

CoffeeTalk

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Brave world

John Schuerholz is known in the baseball world as a Hall of Fame general manager and team architect, the person who helped build the Atlanta Braves into the most decorated team of the 1990s.

But Schuerholz, who, in the business world is essentially a turnaround executive, also proved something else in his long career: going against conventional wisdom, while it can be lonely, can also provide big payoffs. A part-time Naples resident, Schuerholz was the keynote speaker at the latest NextGen Speaker Series event, held Feb. 25 at the Grey Oaks Country Club in Naples. Benson Blackburn, a boutique financial services firm founded in 1976, is the founding sponsor of the series.

The Braves, with Schuerholz as GM and Bobby Cox as manager, won 14 straight National League titles from 1991 to 2005; five NL pennants; and one World Series, in 1995. Some of the stars of those teams Schuerholz helped build are known in baseball by one name: Maddux, Chipper, McGriff.

Prior to joining the Braves, Schuerholz was an executive with the Kansas City Royals — one of the premier baseball organizations of the 1980s. The Braves had finished last place three years in a row when Schuerholz was hired away from the Royals in 1991. Hence the turnaround that brought out the doubters. “When the baseball world learned of my decision to leave the classiest organization in baseball, the Royals, to go work with the last place Atlanta Braves, I received many calls from my friends — some of which I can’t repeat here,” Schuerholz quipped at the NextGen event.

“Most were stunned to hear the



Atlanta Braves official **JOHN SCHUERHOLZ** attended the grand opening of the Atlanta Braves new spring training stadium in North Port, south Sarasota County, in 2018.

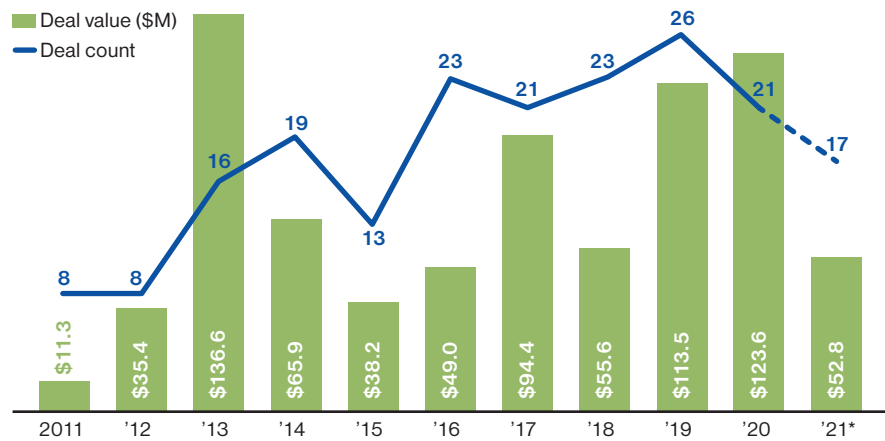
news, some saying ‘what a shame, Schuerholz was really a talented guy, it’s too bad he hit his head on the pavement,’” he added. “I think the guy has lost his marbles.”

But Schuerholz says he was able to help build the Braves into a winner by adhering to several principles that could apply to any business. The list includes embracing rapid change; look good, play good (players on his teams wore jackets and ties); and over-communicate. “Speaking clearly and concisely and honestly, from the players to the managers to the coaches to the people who ran our business, was very important,” he says. “It was the most important tool I used.”

The visionary sponsors for the NextGen Speaker Series include Arthrex; Green Line Benefits; Meristem Family Wealth; Dentons; John R. Wood; PNC Bank; Lurie; Elite Jets; Marsh McLennan; Pure Insurance; and Sunshine Ace Hardware. The media partners are e’Bella and the *Business Observer*. The academic partner is FGCU.

data snapshot

Tampa seed- and early-stage VC deal activity



*AS OF SEPTEMBER 1, 2021. SOURCE: PITCHBOOK | GEOGRAPHY: TAMPA

Move that Bus

The Rise of the Rest bus tour, a nod to the notion that tech companies can and do thrive outside Silicon Valley, New York and Boston, has made some stops in Tampa. Now, based on new report from the organization and investment fund Revolution, the city’s tech scene is going to need a bigger bus.

Using data from private capital research firm Pitchbook, the report shows a steady rise in both deal count and total amount of money invested in Tampa companies. Both Rise of the Rest and Revolution are projects backed by AOL founder and tech entrepreneur Steve Case. The bus tour began in 2014, and, according to the report, has since traveled 11,000 miles nationwide to more than 40 cities. The fund has subsequently invested in more than 170 early-stage startups — with more than 300 institutional co-investors. “Our

analysis reveals that investor interest is increasingly tipping toward ‘rising cities,’” the report states.

One of those cities is Tampa. The report cites several individual examples including former Zynga executive Steve Parkis, who moved to town from San Francisco. Once here, the report says he “became an investor and advisor in Leasecake, Ideal Agent and DocLocker, three local success stories.” And Ty Blachly, former chief of staff at Snap in Los Angeles, joined the advisory board of Openly HQ after moving to Tampa.

On the data, at least 20 seed- and early-stage rounds have been closed each year in Tampa dating back to 2017. And those dollar amounts are becoming consistently higher. In 2019 and 2020, for example, seed-stage and early-stage startups hauled in \$237.1 million in 47 rounds. Tampa companies recorded some \$11 million in seed and early-stage financings in 2011.



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