

RV FUND JUNE 2020

Unlike Hurricane Katrina whose wrath was centered on a narrow swath of South Louisiana, the scourge of Covid 19 has left a physical and economic scar that is near universal.

The National Hurricane Center attributed 1577 deaths in our state directly to Katrina. At this writing the current pandemic is responsible for 2870 deaths in Louisiana. In both instances the onset of morbidity and subsequent fatalities have fallen disproportionately on our elderly and African American citizenry.

Our South Louisiana community is ill-equipped both economically and culturally to meet the challenges presented by the spread of this illness. Our medical facilities have executed without fail throughout but our gig economy is wobbly.

Tourism is the animating spirit and financial crux of our economic engine. Mardi Gras, JazzFest, Saints and LSU games, second lines, and crawfish boils are events with a cheek to cheek and elbow to elbow protocol. We celebrate together and mourn together almost always in close quarters. For us social distancing is as novel as this horrid virus is.

The physical and economic illnesses of our community have stressed our medical and beneficent non-profits to their respective limits. The fund has continued support for many old friends and a few new ones since our last letter. A sampling follows.

The fund contributed \$1K each to Ochsner Medical Center and St. Tammany Parish Hospital emergency funds to aid their healthcare workers.

Food insecurity is a recurrent problem here and has understandably worsened of late. The fund has supported our local Northshore Food Bank since our founding post-Katrina. We added the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank and Second Harvest Food Bank (New Orleans) to our giving this year. The total for the three agencies was \$5K.

Pennies for Bread is another old fund friend. The monks of St Joseph Abbey deliver 2000 loaves a week of their freshly baked bread to twenty locations serving the poor and homeless in the New Orleans area. We have an annual

\$5K commitment to that effort. which we supplemented by \$1K since our last letter.

Another long-time fund favorite is The Boys and Girls Club which suspended activities during the recent stay-at-home orders. Through our local club we learned of some kids whose families were facing unusual hardship. The fund purchased \$3K of gift cards from our local supermarket that the Boys and Girls Club managers distributed to those families.

We purchased additional supermarket gift cards for wait and kitchen staff at several neighborhood restaurants which were temporarily closed this spring. Most have recently reopened.

The Tulane Primate Center is a 500-acre medical research facility a few minutes from our office. While reading about the center's current work on a Corona 19 vaccine, we were reminded of Chimp Haven in North Louisiana which is the only retirement community for former laboratory test chimpanzees in the U.S.



FIFTY-FOUR-YEAR-OLD RETIREE "ED"

We again sent \$500 to this unique and deserving non-profit.

Bryleigh Fortenberry is a three-year-old girl from Hammond diagnosed with Pre-B Cell Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia earlier this year. While that illness has a 90% cure rate, her family faces a long and costly treatment to accomplish that goal. The fund contributed \$1K to a recent Blood Drive for Bryleigh. We will keep up with Bryleigh's progress and offer additional support if needed.



BRYLEIGH FORTENBERRY

Last year we told you of the medical challenge faced by Covington fourth grader Luke Bertel. For the past year he has undergone intense treatment for Acute Myeloid Leukemia. During that time, he has been home bound apart from hospital stays for the six infusion treatments designed to stimulate red blood cell growth. Luke's mom and Luke's older sister are his only caregivers. The illness has fractured the family finances. The fund recently sent \$5K to this good family in direful need.



LUKE BERTEL

Prior to his diagnosis, Luke was a star goalie on his lacrosse team. His legion of supporters all hope the day will come when he can return to his school and his team.

Last fall we contributed to a raise to assist students at Folsom Elementary School purchasing needed school supplies. Despite nearly all of its students living in or on the edge of poverty, the school was named one of the top twenty in the state and the principal was named number one in St. Tammany.

Parish. Even though the school is a Title I designate serving severely economically disadvantage students, the additional funding is very limited. The fund is contributing \$3K toward a new reading program not covered by the school’s tight budget.



FOLSOM ELEMENTARY’S KINDERGARTEN

We continue our support of Innocence Project New Orleans which has now accomplished freedom for thirty-six wrongly convicted Louisiana citizens. One particularly gratifying story is that of Archie Williams profiled in our June 2019 letter. Exonerated after serving thirty-six years, Archie has pursued his dream of becoming a professional singer.



ARCHIE UPON RELEASE



ARCHIE TODAY

He recently performed on an episode of *America's Got Talent* in which he related his life story and sang Elton John's composition "*Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me.*" Subsequently Archie received a phone call from Elton John praising the performance and inviting Archie to perform with the star on his next U.S. tour. Here is a link to that episode:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ShgOH1u78XA>

The homicide committed on George Floyd in Minneapolis was yet another example of the mismatch faced by the African-American community with some elements of law enforcement. IPNO's work is integral to undoing some of that injustice.

The Pro Bono Publico Foundation is a philanthropic outreach of the Rex Organization which produces and funds most of the Mardi Gras Day spectacle enjoyed by millions.

The fund made an initial \$1K donation this year after learning of PBBF's underwriting of laptops and home internet connectivity for public school children following the Corona Virus shutdown in the city. The PBPF is headed by a close friend who this year was chosen as Rex for Mardi Gras Day for his philanthropic contributions to the city.

Unity of Greater New Orleans continues its winning battle against homelessness in New Orleans especially among veterans. We have supported this great organization since our founding and contributed another \$1K since our last letter.

The fund made an initial contribution of \$1K to the Harry Tomson Center which provides a day shelter for the homeless. Named for the late principal of New Orleans' Jesuit High School, the center attends to basic hygienic needs, as well as employment assistance, housing, counseling, treatment for addiction and mental illnesses.

Although there are many heartening stories of pet adoption during the pandemic, there have also been many incidents of financially stressed owners surrendering pets to shelters. The fund contributed to Humane Society of Louisiana (\$3500) and pet adoption agency Zeus Rescues (\$500).

The larger than usual HSL gift was due to a \$1500 contribution to a \$10k reward for information regarding an incident last winter. A fisherman saw an individual toss a feedbag off of a nearby bridge. Thinking it was trash he

drove his boat to it to collect and dispose of it. The bag contained six live lab puppies. The puppies were rescued in good health and taken to HSL where they were all adopted to caring homes. The reward worked; the perpetrator was arrested and charged while admitting guilt. Sentencing is pending.

Mose Allison was one of my all-time favorite jazz/blues musicians. A white guy born in north Mississippi in 1927, he migrated to Memphis as a teen and broke the Jim Crow laws there by playing with black musicians. One of those was another teenager known then as Beale Street Boy, who later gained fame as B.B. King.

One of Mose's compositions, *Everyone's Cryin' Mercy*, was released in 1968. Not surprisingly given that year, the lyrics fit today:

*I can't believe the things I'm seeing
I wonder 'bout some things I've heard
Everybody's crying mercy
When they don't know the meaning of the word*

*A bad enough situation
It's sure enough getting worse
Everybody's crying justice
Just as long as it's business first*

Your generosity is a clear manifestation that you know the meaning of the word mercy and that you possess a commitment to justice. For that our thanks once again.

Year to date the fund has disbursed \$30,800 and incoming gifts have totaled \$20,950. All but \$5k is attributable to a matching gift of \$10K from our longtime supporter Marc Cohodes. The balance in our account is \$26,524.

JTR