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Give Something Back Inc.'s Marx finds profit in giving

East Bay Business Times - by [David Goll](#) Staff reporter

Though one of his greatest professional role models, Paul Newman, died Sept. 26, Sean Marx is determined to carry on the legacy of the renowned actor and businessman.

Marx and co-founder Mike Hannigan started Give Something Back Inc., an office products company, 17 years ago in Hannigan's living room. According to the company Web site, Hannigan came up with the idea when cooking dinner one night. While opening a jar of Newman's Own spaghetti sauce, he said to himself: "Hey, if Paul Newman can do it, so can we. We might not have his baby blues, but we sure know business products."

The socially conscious pair patterned their business after Newman's food company, which donates all of its profits to charitable causes. Marx said that since 1991 his Oakland company has donated more than half of its profits – greater than \$4 million – to charity.

"It was a pretty alien and 'out there' concept at the time, but I think many of my peers in the business world have come around to realize there's more to life than climbing the corporate ladder," said Marx, now the company's CEO. "If you can make a reasonable living, do something challenging and also do some good in the world at the same time, why not?"

It has turned out to be a recipe for success, too. Today, Marx's company is the largest independent supplier of office supplies on the West Coast, selling 70,000 products nationwide from 40 distribution centers and operating three corporate offices.

"I have always cared deeply about the welfare of others," Marx said. "I get great satisfaction from knowing I can make a positive contribution to society."

Reality check

PERSONAL STYLE

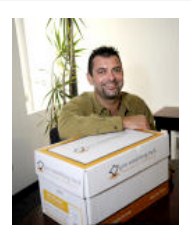
- **Age:** 42
- **Automobile:** Volvo
- **Number of days spent on the road:** Very few
- **Dress code:** Business casual
- **Education:** B.S., economics, Occidental College
- **Family:** My wife, son, 14, daughter, 11
- **Hotel:** Wawona Hotel, Yosemite National Park
- **Food:** Sushi
- **Restaurant:** Yoshi's in Oakland
- **Drink:** Water
- **Sport:** Baseball, lacrosse, running, yoga
- **First job:** Copier sales
- **City of residence:** Orinda

COMPANY STYLE

- **Proudest moment:** Being honored by the late Paul Newman and John F. Kennedy Jr. as one of America's most generous companies.
- **Next unique project:** Leading the office products industry in a greener direction.
- **Inducement to sell/leave:** When my leadership is no longer required.
- **Lessons learned:** It's always all about the people.
- **Single biggest challenge:** Evolving technology at the dizzying pace required.
- **Sources of capital:** Bank line.
- **Two best practices:** Servant leadership, leveraging technology.
- **Advice to a new CEO:** Choose your passion, because to succeed, it takes a lot of work. So you'd better love what you do.

Give Something Back Inc.

- **Address:** 7730 Pardee Lane, Oakland 94621
- **Phone:** 800-261-2619
- **Web site:** www.givesomethingback.com
- **Year founded:** 1991



Stephanie Secret | East Bay Business Times

Sean Marx of Give Something Back Business Products.

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- **Number of employees:** 90
- **CEO:** Sean Marx
- **Revenue:** \$28 million

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