

# CRAIN'S

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## Growing the holistic way

Open Center's prez, formerly an attorney, says goal is to 'work less, enjoy more'

BY ADRIANNE PASQUARELLI

**A**FTER 25 YEARS IN SoHo, the Open Center has moved on up. The holistic learning organization sold its former home, a funky condominium at 83 Spring St., for more than \$7 million late last year. In August, the popular New York institution relocated to a 16,000-square-foot space at 22 E. 30th St., expanding its size by almost

50%. Now, Walter Beebe, the current president and one of the nonprofit's founders, has big plans for growth.

**How does a corporate attorney end up heading a holistic institution?**

You make a mistake in looking for a purpose in life—we

really have purposes. I was interested in the legal profession and in helping other people get a deeper understanding of themselves. I'm 69 years old, but I feel like I'm just going at some of these missions. I retired from the law four years ago.

**Why did you decide to expand?**

When the real estate market was going through the roof three years ago, we realized that our assets were tied up in bricks and mortar.

We realized we could sell [our condominium] and use the proceeds to sustain a rental for at least 10 years. Another driver for the move was atten-

dance, which was shooting up by 20%. That means that a lot of people like what we do, and we didn't have enough room for them. We were renting outside space right and left, and selling out on classes.

**What are your new attendance goals?**

We were at 10,000 people a year. If our growth curve continues, we expect to be at 15,000 by the end of 2010.

**Any new services on tap?**

We're doing more long-term training for careers, so people can bring holistic concepts and practices into their real life. We're doing one on voice dialogue, and programs on tai chi and meditation. We now have a bookstore café and a grand hall that we sometimes rent out on the second floor.

**Have you raised your prices?**

Right now we're holding prices, so that particularly in this down economy, people who may need this approach to life more than ever can come in and make use of it.

**Did you make a New Year's resolution?**

Work less and enjoy more, after two years of the opposite! ■

