



COURTESY OF BRAD RUDER

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Humanism in Building

IN HIGH SCHOOL, BRAD RUDER (T'93) CAREFULLY researched college options across the country from his New Jersey home and chose Purdue for its outstanding construction engineering and management program. Building was his first love, and he wanted curriculum that covered all aspects of the construction process. Little did he know then that his life's work would also include building communities and better lives for people.

Ruder's path started on the corporate side, shaping big arenas and skyscrapers. As he oversaw construction of clients' day-care centers, something started to click — he loved knowing the end users would be kids in a safe place. Ruder was also being promoted, often spending more time making deals in conference rooms than being on job sites. It was time for a change.

Ruder took a leap to start his own company, Brad-Core, in his home area of Bergen County, New Jersey. He began

learning the ins and outs of business ownership and also about his community. "I realized this was the first time I worked on projects where I lived, so I really got immersed in my town," Ruder says. His office was situated in a local mall, and the idea hit him that a glass-walled space next to his own would be the perfect spot for elderly outreach.

"I have always had an affinity for senior citizens, and as I worked in the community, it was easy to see seniors needed their own spot," Ruder says. Senior Source was born, giving local seniors a no-cost place to engage, hang out, and socialize. "Senior citizens are people, just older, and being a senior isn't a disease!" Ruder asserts. "They don't just want bingo." This mindset is illustrated in Senior Source's programming, with classes ranging from drawing to belly dancing instruction, birthday parties for those 100 years young, and professional presentations on vital medical, health, and insurance issues of the day — all provided for free. "This is their living room," Ruder explains.



IN FEBRUARY, BRAD Ruder, left, received the Community Partnership Award from SINAI Schools in recognition of his commitment to those in need in northern New Jersey.

SERVICE

Now in its 11th year of operation, the center has an executive director and several part-time staff. In the early days, Ruder oversaw all operations; his construction crews pitched in, opening the mall space and hanging out with the seniors.

Interacting with the elderly opened Ruder's eyes to their lives, driving him to address needs that might be hidden. "I've seen firsthand how scary and lonely it can be for an 80-year-old living without local family, wanting to stay in their own home but unable to keep it up," Ruder says. "I'd send a guy out to fix a roof leak that should take 40 minutes, and he'd be gone three hours. I'd ask what took so long and learn that the homeowner had invited him in as he finished up." He laughs at the visual of a big bulky guy saying, "What was I supposed to do? Of course, I sat down for tea and cookies."

These types of moments inspired Ruder to develop a membership-based concierge service for Brad-Core. The unique program is a single-point-of-contact solution to address all design, construction, and maintenance needs for both commercial and residential clients. It is ideal for health-care facilities and families caring for seniors or anyone with disabilities. "We don't just finish a project and disappear," Ruder says. "We build a relationship and provide peace of mind."

This is indeed "Humanism in Building," which emerged as the company tagline. It also became the name of Ruder's nonprofit organization, under which Senior Source operates, as well as other community efforts. The old saying "One good deed leads to another" rings true. As Ruder's teams worked on construction projects for special-needs schools, he realized he could bring together generations for mutual benefit. "Seniors often are intimidated by technology, and what do teenagers know better than anybody?" Ruder asks. He connected seniors in high school with senior citizens to share knowledge — kids sit side by side with retirees to show them how to use their phones or iPads. "You just sit back and watch, and the intergenerational relationship naturally unfolds," Ruder says.

Of course, the spring of 2020 brought changes to Ruder's activities as he temporarily closed Senior Source at the early pandemic warning signals. Spring construction work also slowed extensively. Yet, progress is still possible. Ruder's local community rallied in 2019 to raise money to build a safe and accessible home for a family with four children who use wheelchairs. The work in this new construction continued, as craftspeople were carefully scheduled to work in isolation to help this dream home — complete with ramps and even an elevator — come into being. "It's not just building a structure — it's about building a bridge to better lives for people," Ruder says.

—KENDA RESLER FRIEND (LA'90, MS A'91)



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