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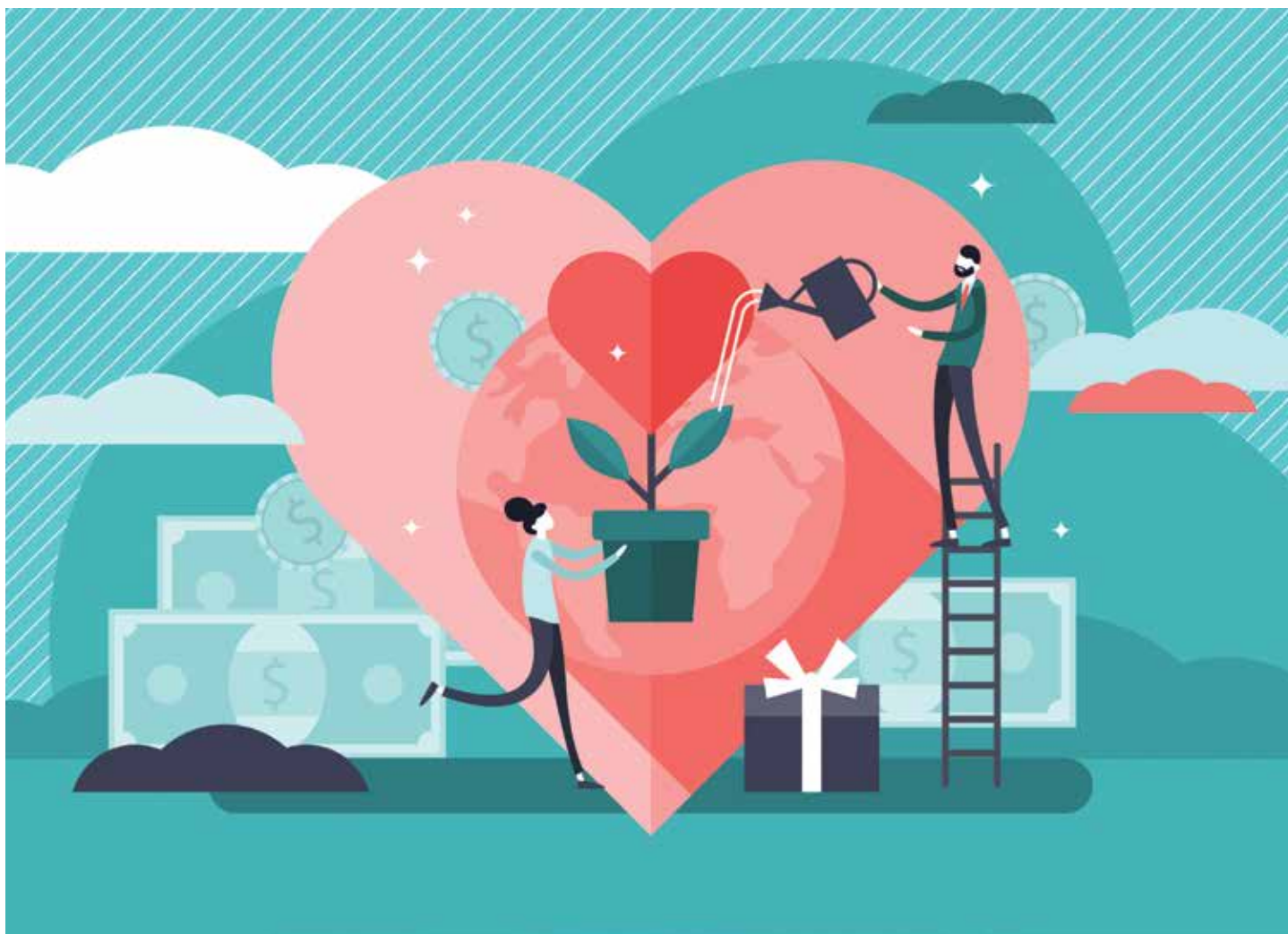
Magazine[®]

JUNE 2024

MADE IN VERO BEACH

Country music star
Jake Owen always
comes back—and
gives back—to his
hometown





PHILANTHROPY

Giving & Receiving

‘ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY’ REPRESENTS TWO SIDES OF THE COIN



BY JEFFREY R. PICKERING

The act of giving is a gift. It is also an economic opportunity.

I thought a lot about this axiom during a recent trip to Bakersfield, California to rendezvous with two of my three children who are in college on the West Coast. While there is nothing about a trip to that part of the country that

screams “spring break,” this ended up being the best destination for a family get-together that coordinated with each child’s school location and calendar this year.

This area in the southern San Joaquin Valley of Central California has been called the “Breadbasket of the World,” as it generates the bulk of Califor-

nia’s agricultural production. Grapes, citrus, milk, almonds, and pistachios are the top commodities grown in Kern County, where Bakersfield is located. When combined with all other crops, it made the county the leading agricultural producer in the United States, with approximately \$8 billion in gross value last year, slightly



Kern County, California is considered the leading agricultural producer in the United States because of the scope of its food production.



Every year, Indian River County ranks as one of the most generous communities in America.

higher than the entire value of all of Florida's agricultural products.

But even with so much economic activity, not only in agriculture, but also in the energy, logistics, and aerospace industries, there is so little economic opportunity that almost 60 percent of the population lives in poverty or just one paycheck away from it. It was starting to feel like home, back in Vero Beach and Indian River County.

While measuring a much smaller population, data from the most recent community needs assessment conducted by Indian River Community Foundation shows that almost half of Indian River County's 66,000 households live either in poverty or one paycheck away from it. More specifically, 11 percent of local households (7,260) live below the poverty level, which is \$20,440 for a family of two and \$31,200 for a family of four.



