

The Charlotte Observer

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Thank you, Charlotte, for showing such a big heart



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From Carol
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Ministry:

Like many big cities, Charlotte has a personality. We're vibrant. We are ambitious. We don't accept the status quo.

These character traits can be seen time and again in our history.

When our NBA team left town, community leaders made phone calls and gathered friends and in no time we had a new team on the court.

When voters showed their concern about an uptown arena and an arts package, our leaders found a new path to making these projects a reality. Today these efforts are attracting and supporting local business and creating jobs.

Then a unique community challenge appeared in 2008. We had seen climbing numbers of people seeking emergency financial assistance for rent and utilities in 2007. For the first time I envisioned the need outstripping our ability to provide help. We were facing growing numbers of people being turned away. This would mean certain homelessness for thousands of families over the next several years if we could not keep up.

Our accountant showed me the data. "We are going to have to cut back on aid; we can't keep up with this pace of spending on assistance," she said. She was correct, and yet I told her not to cut back. I did not know how we would keep up, but I had faith. Our neighbors had worked hard to build this city - construction workers, restaurant staff, bus drivers, child care providers. I could not imagine community leaders letting them down.

Yet, our city had taken a beating. Philanthropic

citizens experienced significant erosion in their charitable assets. Faith leaders saw pledges going unmet. There were few indicators to suggest we could keep up with the need. But isn't that what faith is all about?

Time and again I watched as we added jewels to the Queen City's crown. Now I wondered, "Will we put a jewel in the crown for those who have built and polished it?"

And then it happened. It turns out Charlotte doesn't just have personality. We have heart.

Some of the champions' names are familiar - Levine, Gantt, McColl, Marsicano. They knew we needed to bring the crisis to the forefront of our community. A community referendum, for our struggling neighbors, was birthed.

And it passed in a big way! You voted with your wallet, your time, your food drives ... your heart. Children set up lemonade stands. Bar owners turned happy hour into giving hour. The rate of volunteerism soared. More than 1,400 people contributed \$6.7 million for a Critical Need Response Fund that helped vulnerable neighbors. Another jewel has been hoisted into the Queen City crown! Thank you!

Today, quarterly earnings are moving in the right direction for many. But as the economic recovery starts, human service agencies see no relief. Frankly, many we are serving today have helped create those improved earnings by no longer being on a company payroll.

Last month Crisis Assistance Ministry served more people facing eviction or utility disconnection than ever - 3,067 households. This month could surpass this record-breaker.

The Critical Need Fund has completed its work; our community kept the safety net intact. Yet, over 100,000 people in our county are still very poor. How will we face this uncertain future? I don't know. But I have faith because Charlotte is a town with a heart.