



## 2024 Virginia CFO Awards: Nonprofits: John Zabrowski, VHC Health

A passion for patients: Health system CFO has ‘people-first’ attitude



John Zabrowski is CFO and chief strategy officer for Northern Virginia regional health system VHC Health. Photo by Will Schermerhorn

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VHC Health Chief Financial Officer John Zabrowski zeroed in on accounting and finance early in life, double majoring in the subjects at Indiana University’s Kelley School of Business and then doing two internships in public accounting after graduation.

“I love economics, I love statistics,” he says. “I found that I was really attracted to the types of jobs where the assignment was to learn about the client and build great relationships with the management team and help deliver an audit.”

Zabrowski worked at a couple banks, became a certified public accountant and earned his MBA from DePaul University’s Kellstadt Graduate School of Business in Chicago. But he soon found that “something was missing” for him in the corporate finance career

he was building. “After a couple years, [orchestrating transactions] wasn’t really enjoyable,” he remembers. “I didn’t get fulfillment out of it.”

In 2005, he applied for a job at Deaconess Health System in Evansville, Indiana, and was hired as a finance manager. At the CFO’s suggestion, he started his tenure there by witnessing an open-heart surgery, standing in the room right next to the patient on the table and observing the institution’s health care in action. And that was it — Zabrowski was hooked.

“What I thought was so cool about it was that everybody in that room did something to make that patient’s life better,” he says. “That’s my passion. That’s what drives me.”

He stayed at Deaconess for eight years, rising to system controller and director of finance. From there, he became a regional CFO for St. Vincent Health, working at a 508-bed, dual-campus, integrated health care and trauma care institution in Evansville, Indiana. He was instrumental in the establishment of significant ambulatory assets and helped build a specialty orthopedic hospital in collaboration with an orthopedic group.

Soon, his effectiveness as a finance leader and genuine enthusiasm for health care leadership drew the interest of Arlington County-based VHC Health (formerly Virginia Hospital Center), which he joined in 2018. He now serves as VHC’s system senior vice president, CFO and chief strategy officer.

During his tenure, Zabrowski has been a key player in acquisitions, growth plans and joint venture development. He also led the issuance of \$274 million in municipal bonds, successfully obtaining for VHC Health an AA- stable outlook rating from Fitch Ratings and an A+ stable outlook rating from S&P Global.

“John is intelligent, thoughtful, and strategic — the best CFO I’ve had the pleasure of knowing and working with,” says VHC Health President and CEO Christopher T. Lane. “His balanced approach to strategic and financial growth combines a supportive, enthusiastic attitude with high expectations to achieve the team’s goals.”

Zabrowski, for his part, shares that enthusiasm for his co-workers at VHC.

“The people I’ve worked with, I couldn’t begin to be more blessed that they’re happy to work with me, happy to teach me, happy to give me an opportunity to learn,” he says. “Everyone here is phenomenal and really helpful and really supportive.”

That attitude of teamwork is part of what enables his institution to be taking on what he describes as an “aggressive” capital project to open up 25 new physician offices over the next five years. The goal is to modernize the system’s facilities and adjust the way it delivers care.

“It’s a really massive investment,” he notes. “To be able to count on spending half-a-billion dollars and having a capital plan to run it, that’s really good.”

Along with the ability to help improve patients’ lives, the work of building something new inspires him. He’s focused on facilitating access and bringing a “people-first lens” to the work of innovating better ways of delivering care.

“I like the opportunity to innovate and build with this team,” he says. “We have done so many amazing things in such a short period of time. I find that really rewarding and invigorating.”