A BROADWAY PRODUCER who won a Tony at age 29, an emergency management expert who lived through the World Trade Center attacks and a neuroscientist who raises money for brain research are just three of the exceptional executives profiled in Crain's New York Business' 40 Under 40 special report.

Crain's editors chose this year's class from a record 800 nominations, making it more difficult than ever to select the honorees. Read their stories, find out surprising tidbits about each member of the group, and go to Crain's Web site to watch video interviews with this year's rising stars.

www.newyorkbusiness-risingstars.com

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BUCK ENNIS
KENNY LAO, 30
CO-FOUNDER, RICKSHAW DUMPLING BAR

KENNY LAO ISN'T SURE whom to credit for his career choice—his mother, who prepared Chinese dumplings with him every week, or his stepfather, a foodie who took him out of school for lunch dates.

One thing is certain: His parents never imagined that they would be watching their son on The Martha Stewart Show or on MTV talking about Chinese cuisine. "My mother wanted me to be a lawyer," says the California transplant, who instead got an M.B.A. at New York University's Stern School of Business.

Though Mr. Lao worked briefly on Wall Street, his food lust won out, and he opened Rickshaw Dumpling Bar two years ago. The casual Chelsea eatery grew out of a business plan contest at Stern. Mr. Lao nabbed second place and attracted the school's dean, Thomas Cooley, as an investor. Chef Anita Lo, whose work elsewhere has garnered Michelin stars, joined as a partner.

"The force of his personality and his thoroughness" persuaded Mr. Cooley to sign on, says the dean, who had never invested in a student venture.

Michael Bonadies, a founding partner of Drew Nieporent's Myriad Restaurant Group, is also a backer. He and Mr. Lao met when the ambitious young man worked for Myriad as a new projects manager before he entered graduate school.

Rickshaw's revenues of $1.3 million in fiscal 2005 are on track to rise 22% in fiscal 2006, says Mr. Lao, whose ambitions don't stop with one spot. He has raised two-thirds of the $3 million needed to open six more Rickshaw bars, here and in other markets, over the next couple of years.

The entrepreneur, a reformed marathon runner, says: "I got that masochistic streak out of my system. Now I channel it into the restaurant."

—LISA FICKENSCHER