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# SPARTANBURG

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# Sharing our Gifts

PHILANTHROPY IN SPARTANBURG

## HUB CITY'S SPIRIT OF GIVING

### Environment of Collaboration, Innovation Can 'Move the Needle' on Challenges



CHUCK MILTEER, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

On a chilly Tuesday evening in late November, about 250 people, many with beer or cider in hand, socialized and circled the Fr8Yard in downtown Spartanburg. There was live music on stage.

At tables around the perimeter, about 30 nonprofit organizations raised their banners, offering literature, conversation and a chance to help.

Philanthropy, live and in real time in the Hub City.

Called "Brew Good," the event is part of the annual Giving Tuesday effort by Spartanburg Gives, a collective of community organizations developed by communications and marketing entrepreneur and community activist Kathryn Harvey.

This year's event is Nov. 29 from 5:30 to 9 p.m.

Over on Kennedy Street, at the Spartanburg County Foundation, decisions take place about where millions of dollars entrusted by thousands of donors will be deployed for the benefit of the people of Spartanburg.

At the foundation's Robert Hett Chapman III Center for Philanthropy across the street, meetings and training sessions take place in a facility specifically created for people to gather and discuss and work on community issues.

Not counting churches, Spartanburg has more than 300 nonprofit organizations, says Troy Hanna, the foundation's President and CEO.

Their work is supported financially by individual contributors and by the county's "joint funders," the County Foundation, the Mary Black Foundation, the Spartanburg Regional Healthcare Foundation, Chapman Cultural Center and the United Way of the Piedmont.

The work is done by thousands of volunteers and staffers, each offering their time and talent to help make Spartanburg a better place to live.



## MAKING DECISIONS

Talk to people around Spartanburg and a common theme often comes up: The area's spirit of generosity.

"There is a strong heritage here of giving, generosity, seeing needs and striving to meet them. That includes coming up with creative ways to approach meeting those needs," says Hanna.

Spartanburg created one of the first community indicators programs in the country in 1987. The effort was led by John T. Wardlaw, a textile executive and county foundation board member renowned for his expertise in data tracking and analysis.

The indicators quantify the community's well-being in multiple areas: Education, Economy, Social Environment, Natural Environment, Public Health, Civic Health and Cultural Vitality.

"Being focused on data allows you to consider the greatest needs in the community. It brings focus. Data allows for a neutral setting," Hanna says.

It also makes for better, more equitable decisions, he says.

"It's not a political position or opinions, it's data and we're following the data. It allows for funding to follow needs. If the data is not moving, then you can change to a different strategy."

## AN EDUCATION IN DATA

There was a disturbing data point in a 2008 economic development task force report: the number 19.2. That's the percentage of Spartanburg residents 25 and older with a bachelor's degree or higher.

The number was well below state and national levels and quantified something that had long been suspected. Worse, it was less than half the percentage of places with dynamic, rising economies – if Spartanburg hoped to become one of those places, the data showed the county was not even in the game.

The task force recommended the 40/30 Challenge – double the number of Spartanburg adults with bachelor's degrees to 40% by 2030. The target date was 22 years in the future. One generation.

To attack the goal, the Spartanburg County Foundation established and funded College Hub, a nonprofit organization focused on getting more students and adults to attend and graduate college. Get the ball rolling. Move the needle.

But when does economic development become philanthropy?

Underneath the specific benchmark, the true challenge was increasing the economic mobility that almost always accompanies increased educational achievement. Moving toward that objective would require a comprehensive approach to education at all levels.

By 2013, College Hub had merged with several other related efforts and evolved into Spartanburg Academic Movement. SAM brings together education, business, government, community and faith leaders to work together in pursuit of increasing academic success for all the county's children.

SAM is not a direct services provider, but it does connect them, using data to point where they are needed most.

"One of our core values at SAM is equity and we drive equity by pointing to what the data reveals," said Dr. Russell Booker, SAM Executive Director and the recently retired Superintendent of Spartanburg School District 7.

The data points to disparities. "There is no mistaking that our African American, Hispanic and poor students are impacted the most," Booker said. "Our community is coming together to address these disparities."

Using time, talent and treasure to benefit all: Philanthropy at its most basic.

## GETTING THE WORD OUT

Spartanburg Gives came out of the pandemic, when in-person networking and fundraising wasn't possible.

"It was a wake-up call seeing our own clients struggle with reaching folks online, staying relevant and in the news," Harvey said.

What started as a way to support Giving Tuesday, has developed into a certified benefit corporation, an online platform for the 33 member organizations to tell their own stories and connect with other nonprofits and people who might be looking to help.

"Many nonprofits needed critical marketing and communications support, to deepen their impact and increase visibility," Harvey said. "It was how can we make this affordable and approachable."

Events like "Brew Good" are the logical in-person extension of what started online.

"It's getting opportunities and information out to the larger community and getting in front of people to create

awareness. Sometimes it's just 'show up to this event, have a good time, learn about us.'"

## BLESSINGS OF HOPE

In 2005, Victor Durrah Jr. was a student at USC Upstate, learning about the management of nonprofit organizations.

He recalled his youth in Cowpens and the mentors who had helped him stay on a path that led him to college, when some of his peers had taken different more dangerous, destructive routes.

Recognizing the need, he founded Brothers Restoring Urban Hope (BRUH), an organization dedicated to connecting young people like himself with mentors and offering them a path of hope for the future. He graduated from USC Upstate in 2008 and has continued building BRUH ever since.

The group has connected about 30,000 Spartanburg area youth, primarily young men, 17 to 25 years old, with group mentorship, leadership training and spiritual guidance. Durrah's group has mobilized more than 3,000 volunteers to work with BRUH and other area organizations on a variety of events and programs.

