

Beech commemorates memory of former CEO during COVID-19 pandemic



Floyd Alston

PHILADELPHIA, May 25, 2020 – The Beech Companies, Inc., a small nonprofit founded to revitalize disadvantaged communities in Philadelphia would have been celebrating its 30th anniversary with a big dinner on May 28th.

As fate would have it, the COVID-19 pandemic changed those plans. Instead, Beech decided to use funds for the celebration to provide assistance to those most in need during the coronavirus emergency

through its Alston Beech Foundation. Since March 23, Beech has donated emergency micro-grants to 30 nonprofits in North, West and Northwest Philadelphia that provide urgent, essential services to help keep them running during this national emergency.

“As Beech planned to celebrate our 30th anniversary, the worldwide pandemic became a vivid reminder of our purpose and mission from day one of providing vital services to the community,” reflected Dr. Kenneth Scott, president/CEO of Beech. “I thought, what would our founding CEO, the late Floyd Alston do? That’s when we decided to commemorate his memory by providing contributions to organizations that provide food, shelter and support services to people in emergency situations. Our goal was to provide funding to 30 nonprofits in celebration of our 30 years of service. These are serious times that require a timely, unified, compassionate response.”

Each week Beech provided \$1,000 micro-grants to five selected non-profits. Bazelon, Leff & Feldman law firm, Domus Construction and several anonymous donors partnered with Beech on its mission. The small grants have helped the recipients immensely during the pandemic.

Without the grant from Beech, the Walker Junior Unity Center in North Philadelphia, which delivers food to 100 to 200 families per week, might have had to skip paying some of its bills. The grant allowed them to pay the rent and buy gas for their food delivery vehicle. “The \$1,000 donation bought me two months,” said Kenny Walker, its CEO. “We’re able to keep the office open.”

The Black Doctors COVID-19 Consortium used their grant to purchase personal protective equipment and testing supplies to continue its mission of testing African Americans. “We rely 100% on volunteers and funds raised in the private sector,” explained Kamau Stanford. Essentially, we refused to let the disproportionate death of African Americans be regulated to an asterisk or footnote when history speaks of COVID-19.”

Philadelphia Corporation for Aging (PCA) used their grant to help replenish its Rodney D. Williams Philadelphia Fund for Seniors, created to supplement its public funding, which according to PCA CEO Holly Lange, has not kept pace with its overwhelming needs.

The Share Food Program used their grant to expand home deliveries for seniors and people with disabilities who can’t visit the food pantry. “Your donation has a real impact in ensuring food cupboards can respond to the unprecedented and escalating need because of the COVID-19 crisis,” wrote Share Director of Development Mara Natkins in a letter of thanks.

The Salvation Army used its grant to provide for home-

less families. “We deeply appreciate the Alston Beech Foundation for contributing \$1,000 to our Red Shield Family Residence,” said Captain Tawny Cowen-Zanders. With this generous contribution, we are better prepared at the front lines to alleviate the burdens of poverty that have been heightened as a result of this pandemic.”

The 30 non profits that received the Alston Beech Foundation COVID-19 emergency grants are:

Achievability, Bebashi, Bethlehem Deliverance Church, Real Deal Food Ministry, Black Doctors COVID-19 Consortium, Chosen 300 Ministries, Covenant House, Dignity Housing, Grands As Parents, Inc., Kirkbridge Center, Kitchen Of Love, Lutheran Settlement, ManUpPHL, Mercy Neighborhood Services, North Broad Renaissance, People’s Emergency Center, Philadelphia Black Women’s Health Alliance, Philadelphia Corporation for Aging, Philabundance, Project Home, Salvation Army Red Shield Center, Self, Inc., Share Food Program, Sunday Breakfast Rescue Mission, The Table Pantry, Walker Junior Unity Center, White Rock Community Food Pantry, Whosoever Mission, Women’s Center Coalition Against Hunger, Yorktown Community Development Corporation, Youth Services, Inc.

Named after Alston who was vice president of marketing at First Pennsylvania Bank in the 1980s and president of

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Restaurants

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“All of the designs are my own, and draw upon my ‘former-life’ experience as a graphic designer,” she said. “For those that wish to go the extra mile, there’s a ‘leave a tip’ option at the purchase checkout.”

