

Geoff Calkins: A primer for Robert Pera -- 50 things to know about Griz and Memphis



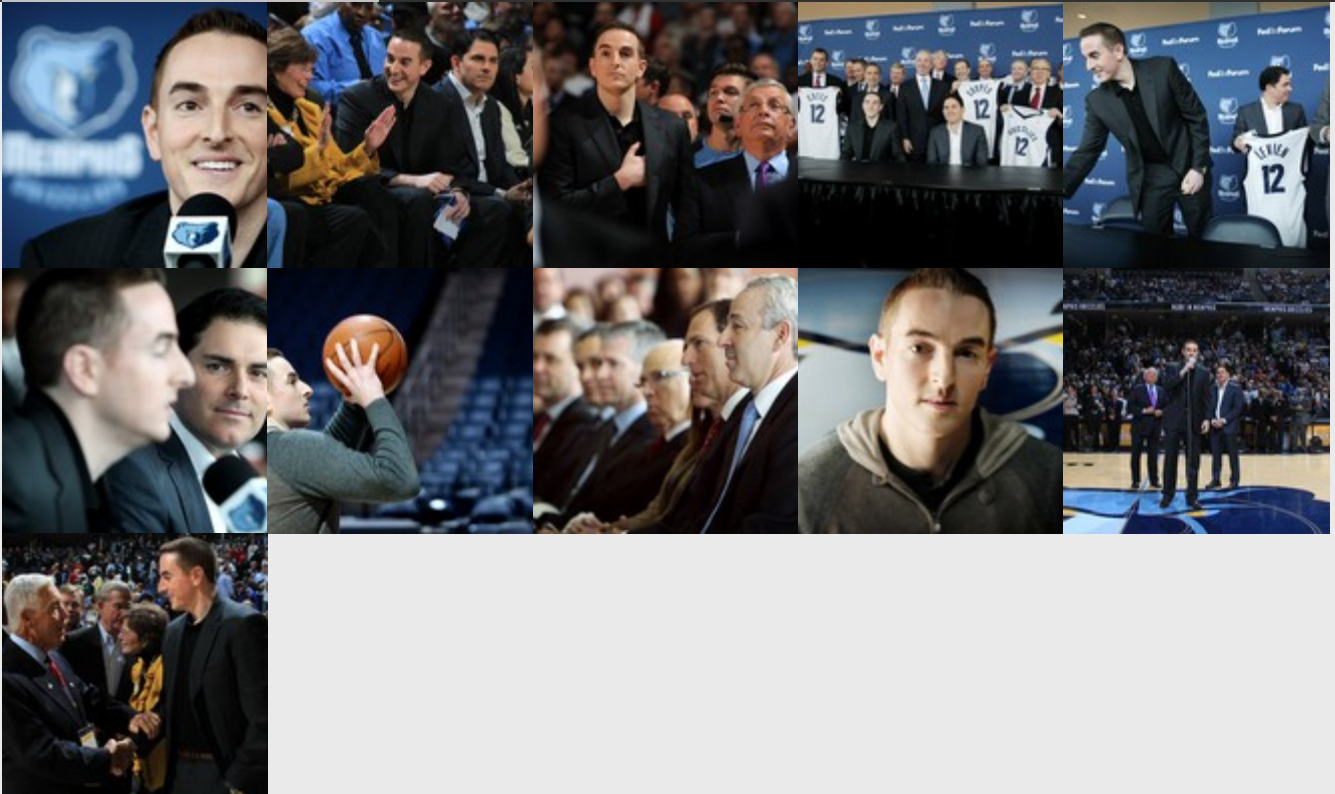
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- Posted November 3, 2012 at 1:52 p.m., updated November 3, 2012 at 3:19 p.m.



PHOTO BY [KAREN PULFER FOCHT](#)

Exact replica of the famous Stax Records neon marquee

Grizzlies Owner Robert Pera



Welcome to Memphis, Robert Pera! Big day Monday, isn't it? But don't be nervous. I'm here for you. Here with, 50 things you should know about your new basketball team and city:

1. The guy with the blonde wife on the front row is the Cracker Rapper. [He made a video](#). I don't know whether to tell you to watch it.

2. Elvis jokes in Memphis are like Toto jokes in Kansas. Best to skip 'em entirely.

3. No need to ever say "[Walking in Memphis](#)," either.

4. If you're going to follow one Memphian on Twitter, you can't go wrong with [Tony Allen](#).

5. If you're 34, like your bio says, you should probably be on a [barbecue team](#).

6. But you can actually be a wildly popular Memphian without eating barbecue. Shane Battier did it.

7. Yes, there are two mayors, and two Kings, and more than two Parkways. Just go with it, OK?

8. People will want you to draft players from the University of Memphis. Don't listen. It's pandering and it's ridiculous.

9. We're already up to No. 9? Then somebody has surely asked you if you have [found a church home](#) by now. Do not be offended.

