

## Dan Brown: Walking the Talk

**R**acker salutes our Executive Director as he transitions into retirement in July of 2022. A trailblazer who leads by example, Dan Brown champions a world of belonging for people with disabilities, and his entire community. This Outlook will look back on Dan's accomplishments and impact through the words of his colleagues, community partners and staff.



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# FROM THE DESK OF...

## CRIS DONOVAN

Associate Executive Director

Thank you, Dan, for your 25 years of dedication and service to Racker and the field as a whole. I will forever be grateful for your friendship, mentoring, and guidance. Cheers to your retirement!

## GAYLE PADO

Director of Family Resource Program

My son met Dan in 2015 and instantly admired him telling me, "I can tell he is a nice man." My son didn't usually want anything to do with strangers, but Dan was an exception. I still love looking at the sweet picture of the two of them crossing the street on a trip to Albany one day. That was the day my son learned about true advocacy and got a taste of how our government works! Dan is an exemplary role model for all who know him and has impacted lives of all ages.

## BETHANY BROWN

Director of Human Resources

I've had the honor of working for Dan and with Dan for my entire career at Racker. Dan has many, many strengths that we all know and one of them has always been his ability to create and mentor leaders. I have been a direct beneficiary of this and am certain that without his thoughtful guidance throughout the years, my learning path would have been much different. Although I will greatly miss his regular presence at Racker, I am so thankful that he's leaving the agency with so many strong, established leaders. Thank you, Dan, for all that you have done.

## SUE BUDNEY

Director of Quality Standards

When I think of Dan Brown, I think of his commitment, his thoughtfulness, his integrity, his vision. Dan does the right thing for the right reasons - while balancing his drive with patience. His advocacy, his understanding and willingness to listen, and his 'pitching in' in a hands-on way - to help, as well as to learn - are just a few of the ways one witnesses his authentic character. Altogether, these are the quality attributes Dan possesses which have lead to his great successes. I will remember these things about Dan for many years to come. I will miss him.

## KATIE BOARDMAN

Director of Residential Services

Dan Brown has been a wonderful leader at Racker throughout my time here. He is a hands-on leader that, in pre-pandemic times, could often be found at every party, dinner and BBQ he was ever invited to at the residential homes. He has made a point to get to know people including the people we support, their families and the staff who work with them. We will miss you, Dan.

## SARAH TARROW

Director of Counseling for School Success

When I accepted this position, Dan scheduled a time for us to meet a few weeks after my starting date. I was of course anxious that I had already made a mistake, but his intention was actually to share the following general advice:

1. Stay calm in a crisis
2. Nurture relationships – they should all be good. If they're not, work on it
3. Always be conscious of work/life balance
4. Apologize when you make a mistake

Over the past four years – and especially the last two – I've had many opportunities to refer back to his helpful guidance, and it has served me well. Thank you, Dan.

## CECILIA CAMPBELL

Director of Finance

Early in Dan's tenure at Racker, I hadn't made quite up my mind about him – who was this guy that I am working for? Then, late one Friday in 2000, I was chatting with Dan just as I was about to go home for the weekend. One of the maintenance staff came up to us and sheepishly told Dan that he forgot to submit his mileage reimbursement so he didn't have the extra cash he needed for his weekend plans with his daughter. Now, I figured this would play out in 1 of 2 ways. Either Dan was going to tell him that he was out of luck since he didn't do what he was supposed to do. Or, Dan would delay the start of my weekend and send me back to my office to process a check for him. Neither happened. Dan reached into his pocket and took out \$80 and handed it to him. He looked at the both of us and said, "let's just settle this up on Monday – have a nice time with your daughter." This epitomizes how Dan handles things. Quick, decisive, creative and always putting people first. My mind was made up!







## THE INNOVATOR

Throughout his career, Dan has been constantly looking for ways to improve efficiency. This can be seen in his approach to technology, models of service delivery or even his speed on his road bicycle. He is continually searching for ways to improve. His evaluation process includes statistics, discussion with affected people and common sense.

Dan moved the agency into a cloud-based file storage system. With concerns over security, Dan's background in technology provided great insight while working with Racker's IT department. The move improved Racker safeguards but also promoted collaboration between departments. This proved crucial during the pandemic as staff worked remotely but relied on technology for communication. Similar moves to cutting-edge software allowed staff to track their time for billing and helped alleviate piles of paperwork. Dan embraced the innovation and allowed Racker staff to focus their time helping the people in our programs.

Outside of the Racker hallways, Dan is working with state leaders and other nonprofit executives to redevelop the residential model in New York State. Dan has authored a white paper titled, Vision for Housing Supports, that provides a new way of delivering residential services. This initiative requires hundreds of phone calls and presentations to stakeholders and legislators. His design is based around a person's choice and would find a way to reduce staff turnover while including program adaptability. It would reduce waiting lists and incorporate technology. Dan's vision is gaining momentum. Once again, it relies on efficiency and

common sense. He will continue this work as he transitions to the Director of Statewide Initiatives at Racker.