Durrah says mentoring builds social capital – a web of relationships that can have profound positive impact on an individual and their community. There's no better time to build those relationships than when a person is young.

"Wherever you are in life, chances are someone invested in you," Durrah wrote in an op-ed column earlier this year. "Either by supporting an organization you were involved in, offering you advice when you were struggling, or using their own social capital to advocate for you."

Durrah's own social capital paid dividends last Thanksgiving when he and BRUH were presented with a grant from the offering of Spartanburg's annual Community Thanksgiving Service.

## THE ARTS OF GIVING

There's a funny thing about giving to support the arts in Spartanburg – they give right back.

"There is a tremendous sense of giving in this community and supporting the arts in particular," says Courtney Oliver, Marketing and Special Events Manager for the Spartanburg Philharmonic.

Oliver moved here from Memphis in 2016. "That Spar-

Previous page, The Brew Good event at Fr8Yard is part of the Giving Tuesday effort organized by Spartanburg Gives. JOHN GALLANT ; Getty; Opposite, from left, The Robert Hett Chapman III Center for Philanthropy. TIM KIMZEY/STAFF; Dr. Russell Booker is Executive Director of Spartanburg Academic Movement PROVIDED; Above left, Students at Mary H. Wright Elementary School. ALEX HICKS JR./STAFF; Above right, BRUH-Mentor founder Victor Durrah Jr. receives the Key to Spartanburg County from council member Mo Abusafa. PROVIDED.

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tanburg supports not only the Philharmonic, but so many other arts organizations in a relatively smaller community, is impressive," she says. "There's a desire to engage with all these organizations and support them."

It's vital support to keep the music playing for more than 40 performances each year in five different concert series.

Less than half the cost of staging a performance is covered by ticket sales, even with a sold-out crowd, Oliver says. The rest comes from donors and grants.

Yet, even as the organization receives, it gives -- practicing philanthropy of its own.

The Philharmonic organizes and presents the Music Sandwiched In series at the downtown Library. On 22 selected Wednesdays, anyone can take in free lunchtime performances that showcase Philharmonic members as well as other local artists.

Board member and education chair Helen Tipton puts her commitment into action, Oliver says. A music teacher in Spartanburg District 7, Tipton was instrumental in the creation of the Philharmonic's Youth Orchestra, which held its first performance in 2019. She dedicates her time each Sunday during the season as co-manager for rehearsals and performances.

She's just one example of the Philharmonic's active, engaged board, Oliver says.

"It's not just 'hey, I'm going to come to some board meetings and talk about all the things that we want to do,' she really is a hands-on part of making that part of the organization run."

## GIFTS OF SUPPORT

At the most difficult moments in a person's life, there is nothing more valuable than someone offering a hand to hold or a shoulder to lean on. Gifts of time, talent and treasure make it possible for these organizations to be there with support and encouragement.

Angels Charge Ministry is one such support system and is both a recipient and a source of philanthropy.

The organization is dedicated to offering support to women who are working to make the transition from incarceration to a safe, productive life on the outside.

Pastor Nannie Jefferies established Angels Charge Ministry in 2014 after witnessing first-hand the challenges facing incarcerated women. She would visit jailed members of her own church and others to encourage and pray for the



women and their children.

Jefferies and her team focus on providing what former prisoners need to get back into the mainstream of life, including mental health services, help with addiction, educational opportunity, housing, employment and transportation.

Resources to support the group's transitional housing program, case management and advocacy come from grants and donations.

Angels Charge has helped Audrey Colin move from addiction and incarceration to work as a support specialist, helping others who are just starting their journey. She says she is grateful to Jefferies' organization. "They were the hands that caught me when I fell."

## TRAINING AND COLLABORATING

Most nonprofits get their start from a deep desire to help make things better -- acting from the heart.

Often, the key to making those groups successful is also learning how to act with the head, says Mary Thomas, the COO of the Spartanburg Foundation and the Executive Director of the Center for Philanthropy.

That's one of the primary functions of the center.

"Over across the street is our headquarters where we do all of our transactional work with our donors," Thomas said "Here, this center was built for incubating ideas,

programs, looking at some of the pressing issues in Spartanburg and asking: 'What can we do to solve some of these issues?'"

The high-tech, \$6 million facility is also intended to be a community resource, a place where meetings are held and collaborators can gather, but it's also a space for anyone who is working for the benefit of the community, Thomas said.

Helping build healthier, more capable community organizations is a great investment, says Hanna.

The foundation's Grassroots Leadership Development Institute and other efforts are aimed at training the next waves of community leaders.

"We often worry about return on investment for our financial capital, but when you've graduated over 400 nonprofit and grassroots leaders back into our community, how do you measure that social impact, that social capital?" Hanna says. "Those graduates are sitting on city council, on county council. One is the mayor. They're leading nonprofits. It's immeasurable."

Building that leadership is the secret to making sure the entire community is invested in tackling its challenges.

"It's doing what you can to meet a need. Philanthropy is a way of life and thinking. It is that spirit of giving," says Hanna.

Clockwise, Big Brothers Big Sisters provides boys and girls with mentoring in school and community-based programs; Soloist Kenneth Overton with the Spartanburg Philharmonic; The Spartanburg Philharmonic and Ballet Spartanburg will present The Nutcracker Dec. 9-11. PROVIDED; Angels Charge Ministry founder Nannie Jefferies and case manager Lia Rice at Brew Good 2021 event. JOHN GALLANT. The Center for Philanthropy is officially opened by Spartanburg County Foundation President and CEO Troy Hanna, COO and CFP Executive Director Mary Thomas, Board Chair Sheryl Booker and Spartanburg One CEO Alan Smith. PROVIDED; Nonprofits at the Brew Good event got a chance to share their message with the 250 people who attended. JOHN GALLANT.

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