

# Life after 'Charlie'

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Renée Brown, cofounder and CEO of C.W. Brown Inc. Photograph by Bob Rozycki

Charles W. Brown Jr. would chase you down in a parking lot after a lunch-and-learn to hand over a business card and foster a relationship.

He was the sort of man who would order lunch every day for every employee – and who cried when he had to cut that expense when the recession hit.

The kind of man, who, when he had to leave, left a legacy.

When the founder and president of Armonk-based commercial construction firm C.W. Brown Inc. passed away this past June, his family requested any gift made in his honor go to one of his passions, the Westchester Community College Foundation.

More than \$50,000 has been donated to date.

“They’re now able to start a men’s mentoring program and they’ve never had one before,” said Erin Griffin Loosen, C.W. Brown’s director of business development. “I’m getting goosebumps... it’s because of the donations that were made in Charlie’s name.”

Charlie’s executive staff stepped up upon his passing, most notably his wife and company co-founder and CEO Renée Brown.

“I think aside from the fact that there’s a hole from missing his physical presence, okay now I’m going to get upset, I think he was smart enough – like any great president – to surround yourself with really intelligent and qualified people,” she said. “So from a day-to-day operations standpoint, nothing changed. Because at this point in his career, his role was the face of the company and being out in the community.”

And Charlie was an active man.

He served as chairman of the board for the Business Council of Westchester and served the economic development board for Westchester County, the Building Owners & Managers Association (BOMA), Mahopac National Bank and was a village trustee and deputy mayor for the village of West Hampton Dunes.

Renée will take on his board seat at the Westchester Community College Foundation among others; other C.W. Brown employees will fill remaining roles on the boards.

“We went through a couple of lean years, I’m not going to lie,” she said of 2008 to 2009. “But we were very proactive in taking some measures to help cut back on overhead without cutting staff.”

The 28-year-old general contracting and construction management firm has completed work for clients ranging from PepsiCo and Starwood Hotels to Dannon Co. and Reckson Metro.

Charlie’s vision to make the company’s 1 Labriola Court headquarters a green leader in the county came to fruition when the company secured Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) platinum certification last spring.

It has served as a meeting place for the boards of the town of North Castle and animal therapy organization Green Chimneys and Pace University environmental students.

And it is a repository of sorts for Marcus Dairy Bar memorabilia.

“When Charlie found out they were closing the facility (in Danbury, Conn.), he went up with one of his buddies one Sunday, and with the two of them unchecked, probably most of the contents of Marcus Dairy along with 2,000 milk jugs are sitting in our warehouse right now,” Brown said.

Because “everybody’s going to want a piece of Marcus Dairy history,” Charlie had firmly believed.

Today, a shrine to Charlie – complete with milk jugs and portrait – sit in C.W. Brown’s entry. The jugs act as vases and takeaway gifts at corporate events.

“Charlie was nervous because he thought everybody would buy them, and then nobody was trying to buy them, and then he got nervous that they’d go sit in a landfill somewhere,” Griffin Loosen said.

That was Charlie, always thinking.

“Charlie was the light, the life of this office.”