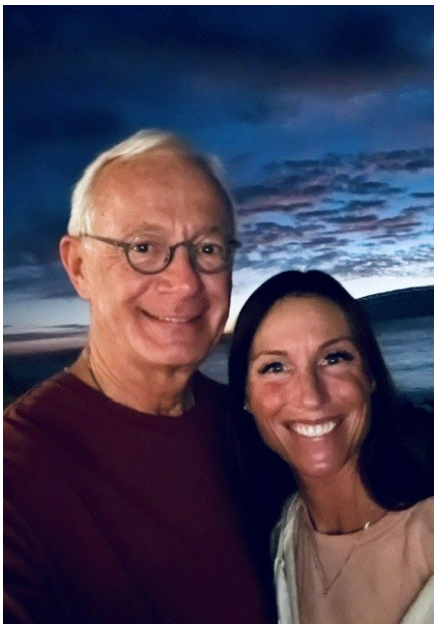
PEOPLE OF ACTION

Dr. John E. Bauer

Principal and Senior Strategist, John E. Bauer Consulting, LLC
Executive Director, Cedarburg Art Museum
Honorary Lifetime Member of the Rotary Club of Wauwatosa Since 1991
Rotary Club of Milwaukee Member Since 2022



"The metaphor I use to describe my life is a tractor pull. I hope to keep chugging and grinding and spitting smoke until I croak."

John Bauer's motor runs on curiosity. From reading about quantum physics and Jungian psychology to riding his Harley-Davidson motorcycle, he devotedly pursues his interests. He remains as determined as ever to keep working, learning, and growing.

"I love to learn new things. I try to be open and receptive to what comes along and to balance that with a certain humility. There's a lot I don't know."

The son of a Lutheran minister and a schoolteacher and the oldest of seven children, John was born in the small town of Mobridge, South Dakota.

"It wasn't the end of the world, but you could see it from there."

John's family moved often as his father served different congregations, including Minocqua, Wisconsin, rural Dexter, Minnesota, and North Platte, Nebraska, where John recalls enjoying "a pretty cool childhood."

Two teachers made a lasting impact on him: Miss Morton, who taught pre-calc, and Mr. Peterson, the art teacher. Although John set his sights on engineering as a young man, teaching was in his blood, and the call came early.

"It was almost an accident I got into teaching. I was in the middle of my engineering studies when I got a call to teach biology at a small Lutheran high school. I taught for one year and fell in love with the experience."

By age 23, John became a school principal while simultaneously studying for his master's degree in education. He married and had three sons. During his tenure, the school dramatically increased student attendance and performance scores—the first of several institutional transformations that would occur under his guidance.



In 1981, John began working as the academic dean and then vice president for academic affairs at Wisconsin Lutheran College, teaching education and philosophy. During this time, he earned his PhD in education administration and supervision from Marquette University.

As John created and implemented a strategic plan for the school, he developed a close partnership with Dr. Gary Greenfield, Wisconsin Lutheran College's first president. The school's impressive growth over the next 25 years is John's proudest professional achievement.

"We built it basically from scratch. We developed the curriculum, got it accredited, expanded it from a two-year to

a four-year program, recruited quality faculty and established high expectations for faculty and students."

Gary Greenfield retired in 2003 and passed away a year later from brain cancer.

"He had a profound impact on me. I've made a life out of studying leadership and coaching leaders, and he embodied what I thought was outstanding, compassionate, and visionary leadership. He was a true gentleman and an amazing human being."

Gary also inspired John to buy his first motorcycle. During Harley's 95th anniversary celebration, they watched Harleys roar down Mayfair Road and decided to start riding together. Gary was the first to get a cycle. It took John a little longer.

"I had to sell my wife on the idea. I developed a strategic plan to convince her."

John is now an avid Harley rider with four Iron Butt patches, which recognize long-distance rides of 1,000+ miles in under 24 hours. He enjoys the surprised reaction people often have when they learn of his passion for motorcycles.

"There's a little bad boy in all of us."

From 2006 to 2014, John worked for Bethesda Lutheran Communities, a non-profit organization that supports people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. As president and CEO, John became the public face and voice of the organization, steering it through a period of major growth. While working to develop international pilot programs at Bethesda, John traveled to 31 different countries, including Kenya, Russia, and the Dominican Republic.

These days, John uses his talents in executive leadership to help non-profits succeed. As executive director of the Cedarburg Art Museum, John works with a curator and a dedicated team of volunteers to showcase late 19th-century to mid-20th century Wisconsin art within a pristine 1898 Victorian mansion.

John and his second wife, Sarayu Meraki, built a home and moved to Cedarburg in 2024. They enjoy supporting the local arts scene and spending time exploring their new community. The couple especially look forward to their annual trips to Hawaii, where they were married.



As with John's professional endeavors, his commitment to Rotary runs deep. He joined the Rotary Club of Wauwatosa in 1991 and spent a fulfilling 25 years in a variety of leadership roles for which he was recognized with lifetime honorary membership.

"I love Rotary. I've been blessed to have served in many positions—club president twice, foundation president, song leader (I once actually sang a page from the "ABC's of Rotary" in Gregorian chant), club bulletin editor for 17 years and master fish boiler."

John joined the Rotary Club of Milwaukee in 2022 and currently serves on the board of directors, is a member of the Scholarship Committee, is a scholarship recipient mentor, and a World Community Service Committee member. He described his recent Rotary trip to Guatemala as an incredible experience.

"After a lifetime of leadership, I've learned that the greatest rewards come from serving alongside people who care about making a difference. Rotary gives me that opportunity—and a chance to keep making a little mischief for a good cause."

Editor's Note: *Rotary People of Action is a bi-monthly series written by a group of Rotarians. This feature was written by Elizabeth Evans Draper.*