



BREAKING NEWS: Tennessee football coach Phillip Fulmer has agreed to a buyout of his contract; announcement due today.

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Event organizers keep cool amid debate's shifts

By James Dowd (Contact), Memphis Commercial Appeal
Saturday, September 27, 2008

As the first wave of phone calls poured in early Wednesday afternoon from Oxford, Miss., event organizers at [Classic Party Rentals](#) started paddling.

Amid reports that Sen. John McCain might skip Friday's televised presidential debate with Sen. Barack Obama at the [University of Mississippi](#), Classic company officials shifted into overdrive.

"Sometimes this is the nature of event planning," said Classic manager Stan White. "Things happen at the last minute, something unexpected arises and you have to be able to react and adapt. If you can't do that you won't survive in this business."



Classic Party Rentals employees (from left) Jamie Lambert, Cristoforo Gonzalez and Danny Kihni set up a tent in The Grove at Ole Miss on Thursday. Despite uncertainty over whether the presidential debate would proceed, Classic kept on schedule with preparations.

Classic supplied tents, flooring and furniture and staged several events on the Ole Miss campus -- including the setup for a McCain reception to follow the debate. News that the whole thing might be scrapped set off a flurry of activity, but didn't generate a sense of panic.

"We kept on schedule and proceeded as planned," said David Platt, an event consultant who coordinated the McCain reception. "It's all about responding and we've got the best team around to do that. We're always ready."

The folks at Classic have plenty of experience in managing last-minute challenges, White said, and the company's 19-year history has given them an edge in knowing how to plan ahead.

In addition, the company's recent rebranding -- founded in 1990 as Grand Rental Station by White, his wife, Beth, and brother, Mark, it was sold last year to Classic Party Rentals -- has boosted the firm's capabilities.

Now the Memphis branch is part of a national event-rental-supply network with warehouses from coast to coast. And the company has a higher profile as part of an organization that coordinates parties for such events as the Academy Awards and the Super Bowl.

"Now we have the ability to draw from inventories in Chicago or Dallas or Atlanta or across the country," Mark White said. "We don't have to go outside our company to find something a client might want. We have it all within our system."

The national connection also means the Memphis firm is able to distribute items from its 120,000-square-foot warehouse at 3347 Pearson.

The company typically stores more than 20,000 chairs onsite, as well as about 4,000 tables. The warehouse

contains more than 20,000 linens and well more than 100,000 pieces of china, glasses and flatware.

Classic supplies tents and other materials for more than 3,500 events per year, most being April through June and August through October. The majority are within 75 miles of Memphis and average attendance is 200 people.

Cindy Crill Brewer is president of [Destination King](#), an event organizer. She has worked with the Whites since 2001 and said the company's service has kept her coming back time and again.

"If you have to call them at 2 a.m. -- and I have, unfortunately -- they're available and they work to get any issues resolved," Brewer said. "Now with the national backing they're enhanced even more. They make my job infinitely easier."

Paul Chandler, founding partner of [Resource Entertainment Group](#), agreed.

"As big as they've become, there's still a personal touch," Chandler said. "It's like working with family. They're good people and they've never let us down."

-- James Dowd: 529-2737

Classic Party Rentals

Founded: 1990

Principles: Managers Stan and Beth White and managing consultant Mark White

Rebranding: Formerly Grand Events, acquired by Classic in 2007

Employees: 70

Location: 3347 Pearson

Phone: 366-0670

Hours: 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Mon.-Fri. and 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Sat.

Online: classicpartyrentals.com



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