



Chris Baeten

Orlando, Florida



[Knight Federal Solutions](#)

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Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Chris Baeten:

Knight Federal Solutions originally started as a DBA of a holding company that owned multiple firms. Chris Baeten, co-founder and CEO, bought out the original partners in December of 2015 and gradually built the business into what it is today. Baeten shared the journey starting with his background and previous experience, as well as how he grew the Orlando-based government contractor, providing support services to the Department of Defense and the Intelligence Community, to nearly 100 employees in less than four years.

"I've worked in simulation and training since 2004," he said. "During that time, I've been in the Central Florida Research Park. I worked for two other companies prior to Knight Federal. At both, I worked my way up and learned all aspects of the industry. The knowledge gained over time

has been instrumental in helping me create and grow Knight Federal Solutions. Nevertheless, when we decided to start the company, I had a lot of fear of the unknown. It was exciting, but nerve racking at the same time. I had extensive knowledge of the industry, but running your own business was a big learning curve. Having the support of the Executives of the holding company, who have started multiple businesses, was extremely beneficial and something that I am very grateful for."

Baeten, who's originally from Lakeland, FL, attended college at the University of Central Florida, just minutes from the UCF Research Park. He's familiar with the local landscape and has his finger on the pulse of the military simulation and training industry, which has its largest presence in Orlando. Nonetheless, Baeten faced a number of challenges getting the business off the ground and establishing his company's edge in the competitive world of defense contracting.

From startup to second-stage

"We faced a lot of challenges," he said. "The hardest part was getting our first contract. After that success, we had to build our capabilities and trust with our partners to ensure they viewed us as trusted solution.

The first few years were focused on growing our capabilities and expanding the breadth of our services. Overtime, we honed in on what we're good at and really tried to focus on our core capabilities. We'll never promise something we can't do, but we do promise to deliver and execute in line with customer expectations. We've built a foundation on that and it has allowed us to grow organically."

As a mission driven, cost-effective solutions provider, Knight Federal Solutions provides its customers with a wide range of capabilities

including Simulation & Training, Cyber Security, Hardware/Software Information Technology, Intelligence Analysis, Engineering / Range Management and Finance. Customers include The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JSJ7), United States Navy, United States Army, and multiple customers within the Intelligence Community, just to name a few.

Baeten shared what makes Knight Federal Solutions unique and the steps they've taken, from a marketing standpoint, to connect with their target market. "We're extremely agile," he said. "All of our internal employees have a very entrepreneurial mindset. So much so that I like to think we can all collectively run the company. Even though we're relatively small and, as a result, cost-competitive, we very much resemble a large firm with the breadth of our capabilities. To reach more customers, we hired an outside company called CKS Marketing about six months ago. We brought them on to do a full blown marketing plan that covered every aspect of what we do and what we plan to do over the next few years. We work closely with the President, Christa Santos.

She's the one that actually nominated us for the GrowFL Florida Companies to Watch award. By nominating us for this award and others, she's helping to raise our corporate profile and share the success of what we're doing."

In addition to being agile, and of an entrepreneurial mindset, Baeten describes his workforce of 90 employees, consisting of contractors and internal staff, as young and hungry. They work closely together and employees are willing to wear multiple hats. They understand the collective mindset and the need to work together as a group to meet their goals and objectives. Internal employees are incentivized to bring in new work and are given an opportunity to meet with management to

chart a course for their future in five years. Knight Federal helps with certifications, education and on-the-job training to help employees accomplish their personal objectives.

Notable community involvement

Philanthropy and community involvement are extremely important to Baeten and a mentality of giving back permeates the organization. On a personal level, Baeten is passionate about supporting combat wounded veterans. He serves on the board of Fairways for Warriors, an organization dedicated to helping Central Florida combat wounded veterans by providing them golf equipment, instructions and by using golf as a vehicle to bring them out of their houses and into a more positive environment. Fairways for Warriors also provides classes on financial aid and real estate. Knight Federal Solutions is a corporate sponsor of the foundation. Through a program called, the Purple Heart Initiative Wounded Warrior Internship Program, Knight Federal Solutions also provides combat wounded veterans with internships. The ultimate goal is to hire them to be part of the internal team or to place them with one of Knight Federal's partners.

What it means to be a Florida Companies to Watch Honoree

"It's one of the first awards we've ever won," he said. "We're very passionate about what we do and our business, so it's really cool to see the nomination and the publicity. It gives outside people some insight about our business and what we're passionate about. Having what is near and dear to me being shared with everyone is really special. It feels like a stepping stone. Ultimately, winning this award validates that we're doing the right things and gives us credibility as a business.

In terms of why we were selected, I think it has a lot to do with how we're structured and how every employee has an entrepreneurial mindset. It is also about how we invest in our employees. This has significantly differentiated us from our peers. Finally, I think our connection to the military and how we give back to that community really sets us apart."

Looking ahead, Baeten and the team are very focused on continuing to grow. There are certain industries they want to pursue such as Cybersecurity. They want to win more projects as the Prime contractor and leverage that to grow their credibility as a primary local defense contractor.

Advice for aspiring entrepreneurs

Baeten offers great advice for aspiring entrepreneurs. "Honestly, I don't know if it's for everyone," he said. "Either way, you don't know until you do it. If it's in you, you're passionate about it and you can envision it, then go for it. The longer you hesitate to do that, the less likely it's going to happen. Also, it helps to have plenty of support and capital. Having connections with other individuals that understand the process and can help navigate the behind the scenes details is helpful. There are so many things you don't know about that go on out of public view. Having someone to walk you through that process is priceless."

Awards and Recognition

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