## FOCUS ON COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

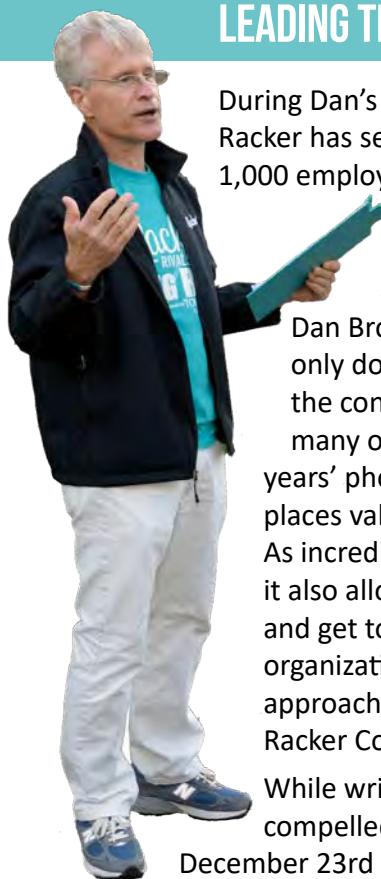
Dan has always believed in connecting people, and looking for ways that people and organizations can collaborate for the greater good. Throughout the years, he's served on dozens of boards for local, regional, state and national organizations.

In 2019, Racker began developing a nonprofit hub that will allow organizations to share services to reduce overhead costs. Through conversations with agencies in Tioga County, it was determined that there was limited administrative space for nonprofits. Additionally, most of the space that was available was subject to the flooding of the Susquehanna River. Dan found a parcel of land above the 500-year flood zone and proposed to construct a facility where nonprofits can share services and rent space at approximately \$5 per square foot. With the money saved on overhead cost, the 4 participating nonprofits can build their program offerings to the community. Through constant discussion with stakeholders in Tioga County, it was determined that this facility could act as a disaster recovery center, should Tioga County suffer another flood. The project is called The Neighborhood Depot, and it epitomizes the work of Dan Brown. It is a collaborative, innovative, well thought-out project that benefits the community. And of course, it makes sense.





## LEADING THROUGH EXAMPLE



During Dan's time as Executive Director, Racker has seen staffing levels of 650 to 1,000 employees. Consider that number when you learn that each of those employees receives a personal phone call from Dan Brown on their birthday. Not only does he take the time to have the conversation, he also remembers many of the stories from previous years' phone calls. This is where Dan places value, the employees of Racker. As incredibly thoughtful as this call is, it also allows Dan to make connections and get to know everyone at the organization. He is recognizable and approachable to everyone in our Racker Community.

While writing this article, I feel compelled to share a story. On Friday, December 23rd of this year, I was meeting with Dan about the grant we were working on. After sharing my family's plans for Christmas, I asked him about his plans. He responded that he was going to work Christmas at one of the residential houses. His family had visited earlier in the month and he felt it was important to give some staff a break after a very rough year. This is Dan Brown. A leader by example who has always "walked the talk."

## DEVELOPING STRENGTH AND LEADERSHIP

Dan's influence on the Racker Community is immense and will guide the organization into a bright future. He has developed strong leaders on his management team and provided the tools for their success. Dan's partnerships in the community allowed him to develop a strong board, with members who embrace our mission and represent all three counties where Racker provides services. This board will lead the comprehensive process to install a new Executive Director, and lead the agency forward.

All of us at Racker want to thank Dan for his outstanding career at Racker. Thank you for leaving Racker in such a strong position, and "walking the talk" every day.

- Bob Brazill  
Director of Community Relations





*"In recent years, Dan has turned his attention to the larger system issues with which we, at the NY Alliance, have long wrestled. Dan has brought great energy and focus to the dialogue about how to reform OPWDD's housing supports from the very limited and restrictive offerings available currently. Specifically, Dan has advanced concepts rooted in true person-centeredness to pivot OPWDD's approach to housing to one that creates a flexible platform by which housing support needs can be met, can scale up or scale back depending on the needs of the individual, including as their needs change throughout their life. Building a community of supporters throughout the state, including other provider organizations, individual service recipients, family members of individual service recipients, Care-Coordination Organizations, and policy makers, Dan has championed this effort that now has gained real traction. While we are sorry to see Dan step away from his day-to-day duties at Racker, we are pleased he will continue to help lead this conversation aimed at real, meaningful change for people across the state, and for those Racker supports."*

-Mike Seereiter  
President & CEO,  
New York Alliance for Inclusion & Innovation

*"As Dan takes his leave, he should be particularly proud of the current state of the organization. Racker is very strong financially and programmatically. His style of servant-leadership and mentorship has allowed his senior management team to thrive, to grow in their roles, and to lead Racker into the future. That's what a great leader does. Dan will be sorely missed, but we are grateful for his service, leadership, and friendship. His positive impact on our organization and the families we serve will continue into the foreseeable future."*

