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#PwrFwd
High-res photo of Chris Gardner attached

First Commerce, FSU Office of Research to Kick off E-Month with Power Forward Speaker Chris Gardner of “The Pursuit of Happyness” fame

From homeless to successful Wall Street broker and entrepreneur, Gardner will share experiences on resiliency, adaptability, and being portrayed by Will Smith in film

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. – As businesses navigate uncertain and challenging times, First Commerce Credit Union and the FSU Office of Research aim to celebrate their resiliency and keep inspiring their entrepreneurial passion with the eighth annual event in the Power Forward Speaker Series. The latest marquee speaker is self-made millionaire, entrepreneur and philanthropist Chris Gardner, who will help kick off Entrepreneurship Month in Tallahassee on Tuesday, Nov. 2. Gardner's real-life story and bestselling autobiography inspired a critically acclaimed film, “The Pursuit of Happyness,” starring award-winning actor Will Smith. Gardner's lessons of true grit and perseverance will leave audience members feeling empowered to do anything they set their minds to in business and in life.

The ability to bring a speaker of this caliber to Tallahassee is made possible through the support and partnership of the FSU Office of Research, along with founding partner the FSU College of Business. Established as Tallahassee's largest annual business event averaging 1,000 attendees, Power Forward with Chris Gardner is set for Tuesday, Nov. 2, from 3:30 to 5:00 p.m. at Ruby Diamond Concert Hall on FSU's campus. The Power Forward Speaker Series has established a solid reputation for bringing highly successful celebrity entrepreneurs to Tallahassee to share their personal journeys and experiences in business, as well as insights that provide tangible takeaways back to the community through our area business leaders.

“We believe entrepreneurs are the dreamers and the doers who keep our region's economy powering forward, even when faced with incredible challenges. Power Forward is just one way we support our communities' businesses by inspiring and motivating our leaders and business owners,” said Cecilia Homison, CEO of First Commerce. “Chris Gardner's remarkable success against all odds is a message that speaks to the heart of what entrepreneurship is all about.”

Chris Gardner is an entrepreneur, international bestselling author and award-winning film producer. His autobiography, “The Pursuit of Happyness,” became a *New York Times* #1 bestseller and has been translated into more than 40 languages. The movie, inspired by his book, tells the real-life story of Gardner's struggles as a single father who, after facing various hardships, ended up living on the streets with his young son. Gardner's relentless pursuit of his dream to work on Wall Street despite insurmountable odds led to his highly successful career as a stockbroker and eventual founder of his own brokerage firm, Gardner Rich & Co.

After selling his stake in the firm in a multimillion-dollar deal, Gardner turned his attention to philanthropy and entrepreneurship. In his “retirement” from the financial services industry after 37 years, Gardner describes himself as a 67-year-old “start up” with significant interest in fin tech. He serves on several boards, including Verify Me, The Change Company and Smart Easy Pay. Two years ago, Gardner also became the oldest “recruit” in the history of the United States Navy and has spoken numerous times on behalf of the Navy about recruitment and retention of talent at naval bases and air stations globally.

In addition to his passion for business, Gardner is also committed to the work of his foundation, The Christopher P. Gardner Foundation, which is working to change the trajectory of young people’s lives. Gardner describes the Foundation’s efforts as “making an alternative investment in human capital.” He is currently conducting a national tour to visit and speak at 1,000 public schools across America.

Gardner has also published two other books – “Start Where You Are: Life Lessons in Getting from Where You Are to Where You Want to Be,” which is another bestseller, and his newest book, “Permission to Dream” released earlier this year. Upon its publication, the book was selected as “Book of The Month” by *The Wall Street Journal*.

As the eighth speaker in the Power Forward Speaker Series, Gardner is in good company. Previous speakers have included “Shark Tank’s” Barbara Corcoran and Kevin O’Leary; Airbnb’s Chip Conley; NFL legend and entrepreneur Jim Kelly; Facebook startup team member Randi Zuckerberg; Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak; and last year’s Peter Diamandis of the XPrize Foundation and Singularity University.

Tickets go on sale Friday, October 1, for Power Forward with Chris Gardner at [Tickets.FSU.edu](https://tickets.fsu.edu) (\$40* base price for main level seating and \$30* base price for balcony seating; \$10* for students – student ID required for college students). Tickets also will be sold at the FSU Fine Arts Ticket Office (in the lobby of the Fine Arts Building at 540 W. Call St.). A limited number of sponsorship opportunities including VIP events are still available. Visit FirstCommerceCU.org/PowerForward for details.

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Other sponsors of Power Forward with Chris Gardner include the FSU Office of Research, FSU College of Business, Mainline Information Systems, Tallahassee Community College, Comcast Business, Harland Clarke, STRUCTURE Commercial Real Estate, Summit Group Commercial Properties, Sorensen Van Leuven Law Firm, WilliamsGautier Law, Golden Lighting, Lucro Commercial Solutions, WCTV, and the Tallahassee Democrat.

More information about Power Forward with Chris Gardner, visit FirstCommerceCU.org/PowerForward.

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*Service fees apply

ABOUT FIRST COMMERCE – First Commerce Credit Union is a full-service, award-winning financial institution headquartered in Tallahassee, Fla., with more than \$950 million in assets and serving over 70,000 business and consumer members across North Florida and South Georgia. First Commerce has proudly supported the communities we serve for more than 80 years, and has 15 financial centers located in Tallahassee and Marianna, Fla., as well as Thomasville, Valdosta, Adel, Nashville and Ray City, Ga. In addition to offering a comprehensive range of consumer services, First Commerce offers a variety of business solutions, including Checking, Savings, CDs, Credit Cards, Treasury Services and more. We also provide a wide range of financial planning and investment services through our subsidiary, Six Pillars Financial Advisors, and auto, home, and life insurance through First Commerce Insurance Agency. Our FCCU Foundation offers free online

and in-person financial education workshops. For details, visit [FirstCommerceCU.org](https://www.FirstCommerceCU.org) or call (850) 488-0035. First Commerce is federally insured by the NCUA and is an equal opportunity lender.