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Colin, Olivia, Jeff, and Stephanie Pickering enjoy a recent family gathering in California.

Almost three-fourths of these households are made up of single mothers with children.

ALICE households, which the United Way says stands for “asset-limited, income-constrained, employed,” make up another 35 percent of our county’s population, with a little over 23,000 households earning just enough income to stay above the federal poverty level but not enough to afford basic necessities such as health care, nutritious food, childcare, transportation to and from work, or housing. Last year, it took a family of four at least \$64,000 in household income to cover these everyday living expenses in Indian River County. No matter where you live, getting by on that amount is still a real stretch.

In places like Kern and Indian River Counties, where there is such great need, people often comment about how fortunate these communities are to have such thriving nonprofit sectors supported by extraordinarily generous giving. For example, for decades Bakersfield has ranked among the top 10 fundraisers nationwide for the

American Cancer Society’s annual Relay for Life. It is also home to The Wonderful Company, a privately held agribusiness that is one of the nation’s most generous corporations and a global leader in corporate social responsibility.

And what Indian River County lacks in corporate philanthropy, it more than makes up for in giving from individuals. Every year, our county ranks as one of the most generous communities in America, with household giving as a percentage of adjusted gross income nearly twice the national average. Surprisingly, this statistic holds true at all income levels and not just in wealthy neighborhoods.

In my role as president and CEO of a local grantmaking foundation, when the topic of economic opportunity comes up, the conversation usually turns to examples in which philanthropy might help alleviate the greatest amount of human suffering by supporting proven programs that lift people out of poverty. One such example is STEP, United Against Poverty’s employment training program, which is

DID YOU KNOW?



79%
of single fathers face
financial hardship

Over 1.1 million Floridians live below the ALICE* threshold – the income needed for household survival. In Indian River alone nearly 31,250 residents are struggling to make ends meet. Celebrate the men who’ve helped shape your life by giving back this Father’s Day.

When you give to United Way, you help Indian River County families thrive.

**ALICE stands for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. The household survival budget for an individual living in Indian River County is \$27,516.*

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Indian River County

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FOUNDATION
OF INDIAN RIVER COUNTY**

“United Against Poverty and STEP changed my life.”

— ALEX DEJESUS



Katy Healy and dad Sam Block learn from each other about giving back.

funded by donations of more than \$400,000 annually to assist participants to overcome barriers to employment and to secure and remain in living-wage jobs. Together with its clients, the Community Foundation has awarded more than \$2 million in grants to help UP clients lift themselves out of poverty through proven programs like STEP.

Last year, nearly 100 people graduated from STEP, and the majority of them gained employment. Alex DeJesus, a single mother of two, is one of those success stories. After graduation, she was able to leave a minimum-wage job working 60 hours per week for one that increased her household income and supports her on a path toward



Ben Bailey and George Hamner Jr. carry on their family tradition of giving.

personal and professional growth.

“United Against Poverty and STEP changed my life,” DeJesus declares. Her smile shows her gratitude for the economic opportunity she has received. What about the economic opportunity on the “giving” side of the equation, however?

By all accounts, we are living in the most generous time in American history. Last year, a record of almost \$500 billion was given to charity, most of which came from individual donors like you and me. In the

Bible, Acts 20:35 says, “It is better to give than to receive.” As the children and grandchildren of baby boomers begin to experience the largest inter-generational wealth transfer in history, I think a lot about whether we are passing this lesson down or not.

We are about to find out. The first test will be taken by Generation X, Americans born between 1965 and 1980. As a proud member of Generation X myself, I believe it is not too late to encourage your 50-something sons or daughters to embrace the economic

opportunity of philanthropy. It will, however, take a deliberate effort to make it stick. Here are a few lessons I have learned by advising several clients at the Community Foundation on the most effective ways to pass on the habit of giving to the next generation.

Provide a vehicle, but not the map. (And definitely not the specific coordinates.) Making a modest donation to establish a donor-advised fund in your son’s or daughter’s name, which they may use to organize and carry out their own charitable giving, is a great way to do this.

Let them know that philanthropy is important to you and that you would like to provide them with the opportunity to experience the same joy that comes with giving back to a cause they believe in. Tell them why you give to specific charities, but let them choose their own charitable causes instead of restricting grants to a particular field of interest that is important only to you, such as the arts or health care.

Give them examples of the characteristics you look for in a charity when donating, such as an engaged board of directors or experienced management. Try not to discredit features they may be more attracted to initially. Remember, giving typically starts with an emotional connection that is eventually reinforced by more analytical considerations.

Remind them that if they are successful in business, clients or other associated organizations are going to ask for donations. Rather than give to everyone, teach them how to politely decline a request that does not align with their charitable giving priorities. When they do pick

a cause, encourage them to be ambassadors for the organization by telling others about the impact the charity is making in the community.

United Against Poverty was founded with the idea of providing people in need of an economic opportunity a hand up, not a handout. Most of the baby boomer generation clients I work with share a similar attitude when it comes to their adult children and the financial assistance they might provide.

As someone who watched two parents work very hard, without any real financial assistance from others, to make a better life for themselves and their family, I



Dace Stubbs, center, has benefited from the philanthropy advice given by Todd Fennell and Jeff Pickering.

understand where this attitude comes from. While I still carry my own sense of pride for what I have accomplished personally and professionally, I recognize that I didn't get here on my own. None of us does.

Support from family and

friends. The kindness of strangers. A lucky break or two. The joy of helping others financially or otherwise. All have led to economic opportunities, in some cases where I least expected them.

You can't put a price on that. ✨

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