

# OC LEADER BOARD

Opinion, Analysis, Insight

## Game-Changing Philanthropy In Unprecedented Times

In the midst of layered and intersecting crises, we are facing a watershed moment.

As a nation and here in Orange County, we must respond to a novel pandemic as it wreaks havoc on our economic and health systems—hitting nonprofits and the vulnerable populations they serve especially hard—while confronting the long-term effects of systemic racism, injustice and inequity.

In this unique moment of both challenge and opportunity, philanthropy can not only rise to the occasion, but take the lead.

We've already seen philanthropy mount a groundbreaking response over the last four months, dramatically increasing contributions to support vulnerable populations. Worldwide, charitable gifts from corporations, foundations, faith-based organizations and individuals hit a record \$10 billion through the end of April, with two-thirds originating in the United States.

Across the country, community foundations such as the **Orange County Community Foundation (OCCF)** saw grantmaking increase by 53% in March and April compared to the same period last year—mobilizing more than \$1 billion to support on-the-ground efforts by nonprofits meeting challenges created by the pandemic. OCCF's generous donors granted a staggering \$34 million over the past four months alone.

We're proud to see this call to action being answered in such inspiring ways by the Orange County community as new models of collective response, the creativity of our business sector and the passions of philanthropic individuals and families are being mobilized to help all our residents to thrive.

### Collective Action

In the first weeks of the pandemic, OCCF joined forces with **Charitable Ventures, Orange County Grantmakers, St. Joseph Community Partnership Fund** and other regional funders to launch the **OC Community Resilience Fund**.

It's accelerating private philanthropy to address the most immediate needs of local nonprofit organizations and our most vulnerable neighbors.

In a few short weeks, the Fund awarded nearly \$4.2 million to 162 OC nonprofits providing medical services through community clinics, access to food and child care, as well as support for the homeless, elderly and other at-risk populations.

This unprecedented philanthropic response is testament to the compassion of our community, but also serves as a case study in collective impact.

In a moment of great need—and openness to innovative partnerships—the Fund coordinated a philanthropic effort between regional funding partners, foundations of major corporations and banks, individual donors and private foundations to focus resources, share infrastructure, streamline efforts and maximize impact. With the initial granting effort complete, the Fund will continue to study the needs of local nonprofits and serve as a resource for individual and foundation funders seeking input on the best use for their philanthropic investments.

### Corporate Leadership

These examples of creative problem-solving by the philanthropic sector have been mirrored by Orange County's innovative and entrepreneurial business community.

When stay-at-home orders went into effect and **Edwards Lifesciences Corp.** found itself with an underutilized corporate kitchen, they put their catering staff to work making meals for homeless individuals and families, preparing and delivering more than 400 meals per day to **Mercy House and Illumination Foundation**.

At an individual level, we're seeing similar passion and commitment. One titan of the OC business community was so moved by the plight of hungry children and families during the pandemic that following a significant contribution to the OC Community Resilience Fund, he called OCCF with a request to make eight additional gifts totaling \$200,000 to local food providers serving on the front lines of need. He replicated this extraordinary response on two more occasions, ultimately gifting \$720,000 to meet the needs of Orange County's most vulnerable—the vast



Edwards Lifesciences provided meals prepared in its corporate kitchen for Illumination Foundation recipients, such as these children majority gifted anonymously—over a few short weeks.

### Looking Forward

These examples of collective action, creative problem-solving and strategic philanthropy are critically important as we look ahead.

We must use what we've learned in addressing the global health pandemic to candidly and thoughtfully examine issues of equity in our communities. We must remain agile, aligned and ready to adapt as we move to address some of the most entrenched and complex issues in our country and our local communities.

At OCCF, we have made a public commitment to answer this call. We recently launched a **Racial Justice and Equity** working group of our board to develop a plan for both immediate action and a long-term commitment to build a more just, civil and equitable Orange County. One of our initial tools will be the **African American Alliance Fund**, founded in June to raise awareness about systemic racism and support programs for African Americans in Orange County and surrounding areas. This is the first of a comprehensive plan and lasting commitment to invest in the promise and potential of diverse communities throughout Orange County.

We are a county that is stronger together—and in this moment especially, philanthropy can lead the way in building a brighter future for all who call Orange County home.



A Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County volunteer providing food at a Honda Center Pop-Up Drive-Thru Food Distribution

*Editor's Note: Shelley Hoss is president and CEO of the Orange County Community Foundation, which ranked No. 3 on the Business Journal's annual list of nonprofits with \$103.5 million in revenue for the year ended June 30, 2019.*



By Shelley Hoss

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