10. There is no correct answer to the wet vs. dry debate. There is a correct answer to Motown vs. [Stax](#).

11. Don't mess with the MLK Day symposia. They're important.

12. Don't mess with the Griz Grannies and Grandpas, either. I have no idea why, but people go nuts for them.

13. Memphis is more Marc Gasol than Pau Gasol.

14. Memphis is even more Z-Bo.

15. Keep Chris Wallace ([but I already said that](#)).

16. Keep Lionel Hollins (but you were going to do that anyway).

17. Let Tony Allen walk after this year at your peril. He invented grit and grind. Memphians truly love him.

18. After you've been here a while, you'll learn [you can get anywhere on Poplar](#).
19. After you've been here a while longer, you'll learn you can get anywhere without having to go on Poplar.
20. You will hear that we have an inferiority complex, but that is so last decade. We actually think we're pretty cool.
21. Also, we believe.
22. If you continue to have that Twitter account, you will hear from a lot of people telling you to trade Rudy Gay. This is not necessarily fair to Gay, by the way. People used to want to trade Mike Conley.
23. Perkins Extended is a continuation of Perkins and runs parallel to Perkins. It's mind-bending.
24. The Griz aren't nearly as bad at drafting as people say. They miss up high, where ownership tends to get involved. But later picks have produced Darrell Arthur, Josh Selby, Tony Wroten, Greivis Vasquez (don't ask) and Sam Young.
25. Rick Trotter rocks. And you have to hear him sing the anthem.
26. People will wave at you. Go ahead and wave back at them.
27. Buy a house inside the loop. It worked for John Calipari.
28. Listen to Fred.
- 29. Set up a program at the University of Memphis Fogelman College of Business and Economics. Place is on the way up, just like you are.**
30. Go to Jerry's Sno Cones and get a supreme, go to Brother Juniper's and get the San Diegan, go to Gibson's and get a warm glazed, go to Iris and get anything.
31. Oh, and that sandwich at Republic Coffee? It's called the Calkins, not the Ahab.
32. Read the letters to the editor whenever you're in town, if only for the chuckles.
33. DO NOT READ THE ONLINE COMMENTS.

34. Nobody likes to say this out loud, but the [Memphis Tigers](#) don't make your job any easier. They're just like a pro team. They're covered like a pro team. People have wondered why Oklahoma City drew more fans than the Grizzlies right off the bat. There are a lot of reasons, including Kevin Durant and local ownership. But the biggest reason: Memphis already had a civic basketball franchise.

35. Having said that, you should wrap your arms around the Tigers. The vibe between the two programs is authentic. The Grizzlies showed up at [Memphis Madness](#) to support the Tigers. Frank the Life Changer — the Tigers' trainer — works with Z-Bo during the offseason. Memphis might just be the best little basketball city on the planet.

36. Yes, people still call the [Hernando DeSoto Bridge](#) — which opened in 1973 — the new bridge.

37. If the airline fares get you down, you can always [drive to Little Rock](#).

38. Wednesday night is "church night."

39. "Bless your heart" is not a compliment.

40. Memphis fans hate the Heat as much for [Mario Chalmers](#) as for LeBron James.

41. Hamed Haddadi sends Memphians into paroxysms of unbridled, shrieking joy. Nobody has ever determined the reason for this.

42. How can you tell when Jerry Lawler is serious? When he pulls the strap down, of course.

43. Go easy on the Griz staff. They have worked hard to create momentum for the franchise. It hasn't always been simple, either. The team has been for sale ever since it arrived. There was the nasty ownership schism. For the longest time, the record was lousy. But now, there's some good stuff happening. Ticket sales are going up every year. The team wins international awards for the good it does in the community. You have to have employees you're comfortable with, ultimately, but this group has earned a long look at the very least.

44. The very large man who shakes it for the [Dance Cam is named Rex](#). He is excellent.

45. The man wearing outlandish suits is [Mark Goodfellow](#). He can get you auto financing, no matter your credit rating!

46. Cool places in Memphis: [The Shell](#), [the Greenline](#), [the zoo](#) (including five actual Grizzlies) and [the Civil Rights Museum](#).

47. [St. Jude Children's Research Hospital](#) will change your life. But there are other worthy causes in Memphis. [The Church Health Center](#). [Bridges](#). If I wanted to list them all, I'd have to take out a full-page ad. Which, I understand, are available. But the point is this: Memphis has a heart as big and unceasing as the river that defines it.

48. Relax. You don't really have to memorize all this stuff. There won't be a test Monday morning. Memphis is a simple place. If you want to pitch in, we'll have you. And if you're open to becoming a part of the community — if you don't build walls around yourself and your organization — then Memphians will fall in love with you. People like to talk about all our racial divisions. And they are real, no question. But Memphis loved the fast-talking Catholic snark from up North (Calipari) and Memphis loves the gee-whiz Jewish kid from Houston by way of Arizona (Josh Pastner) and Memphis loves the in-his-own-world black guy from Chicago (Allen). You know what those three men all have in common? They embraced Memphis. In their own ways, they became one of us. Do that, and the rest is just details.

49. Last thing: The Grizzlies matter. I mean, they really matter to this city. Memphis is a much more vibrant, interesting place than it was even a decade ago. The Grizzlies are both a part of and an expression of that. There was a moment, two years ago, during the playoff series against the Thunder, [when Grizzlies fans held their towels aloft in joyous defiance of the odds](#). "Believe Memphis," the towels said. It wasn't just about basketball. It was about belief in the place and in each other. And I don't really care if it sounds sappy. The fable this town treasures more than any other is the one involving a young man named Larry Finch, and a young team of Memphis Tigers, and [what that team did to heal a troubled city](#). That's what basketball can mean in Memphis. That's what it has meant.

50. So truly, welcome to Memphis. You want a pickup game? Call Penny or Elliot. And, remember, Grindhouse is one word. Please be a wise custodian.

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