



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: Westside Future Fund's Westside Neighborhoods Beautification Project; Hollis Innovation Academy; The Home Depot volunteers.

The Ethos of Giving Back

ATLANTA'S LONG HISTORY OF COLLABORATION AND RESILIENCE HAS MADE IT AN EPICENTER OF ALTRUISM.
BY HEATHER SKYLER

► A few key moments define Atlanta's history of giving.

One of them occurred in 1964 right after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize. A small group of progressive Atlantans organized an interracial, interdenominational dinner to honor Dr. King's achievement and unite the city's largely segregated communities—but there were grumblings from a still-divided city.

The Coca-Cola Company stepped in and announced that if Atlanta wouldn't honor King, Coca-Cola would take its headquarters elsewhere. The company's then-president, J. Paul Austin, was famously quoted as saying, "It's embarrassing for Coca-Cola to be located in a city that refuses to honor its Nobel Prize winner. We are an international business. The Coca-Cola Company does not need Atlanta. You all need to decide whether Atlanta needs The Coca-Cola Company."

Atlanta decided quickly. Shortly after that announcement, tickets to the dinner were sold out and the event was a great success.

"It's that kind of moment that shaped Atlanta's culture," says Alicia Philipp, president of the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta. "It really set a tone and a bar for the city that we continually keep striving to reach and to raise."

And that bar is still high. Talk to anyone involved in Atlanta's philanthropic landscape and you'll hear the same thing: Corporations here give back. Philipp says, "When a new CEO comes to town, they understand they're expected to give. It's an ethos that we give back."

Russ Hardin, president of the Woodruff Foundation, concurs. "There is a distinct sense of corporate responsibility here." He adds, "The [Metro Atlanta] Chamber continues to encourage corporate involvement, and we continue to benefit from that sense of corporate responsibility."

Ron Frieson, president of Children's Healthcare of Atlanta Foundation, says the numbers back up this spirit. "Traditionally, giving from corporations is in the 6 to 7 percent range of total giving. We are at roughly 11 percent in Atlanta," he says. Frieson adds, "Atlanta-based companies are so strong. When I look at Georgia Power, Delta Air Lines, The Home Depot, Cox Communications—they are all involved with us in multiple ways, which is so important because as a nonprofit, you simply cannot raise enough to focus on your mission."

At the nonprofit Atlanta Committee for Progress, whose board includes top local CEOs

THE MENTOR

MUHTAR KENT



Muhtar Kent may be slowing down, but don't expect The Coca-Cola Company's former CEO to fade away.

"I'm in good health, I feel great and I continue to love this great business, which I've been so privileged to be part of since 1978," Kent says. In May, he handed the reins of the global soft-drink giant to new CEO James Quincey, but he'll remain as chairman of the company's board of directors.

Yet now that he's out of the hot seat, the much-admired Turkish-American business leader has had an opportunity to reflect on his legacy. "I'm really proud of all we've done to get our business on a sustainable path for growth," he says. During his tenure, Kent grew the portfolio to 500 brands and 3,500 products, made the Coca-Cola system water-neutral, reshaped and strengthened the company's franchise bottling system and by the end of 2016 helped empower 1.7 million women entrepreneurs.

One of the things he's looking forward to now is mentoring students and young entrepreneurs. "The next generation is going to accomplish so much,"

he says.

Kent adds that one of his proudest moments was passing the torch to Quincey. "I feel we made a lot of necessary changes to get us on a growth footing for James, who really knows our business, brands, system and customers. He's doing a fantastic job."

Kent plans to stay active volunteering, traveling and enjoying his family. He may even be able to indulge in a few extracurriculars.

"I have the perfect balance of commitments and more time for my hobbies of organic farming, antiques and sailing." — WENDELL BROCK

as well as five university presidents, "it is not optional" for business leaders to contribute, says Jeff Sprecher, founder, chairman and CEO and of Atlanta-based Intercontinental Exchange (which owns the New York Stock Exchange). That means businesses that may be competitors in the private sector pool their know-how to help Atlanta—and at the group's quarterly meetings, the busy executive members have almost perfect attendance.

"It is expected that the most senior person sits in that chair—you do not send a subordinate or a proxy," he says of the committee. "That does not exist in other cities."

The list of Atlanta-based corporations giving their time and money is long. The Coca-Cola Company not only set a tone of tolerance, it gives back 1 percent of its prior year's operating income annually. In 2015, the company and its foundation gave more than \$117 million to nearly 300 organizations across 70-plus countries and territories. The Home Depot employees volunteer with thousands of organizations; the company has donated millions to nonprofits in Atlanta. While Hardin agrees that corporate philanthropy thrives in Atlanta, he adds that the city also relies on private initiatives and a distinct sense of civic responsibility and resilience.

"Atlanta really shouldn't be," he explains. "We didn't grow up around a port. The city

burned to the ground in the Civil War. We're a bunch of hustlers who dusted themselves off and had [the 1887] Piedmont Exposition right here. The [exposition] was put on to try to attract northern investment in the South, to prove to the North that we had rebuilt. Atlanta's hustle, private initiative and civic philanthropy are a part of that."

This community spirit has spurred numerous projects, including the Westside Future Fund, a nonprofit committed to helping Atlanta's Westside neighborhoods revitalize and grow, focused on four key areas: quality mixed-income/mixed-use communities, safety and security, cradle-to-career education and community health and wellness. Executive director John Ahmann says that at its peak in 1960, 50,000 people lived in the four neighborhoods of the Westside community. Today, that's down to 15,000. "We want to bring people back to the community without displacing people. There is a huge amount of vacant blighted properties."

The WFF was established by the Atlanta Committee for Progress as a coalition of top CEOs and leaders from Atlanta's private sector, as well as universities and nonprofits in partnership with Mayor Kasim Reed. Civic and private entities working in tandem with generous corporations is what makes Atlanta tick. And as in the past, this city can hustle to tackle just about any problem. ▼