

THE NEW CROP

BY ROBIN HINDERY



The Bay Area is well-known for its innovation, drive, and entrepreneurial spirit. But what if the region was equally renowned for its generosity? That's the underlying goal of "Creating Social Impact," a first-of-its-kind giving forum sponsored by the international financial services firm Robert W. Baird & Co. This unique event, to be held May 24 at the Rosewood Sand Hill hotel in Menlo Park, aims to inspire and educate young tech and business entrepreneurs in order to promote a culture of giving back. The forum also seeks to make the concept of philanthropic giving a bit less daunting and abstract by presenting it in terms familiar to its target audience, such as how to maximize return on your investments.

"There's obviously significant philanthropy going on in the Valley, but the Valley gets a knock for not being as philanthropic as it could be," says Bill Welsh, director and branch manager of Baird's San Francisco wealth management office. "Clearly, the wealth is being created, so what we're trying to do is plant the seed, give people some insights from individuals who have made philanthropy part of their lives, and really educate folks about how they can begin to have a meaningful impact in the community."

The event will include a panel discussion and Q&A moderated by GENTRY's Stefanie Lingle Beasley and featuring individuals from the nonprofit, high-tech, and financial services sectors. Guests will be able to interact with representatives from some top tech-oriented nonprofits, including Kiva, DonorsChoose, and the One Percent Foundation.

Sebastien de Halleux, one of the panelists, is part of the new generation of Bay Area philanthropists Baird hopes to cultivate. In 2009, the Belgian-born entrepreneur's social game company Playfish was acquired by Electronic Arts for \$400 million. Always philanthropy-minded, de Halleux was suddenly in a position to give

To further the goal of developing Bay Area philanthropy among young tech and business entrepreneurs, Robert W. Baird & Co. will present an exciting forum to promote new ideas on creating a culture of giving.

back on a much larger scale, but he wanted to make sure his contributions weren't merely "a drop in a very large bucket."

De Halleux found himself faced with a choice between more traditional nonprofits ("If you give X, they will use their expertise to distribute X to a specific cause") and social enterprises ("If you give X, they will try to leverage that to give 10X or 100X to a specific cause"). "There's a new breed of emerging donors, like me, with a slightly different perspective on how they want their philanthropic investment to work for them. It's about getting high impact out of smaller initial capital."

Faced with a staggering number of worthy organizations, de Halleux established three criteria to help him choose how to allocate his money and time: a focus on education or professional training; a goal of providing economic opportunities to people who wouldn't normally have access to them; and a highly effective team already in place. One of the nonprofits that made the cut was Samasource, a San Francisco-based organization that hires individuals in some of the world's poorest countries to do basic computer-based tasks such as database-entry, image captioning, or product cataloging. Established in 2008, Samasource has provided desperately needed direct income to 2,000 workers through a network of 16 delivery centers in India, Pakistan, Haiti, Uganda, South Africa, and Kenya.

De Halleux discovered Samasource in 2009, when its founder and CEO (and GENTRY's January 2012 cover girl) Leila Janah was participating in a Facebook-sponsored incubator program for which de Halleux served as a mentor. After supporting Janah as she transformed Samasource from an ambitious idea into a thriving social enterprise, de Halleux joined the nonprofit's board in 2011.

Janah, who also will be speaking at the Baird giving forum, says Samasource's operational model and back story seem to resonate



Bill Welsh



Leila Janah



Sebastien de Halleux

with entrepreneurs. “By the end of our first year, I was totally broke and sleeping on an ex’s futon,” she recalls with a laugh. “In Silicon Valley, if you haven’t gone through that with a startup, people don’t take you as seriously.” What’s more, the nonprofit aims to increase sales and revenue to the point where it becomes self-sustaining, instead of relying on donations year after year—a goal more commonly associated with the commercial sector.

Baird’s alignment with young innovators like Janah and de Halleux and its sponsorship of the giving forum are natural next steps as the firm seeks to raise its profile and become a better contributor to the Bay Area community, Welsh says. Based in Milwaukee, with more than 100 additional domestic and international locations, Baird specializes in five complementary business units: private wealth management, equity capital markets, private equity, fixed income capital markets, and asset management. But the firm also has a reputation for placing a strong emphasis on philanthropy. The Baird Foundation, for example, focuses its giving in four strategic areas—education, health and human services, the arts, and diversity—and Baird associates are encouraged to support additional nonprofits of their choice through the firm’s Charitable Gift Matching Program and the Baird Cares program, which allows employees to take up to one paid day off each year to spend volunteering. “I’ve worked a number of firms on Wall Street, and they all talk about philanthropy being important,” says Welsh. “But this is the first place where it’s actually part of the core thread of the firm.”

After forming partnerships with Bay Area nonprofits such as Second Harvest Food Bank, Welsh and his colleagues set their sights higher: “We started asking, ‘Where do we go from here?’ How do we take what we do well, which is give advice to high-net-worth clients, and help from a community-involvement standpoint?” Welsh says he hopes the giving forum will not only become a highly anticipated annual event in Silicon Valley, but also provide a model for similar forums around the country in the future.

De Halleux agrees. “The objective of the giving forum is to connect people from a startup background who have an expectation that whatever they do philanthropically has to have a high impact. We’re here to educate and explain various approaches, but primarily to show that philanthropy is good no matter how you go about it.” ♦

Baird’s “Creating Social Impact” forum will take place Thursday, May 24, from 6 – 8 PM at the Rosewood Sand Hill. For more information, contact Bill Welsh at WWelsh@rwbaird.com or 800.224.7364.