



THE BLACK PROFESSIONALS ALLIANCE

When you walk into to the BPA Holiday Social you will immediately feel the energy in the room. To have over 1,000 of Houston's Black Professionals gathered in one place is very powerful! It shows the strength we collectively have and the impact in how we can make a difference. Not only for the children that benefit from the community generosity, but the influence we can have here in Houston together. Our goal is to make Houston, TX the model for Black Professionals making a difference!

Making Christmas Dreams Come True for Houston's Children

By Sharon C. Jenkins
Editorial Consultant

The Black Professionals Alliance (BPA) will present the 8th Annual Holiday Social and Toy Drive at the Revention Music Center on November 30th at 6:00 pm. This event started out with four organizations and has blossomed to over twenty in the past eight years. Literally thousands of children have received toys as a result of the efforts of this conglomerate of professional black associations and organizations. Carmen Herrera of National Sales Network (NSN) and Gene Padgett of the National Association of Black Accountants (NABA) spearhead this event. They formed the Black Professionals Alliance (BPA). I had the privilege of interviewing both Herrera and Padgett about this noteworthy event for Houston's children.

Jenkins - How did the BPA and the toy drive start?

Padgett - Carmen and I had an idea nine years ago, we looked at our respective organizations and thought we would get more bang for our buck if we combined our organizations to do events together. So we started with four organizations NSN, NABA, the Black HR Professionals, and the Black MBA's. Our first event was a networking event. That event turned out to be very successful, so we did a Christmas event. The toy drive became a part of that initiative. From that event, every year we have added more organizations. The BPA started with four organizations and now we are up to 23.

Herrera - The reason we started the collaboration is even though we have our own separate mission with sales, accountants, doctors, etc., at the end of the day we all have a common goal and that is to serve the community. You know we thought, why not pool our resources during times like the holidays and when people are in need in order to accomplish our missions at a greater level.



Jenkins - How do you see this expanding in the future?

Padgett - The evolution of our organization is to create more opportunities for collaboration. Not just for events, but for projects that benefit the community or coming together on contracts and things like that. So we put all these professionals in a room together to allow them to interact and mix and mingle. There is a lot of cross-referencing of goods and services between us.

There's a couple of things; we do want to grow the business aspect of all of us coming together. We have been talking with the Houston Black Chamber of Commerce about creating an infrastructure to try to make that happen. But as far as something on the charitable side, we talked about



doing an event midyear, be it a professional clothing drive or a back-to-school drive, where we bring everyone together to benefit the community.

Jenkins - How has Hurricane Harvey affected your mission to serve the community?

Herrera - For me, it has not affected us in a negative way at all. Like everything else that is happening in our great city, Hurricane Harvey has been an incentive for everyone, professional organizations included, to do more. We expect to accomplish more. Last year we had approximately 1,100 people and this year we expect to double that. We are expecting a grand event this year because of Hurricane Harvey. We know that there are a lot of children and families that are out there suffering and really won't have the kind of holiday season they would have had prior to the storm. Fortunately, the positive outcome of the storm is that it may have inspired us to do better.

Jenkins - What organizations receive the toys?

Padgett - We actually partner with other charitable organizations in the community. We donate to four or five organizations. The Blue Triangle Multicultural Center has an event the following weekend and we also support The Bread of Life Inc., The Center for Children and Women, and Toys for Tots. So we genuinely choose organizations that already have an infrastructure for disseminating toys and that's who we partner with.

Jenkins - How many children have you made smile and dance with joy on Christmas Day?

Herrera - Wow, each year we probably collect 700 toys.
Padgett - I would say over 5000 toys in the eight years we have been in existence.



Michael Lipford



Fred Guilbeaux

Jenkins - Is there anything else you would like our readers to know about the toy drive?

Herrera - We would be remiss if we did not mention two of our colleagues that supported this cause in the early years, Michael Lipford of NSN (my predecessor) and Fred Guilbeaux of NABA. Both of them have played a major role in the success of this event.

Padgett - If there are still displaced families and children that are in need, we would like to put them on our benefactor list. Please feel free to contact me at genepadgett@att.net or Carmen at carmenherrera@cmhwealth.com.

Jenkins - Thank you.