

pursuits



SPOTLIGHT

AUSTIN BEUTNER '82

Times Management

The econ major is showing the largest news organization on the West Coast how to thrive in a digital world. *by* JAMES ZUG '91

“IT’S LIKE TRYING TO DO A RUBIK’S CUBE IN THE DARK,” says Beutner of the challenges of his new job as publisher and CEO of the *Los Angeles Times*. “The guiding principle in my career, however, is to put myself in uncomfortable positions and take risks.”

With a polymath’s verve, Beutner has cycled through a number of disparate careers: In the late 1980s he was the youngest partner at the N.Y.C.-based private equity firm Blackstone Group. In the mid-1990s President Bill Clinton asked him to advise Russia on transitioning to a free-market economy. (During his three years in Moscow Beutner met with both Yeltsin and Putin.) Then he cofounded Evercore, an investment banking advisory firm, and moved to Los Angeles in 2000.

◀◀◀ The former L.A. jobs czar believes the 133-year-old paper is the civic conscience for the region.

In 2007 Beutner was mountain biking near his house with Jake Winebaum '81. Coming down a hill, he flew off his bike and suffered a concussion, internal bleeding and a broken neck, requiring him to be airlifted to the hospital. During the months of recovery, he spent more time with his wife and four kids. "While lying on my back recuperating I decided I wanted to make a difference through my daily efforts, not just through philanthropy. The accident allowed me to go beyond service at the policy level."

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa appointed him deputy mayor in charge of economic development—or "jobs czar"—overseeing a dozen city departments, including the L.A. Department of Water and Power, the nation's largest municipal utility. Beutner even briefly considered a run for mayor of Los Angeles.

His current focus is the *Times*. After he made an unsuccessful bid to buy the paper, which was on the block as owner Tribune Co. struggled to emerge from bankruptcy in 2012, Beutner was approached by Tribune to become publisher instead. "My initial reaction was, 'No, thanks'—I hadn't had a boss in 20 years," he says. "But then I thought this would be fantastic for our civic life if we could find a way for the *L.A. Times* to survive."

He took on the job in August 2014 and already has made some major changes: student journalists are covering 41 high schools on a new *L.A. Times* website, a weekly e-newsletter is about to go daily, digital tools are now in every reporter's pocket and the iconic "California" section, cut in 2009, is back. "We have 500 journalists on staff," he says. "The *L.A. Times* is the largest news organization west of the Hudson. We have an enormous audience. We have 4 million readers on Sundays. This is also an engaged audience—90 percent of our subscribers voted in the 2012 general election. One interesting dynamic in the digital age is that our readers come to us through search and through social. It is word-of-mouth, these little neighborhoods like in the past, only now they are digital."

The *L.A. Times* has one of the few test kitchens left at any newspaper in the country, and in this new digital environment Beutner believes the paper can leverage the current fascination with food into real advertising dollars. The same goes for other niche coverage areas—such as the state of California, the Pacific Rim and the entertainment industry—where the paper holds a natural edge.

Facing challenges seems to be a hard-wired norm for Beutner. Since his accident he has continued to exercise daily at dawn: he runs, surfs, and paddleboards. He even rides his mountain bike down the same trail where he crashed.

JAMES ZUG is the author of six books, including *American Traveler*, the *Life & Adventures of John Ledyard*. He lives in *Wilmington, Delaware*.

"The story begins here. It starts with the *L.A. Times* and then it spreads to radio, television, the web," says the new publisher.

MAHMUD JOHNSON '13

Making Every Kernel Count

AT 23, JOHNSON IS NO STRANGER TO RUNNING A business. Propelled by a \$150,000 fellowship called 40 Chances, he has most recently founded Kernels for Peace (K4P), Liberia's first fair trade palm kernel oil processing factory. K4P bridges a gap between an estimated \$4 million of wasted palm kernels and high demand for palm oil in the soap industry. "This initiative is representative of big picture development challenges in Liberia, where there are incredible resources and potential not being tapped," Johnson says. "We can be our own employers and create value in the economy."

