

PROFILE



PHOTOS BY DAVID SPRAGUE

Enthusied: John Brauer, chief executive at New Horizons who calls himself a serial entrepreneur, with rendering of proposed building on nonprofit's North Hills campus.

Compassionate CEO

John Brauer brings a career of service — and business expertise — to New Horizons.

By **STEPHANIE BEDOLLA** Staff Reporter

John Brauer may have found his dream job as the new chief executive at New Horizons, the North Hills nonprofit that helps those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. During his career, Brauer has tried his hands at different businesses, from running a restaurant to managing his father-in-law's construction business to eventually gaining 28 years of experience in nonprofit management. Brauer started off at UC Berkeley but during his last semester had to put his studies on hold to take over his father-in-law's construction business, from there he later went on to finish his Bachelor and Master's degree at John F. Kennedy University. His journey into the nonprofit sector began with a nine-month internship during his master's degree program at Las Trampas in Northern California, where he learned to help adults with developmental disabilities discover their capabilities. Prior to New Horizons, he served as chief executive of Union Station Homeless Services in Pasadena. Prior to that, he worked at NW Works Inc., a Virginia nonprofit serving those with intellectual disabilities. He also ran Community Vocational Enterprises, a nonprofit in San Francisco for the intellectually disabled. Brauer met with the Business Journal in his office at the New Horizons campus to talk about how he decided to switch to a nonprofit career, why he loves his job and the opportunity he sees at New Horizons.

Question: How would you describe yourself?

Answer: A serial entrepreneur. I started working when I was 15 and worked for a restaurant for many years, did everything from bussing, cooking and waiting tables to eventually managing the restaurant. And I did

that while I was in school. Then I opened a dental ad and then got into the construction business and then into non-profits.

Why nonprofits?

Even though my degree is in clinical psychology, I've always been a business guy. I've always liked to look at the restaurant business and see not only how do you provide good food and good service, but how do you make the business side of it work? So now taking those same principles and applying them to the non-profit field has been amazing.

What motivates you?

I've always been a people person. Success to me is watching other people succeed. And that's everything from the clients we serve to the staff to the board but also the community.

Can you give an example?

I've been very lucky in my career. I've been president of a chamber of commerce, so I've had opportunities to feel like I've had a wider impact in the community not only from my job — meaning helping people with disabilities and getting them connected — but just in general being part of a bigger community. And I just love it. I find people fascinating and I love to help, and part of the fun for me everyday is to figure out what the next challenges are.

What was your previous job?

Last year I had the opportunity to work for a nonprofit here in Southern California called Union Station Homeless Services. It's amazing, just a great organization. I was only there for a year but it was such a great opportunity for me. Working with folks with disabilities — it's what I have done for the last 28 years and I've just found it's something I'm good at and

John Brauer

TITLE: Chief Executive

ORGANIZATION: New Horizons

BORN: 1960, Chapel Hill, N.C.

EDUCATION: University of California — Berkeley; master's degree in clinical psychology, John F. Kennedy University

CAREER TURNING POINT: After running a construction company for six years, he decided to return to school and shift into a career where he could make "a difference in the world."

PERSONAL: Married with two adult daughters, lives in Arcadia.

HOBBIES: Hiking, reading, tennis and travel.

I love. Once you start working in the field it kind of gets in your skin and I've really missed it so when this opportunity came up to work for New Horizons, I feel really blessed that it was the right timing for them and for me.

What is New Horizons?

New Horizons is an organization that works with folks with special needs, with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and that tends to be folks that have autism, Asperger's, or Down Syndrome. The kinds of services we provide here are anything from classroom-style training to a program that helps people learn to ride the bus. We have a very big work service program and almost 400 people working in the community right now. We want folks to be as community-based as possible, so we try to provide a whole

range of services to help folks to live as independently as they can.

Why did you take this position?

I have been so blessed with two nonprofits where I previously spent a lot of time. They were life changing. I don't know what to say about it other than it just brought me such joy. I saw both organizations thrive and grow and really become part of the community, so I wanted to really take my time, but I knew I wanted to get back into the disability field just because I missed it. I knew when I interviewed at New Horizons, this is an organization that walks its talk. They've really done some spectacular things, so I kind of feel in love with the organization.

What are your plans for the campus?

We had drawings for a planned expansion that at this point we're probably going to change. Now we are talking about reimagining the entire 7-acre campus. We want to make sure we are trying to create not just a building but our whole infrastructure on how we can best serve our clientele. We are talking about adding potentially some residential, maybe some retail space. But it's all to be determined.

What do you like about working with the disabled?

The first day I showed up (to my nine month internship) by the end of the day I realized that working with folks with disabilities is no different than working with the general population. It's just some folks have it a little more obvious and by the end of the first day I thought I loved this. My nine months went so fast and I thought at the end, "This was life changing for me. This is what I want to do for a living." And if I had not had the exposure I wouldn't know.