

Business forum connects purpose with profit

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Sazerac CEO Mark Brown shares his homegrown success story as a keynote speaker during the 2016 Tulane Business Forum, which centered around how to make a profit while making a difference. (Photo by Cheryl Gerber)

Mark Brown, president and CEO of the New Orleans-based Sazerac Co., one of the world's largest manufacturers of distilled spirits, doesn't talk about his company very much.

"Our company is intensely private," he told an audience at the 37th annual Tulane Business Forum on Friday (Sept. 9). "In fact, we had a lot of handwringing over whether we should make this presentation or not, but the connection between us and Tulane and New Orleans is very compelling, and if it's an inspirational story, we'd love to share it with you."

Brown, a 1990 MBA graduate of the A. B. Freeman School of Business, was the luncheon keynote speaker at the forum, an annual presentation of the Tulane Association of Business Alumni (TABA). This year's event, which took place at the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, attracted more than 700 business people from across the region, making it the largest forum in a decade.

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Tulane University

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Founded in 1850 and acquired by its current owners, the Goldring family, in 1948, the Sazerac Co. has grown dramatically in the last 25 years through a series of acquisitions. With top-selling brands including Pappy Van Winkle, Fireball, Buffalo Trace and Southern Comfort, the Sazerac Co. is now the fifth largest spirits company in the world and the only American company in the top five.

“We do business in 112 countries, we’ve got 2,000 employees, and we’ve got nine manufacturing facilities,” Brown said. “We are the proud owners of 420 million bottles of bourbon and Canadian whisky, and we’re roughly capable of making a \$3 billion acquisition if we put our minds to it.”

Brown closed his talk by paying tribute to his Tulane professors, including current business school faculty members John Trapani and Frank Jaster.

“I can tell you without fear of contradiction: no MBA from Tulane, no last 25 years with Sazerac,” Brown said. “Those professors made a big difference in the outcome of Sazerac and for me personally. The value of a great education is never to be underestimated.”