But a person doesn’t have to wait for an organized fundraiser to help out.

“We can all support our family and friends who aren’t faring as well,” Tobin said. “If you can afford to buy a struggling friends’ groceries for the week, do it! Venmo them some money, or drop bags on their doorstep.”

Pearlmutter has seen a lot of people take initiative, contributing to those who lost jobs.

“The level of community support has been absolutely tremendous and does a lot to make one feel better about the future in a general sense,” she said. “Even though it seems we’re constantly bombarded by things that would fly in the face of that.”

For Chapman, he is not sure how safe everyone will feel going out after the quarantine is lifted. And that will have lingering effects for people like him, who make their living as serving food in crowded spaces.

“How can we know for sure that we can be safe in a confined space with strangers?” he said. “I know that I, as a consumer, will definitely be cautious for the first month or so before I just dive back into being shoulder to shoulder with randoms for a happy hour at a bar.”

Tobin said the biggest business obstacles for entertainment, hospitality and service spaces will be getting potential customers and audiences to trust that they can safely enjoy public spaces again.

“People will definitely have a hard time adjusting to new



Urban Village Brewing Company open for take-out food and beer.

‘personal space’ norms when this is all over,” he said. “I can’t wait to create spaces for myself and others to perform in front of an audience again.”

The economic uncertainty that has come with the coronavirus is not likely to fade even after dining rooms open back up.

“There needs to be a more concrete acknowledgement that our industry in particular is being dealt some serious body-blows,” Pearlmutter said. “I think it’s even more important to continue to do the work we, and others like us, are doing.”

Still, the willingness of regular customers and the general community to keep supporting restaurant and hospital workers gives Pearlmutter reasons to be optimistic.

“We have received so many wonderful donations from local residents who know us, and see what we do every day, and understand the work we put in to making their visits pleasant and memorable ones,” she said.

Please email any questions or concerns about this story to: editor@philadelphianeighbors.com.

PHEAA

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secondary schools operate and how students participate in their classes – both physically and virtually,” said Senator Wayne D. Fontana, PHEAA Board Vice Chairman. “Considering today’s higher education environment, if a student’s eligibility for a PA State Grant is otherwise equal, then how they choose to participate, or how their school may require them to participate, should also be considered equally.”

Previously, the awarding formula made an eligibility distinction between traditional in-classroom students, who qualified for a \$4,123 maximum award, and distance education students, who qualified for a \$3,092 maximum award, or 75 percent of a traditional award in 2019-20. PHEAA’s Board of Directors temporarily eliminated this distinction at their March 2020 Board Meeting as part of a COVID-19 student aid rules relief package. Today’s action formally removes this distinction for the entire 2020-21 school year.

PHEAA has provided more than \$1 billion in supplemental funding for student aid programs over the last 10 years. The Agency also self-funds the administration of the PA State Grant Program and other student aid programs and services for the Commonwealth, which saves taxpayers

\$19.2 million annually.

Students and families are encouraged to visit PHEAA on Facebook, at facebook.com/pheaa.aid, where they can learn more about the higher education financial aid process, obtain reminders of financial aid deadlines, and gain information pertaining to planning for higher education. Additionally, video tutorials explaining the student aid process and types of aid available can be found at YouTube.com/PHEAAstudentAid.

About PHEAA

Created in 1963 by the Pennsylvania General Assembly, the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) has evolved into one of the nation’s leading student aid organizations. Today, PHEAA is a national provider of student financial aid services, serving millions of students and thousands of schools through its loan guaranty, loan servicing, financial aid processing, outreach and other student aid programs.

PHEAA’s earnings are used to support its public service mission and to pay its operating costs, including administration of the Pennsylvania State Grant and other state-funded student aid programs. PHEAA continues to devote its energy, resources and imagination to developing innovative ways to ease the financial burden of higher education for students, families, schools and taxpayers.

PHEAA conducts its student loan servicing activities nationally as FedLoan Servicing and American Education Services (AES). For more information, visit www.pheaa.org. The agency operates its digital technology division as Avereo.

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