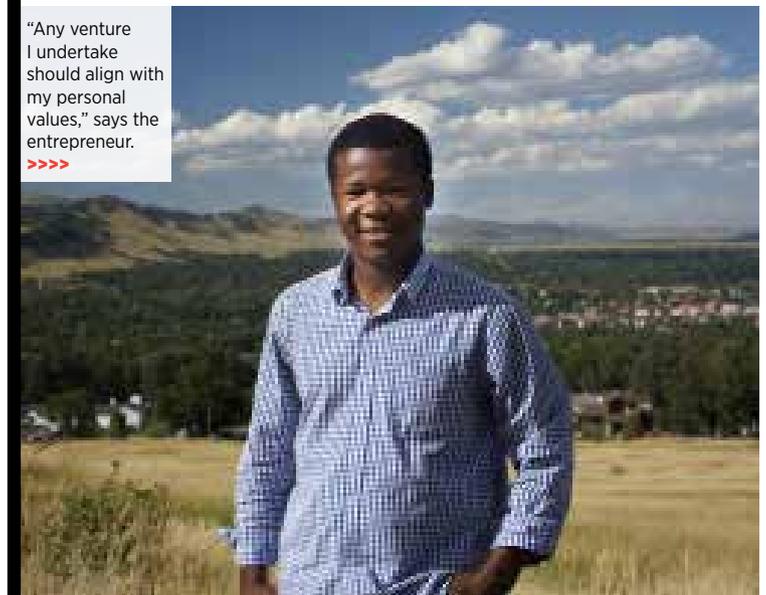
K4P has earned Johnson recognition as the Business Startup Center's 2014 Entrepreneur of the Year and has increased thousands of small farmers' incomes by 25 to 35 percent. The organization creates jobs in areas where unemployment is high and pledges to reinvest 50 percent of profits into local communities after two years in operation.

Johnson's former entrepreneurial ventures have ranged from selling charcoal to T-shirts, and his unconventional path has taken him through a pre-Dartmouth position as public relations intern for the president of Liberia, co-host of a Liberian radio show and a drink with U2's Bono—Johnson still has the Heineken bottle.

K4P takes his previous ventures to a new level. "The opportunity to help somebody earn a living is huge for me. It's amazing to go to the factory site and see people working at something that was just an idea in my mind," he says. "When people have better livelihoods, they have access to more choices and can choose paths that create better futures. I want to continue to use business to solve social problems in Liberia."

—Rianna P. Starheim '14

"Any venture I undertake should align with my personal values," says the entrepreneur. >>>>



“Years ago I wanted to buy an Oscar Meyer Weiner mobile because I thought, ‘That looks like a whale, I’ll just add flippers and a tail!’”



CYNDE MCINNIS '94

A Whale of a Time

MCINNIS IS NOT YOUR EVERYDAY whale enthusiast. Beyond training dozens of interns and volunteers and leading nearly 2,000 whale watches herself during her 20 years at Cape Ann Whale Watch in Gloucester, Massachusetts, she has also embarked on a five-year study of ocean and whale health, and served as the American Cetacean Society's education chair. Her most recent project—dubbed the “Whalemobile”—has given her obsession a whole new form.

With Nile, a 43-foot inflatable whale, as her tool, McInnis travels across Massachusetts teaching grade school students about whale anatomy and behavior. Complete with lungs, ribs, vertebrae and a stomach, Nile—modeled after a real humpback of the same name—has helped to augment limited marine education at local elementary schools. “They don't have the money or funding” for trips anymore, she says, “so I thought the next best thing is to bring a giant inflatable whale into their school that the kids can go inside.” (McInnis gives many of her presentations within Nile's large, hollow belly.) While in her early days at Cape Ann, McInnis was accustomed to taking as many as 100 school groups on watches in the spring. Today the number tops off around 20.

Describing the mammals as her “hook” to get kids to think about protecting the environment, McInnis hopes that through her programming, students will acquire a similar interest in the world around them. “I feel like whales are that thing that can be really powerful to get the kids to care.” —Marley Marius '17

McInnis based her inflatable on a female humpback whale that often summers off the Massachusetts coast. >>>>