- Max Della Pia  
Racker Board President



*"One could not wish for a better colleague than Dan Brown. He is the ultimate example of a leader who exemplifies wisdom, vision, compassion and extraordinary leadership. Dan's eyes are consistently on the prize – using his manifold gifts to partner with others to strengthen the common good."*

-Sr. Mary O'Brien, CSJ  
Executive Director  
Tioga County Rural Ministry

*"Dan has been the consummate leader for Racker. He's actively engaged in the work of the organization having (pre-COVID) dinners at the houses to spend time with staff and residents, participating in circle time in the preschool to learn with Racker's youth, and diving into Racker's various initiatives to help us provide the best supports possible. He did that all with an eye focused on the bigger picture and toward his desired future. That future included partnerships with community organizations to develop a non-profit hub in Owego, developing a coalition to shift the housing opportunities for people with disabilities in New York, spearheading Racker Rivals Big Red, and building Racker's advocacy team. Dan's impact on Racker and people with disabilities in New York State will be felt for generations to come. We'll miss his amazing mental math and creative problem solving on a day-to-day basis, but are absolutely thrilled that we'll be able to soak up an additional year with him in his new role."*

- Cris Donovan  
Racker Associate Executive Director



# INTRODUCING MAX DELLA PIA

## 2022 BOARD PRESIDENT

Max graduated with honors from the Air Force Academy, Marquette Law School, and National Defense University. He served over 30 years in the Active Air Force, the Air Force Reserve and the Air National Guard. He served as an Air Force pilot, flight instructor, flight evaluator, and as a group and wing commander.

He practiced law as a trial attorney, owned his own practice, worked for Lockheed Martin Corporation (Lockheed) as a Business Development Analyst Senior Staff, and worked in the US Senate as a Brookings Fellow/Military Assistant on Senator Carl Levin's personal staff and as an AF Senate Liaison Officer for the Secretary and Chief of Staff of the Air Force.

Since he retired from the Air Force and left Lockheed, he attended

Culinary School, studied Hotel and Restaurant Management, and ran as a Democratic Candidate for Congress. Since then, he has served as Chair of Tioga County Democratic Committee, an Elder and Chair of the Property Committee at First Presbyterian Union Church of Owego, an active member of the National Ski Patrol, and as a Tioga County Election Inspector. Max is on the Boards of Directors for both the Tioga County Rural Ministry and the Owego Rotary. 🌲



## WILKINS ROAD CHANGES

The next time you pull into the preschool parking lot at our Wilkins Road location, you may notice some big changes! Thanks to a grant from the New York State and Municipal Capital Facilities Program, with support from then-Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton, we are preparing to begin capital improvements on our preschool entrance in the near future. While our current parking lot and bus loop have served us well over time, they are most certainly ready for both structural and cosmetic updates. Given the number of cars and busses that utilize this space, wear and tear is inevitable. This grant will allow us to do three large projects to the preschool entrance at Wilkins Road:

- Repave the parent parking lot
- Repave and remodel the bus loop and overhang to provide better coverage for children exiting busses in inclement weather
- Improve drainage throughout the parking area and bus loop



This project has been in the works for quite some time, and we are so excited and grateful to begin these capital improvements! Construction is scheduled for June 2022 and impacted preschool families will receive guidance on altered traffic patterns once construction begins. When the project is complete, the outside of our preschool will be just as beautiful as all of the learning happening inside its doors!



## SPOTLIGHT ON: SELF-ADVOCACY

*Other Voices in the 607* is a self-advocacy group that meets weekly on Zoom. We are a proactive and involved group representing people with disabilities in the greater Southern Tier and Central NY regions.

We are always looking for new members, ages 16 & up, to join our fun group.

Scan this QR Code to find out more, or visit our website: [racker.org](http://racker.org)



### 2022 OFFICER ROLES

*President:* Kelley Snedeker

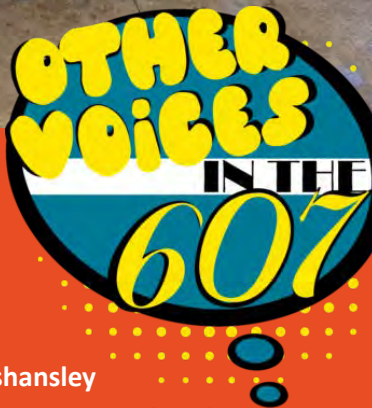
*Vice-President:* Doug Cole

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*Fundraising & Outreach Officer:* Dustin Pataki



## Signs of Spring

It's that difficult time of year between the worst parts of winter and the resplendent spring that we know is just around the bend. Help spread the joyful anticipation of spring with the [#RackerCommunity](#) by sharing YOUR signs of spring on social media. Post your favorite photos using the hashtag: [#RackerSignsOfSpring](#). Racker will feature the best photos in a special spotlight post on Facebook and Instagram in April!





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# OUTLOOK

WWW.RACKER.ORG

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**  
Dan Brown

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Jeffrey S. Lewis, M.D., D.M.D.

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## OUR MISSION:

We support people with disabilities and their families  
to lead fulfilling lives by providing opportunities to  
learn and be connected with others.

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