



## Event History

The festival's event dates are very meaningful to the city of Clarksville. On April 12, 1784 the first settlers landed on the Cumberland River establishing what we have come to know as Clarksville, Tennessee. In commemoration of this historic event we hold the Rivers & Spires Festival as close to that date as possible.

On January 22, 1999, Clarksville was hit with a devastating F4 tornado, resulting in nearly \$73 million in damages. A total of 515 structures were damaged, 125 of which were completely demolished. This included centuries old buildings and historic landmarks. It was because of this disaster that a group of people formed a partnership with the intent of rebuilding Clarksville and bringing hope back to the community. This group of individuals, the Downtown District Partnership (DDP), realized that the people of Clarksville needed an event that would unite the community and revitalize their spirit.

Four years were spent researching 22 other cities and events, as well as developing a strategy to create an event unique to the Middle Tennessee area. A focus group was assembled with the intent to create an event that would have an economic impact on the future of the community. The groundwork was laid including a business concept highlighting specific goals and objectives. Experts were brought in to give insight and guidance on creating a festival. They helped to create the basic structure and theme of the festival and reviewed the major players needed to make this desire a reality. The Rivers & Spires Festival is the product of this enthusiastic and aggressive push to revitalize Clarksville. In 2003, just four years after the town was left in near ruins, the festival began.

On April 10-12, 2003 the first festival opened with the theme "Downtown is Looking Up". Dozens of organizations partnered together and the event was held in multiple locations. The first year did not come without obstacles. Multiple logistical problems coupled by three days of rain, left the festival in debt by \$30,000. There was nothing to do but reorganize, learn from the experience, and begin planning for 2004.

Since that first fateful year, the Rivers and Spires has grown and emerged as one of the leading festivals in Tennessee. Rivers & Spires Festival, Inc. has established a mission statement and by-laws and officially chartered the event in July 2003. In March 2004 the festival became a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. A newsletter and website were developed and the event continues to gain regional appeal. The festival is now managed in part by the Clarksville-Montgomery County Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Rivers & Spires Festival Committee, a group of community volunteers dedicated to the success of the event.

And the success is obvious. Not only has the festival managed to rise up from near ruin, but in the process has managed to become one of the premiere events of the region. Past awards include the Southeast Tourism Society's "Top 20 Events of the Southeast", American Bus Association's "Top 100 Events in America", and in 2007 Rivers & Spires Festival was awarded the International Festival and Event Association's "Gold Grand Pinnacle Award", the highest honor bestowed to any event. Rivers & Spires continues to grow tremendously, while working from a zero based budget. The entire event is funded entirely through sponsorships and food and beverage sales. Most importantly, the Rivers & Spires Festival has remained free to the general public every year. Each year we continue to grow and learn, always developing our ideas to ensure that the festival is a positive influence on the city of Clarksville.