

Community Philanthropy in Raleigh, North Carolina

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Martin Luther King, Jr. called for justice to roll down like mighty waters into American society. The dream he shared has come closer to reality in the last 40 years. The coming presidency of Barack Obama both electrifies and conceals this emerging reality. The generation of African Americans who never saw King alive are a product of the social and cultural change he and others held up as America's future. They are, like Obama, at the same moment, the old time Beloved Community and also very modern philanthropists, giving back every day—thousands of them are. They are the embodiment of the twenty first century dream for all Americans. Most of us just haven't met them yet.

America is closer to being the nation where blacks are not “judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” We are not altogether there yet, but the benefits from such justice are already strengthening our society.

The beautiful two story Palladium-windowed family room of Darryl and Dionne Lester filled with about twenty-five thirty something, college educated

professionals browsing over trays heaped with food to suit every taste. Like the Lesters, all are African Americans, home owners, and working in a variety of industries from high tech companies to a barber shop. All are philanthropists. All proud of the great tradition they are part of and proud of their work together now.

They expressed sadness and a sense of loss that they had never seen King when he was alive. They also expressed a keen understanding that they were living his dream. They acknowledged that this fact had motivated them to become philanthropists so young in their careers.

More than half of them had set up college scholarship funds, either at their alma maters or in their communities. All were members of giving circles, small associations of donors who pledge a set amount annually and disperse funds together in their community after personal evaluation of the impact their money will have. Giving circles are grassroots philanthropy. Darryl Lester has founded eleven of them and united them in the Community Investment Network (CIN).

CIN is established to develop giving circles among minority populations, sustain existing giving circles through strategic donor education and provide a platform for ongoing dialogue among people engaged in grassroots generosity. CIN continually

encourages civic engagement. Under Lester's direction, CIN has developed more than eleven giving circles of African Americans all over the country, from Raleigh to Pittsburgh to Birmingham. Many more have been developed by Black fraternities and sororities and share features of the CIN giving circles. Grassroots philanthropy is a robust movement in King's twenty first century Beloved Community.

These circles, mostly the progeny of the gentle and gifted Lesters, are raising the consciousness of Black philanthropy among whites and fellow Blacks. Lester says, "Giving circles are a resurgence of an old tradition of generosity and caring that is making an impact all across the country. They provide an opportunity for individuals to join others through collective charitable giving. There is something exciting about people pooling their resources and making joint decisions on how to give grants to improve life in their community. What does it mean? Opportunity. This is our turn to make a difference."

Giving circles are helping communities and leveraging their good example to create more giving to local community needs among both blacks and whites—the dream goes on. Lester got the idea of engaging African Americans in giving circles when he was working on the staff of the Triangle Community Foundation

as a program director. Seeing institutional philanthropy working so well, attending conferences, and working with donors and grant seekers, he began to realize how seldom "...people who looked like me were sought as donors, were part of the action of philanthropy. I also saw how many hurdles seemed to stand between people with mid-level incomes, especially African Americans, and their participation as philanthropists. I decided we needed a different on ramp for my generation of African Americans." Lester left the Foundation and started his own consulting group with his wife, Dionne.

McIntosh met Darryl Lester, a new client in his shop, when Lester was advising one of McIntosh's other clients as a program director for the Triangle Community Foundation. Both men were interested in philanthropy. McIntosh had already set up his first non-profit called the Barber Foundation. Lester had started a giving circle with African American community members he had met in his work with the Triangle Community Foundation. The group called the giving circle Next Generation of African American Philanthropists (NGAAP). Lester and his wife and business partner, Dionne, had already started the Zawadi Fund to supply books to college bound young people.

Meanwhile, the new client learned that his barber had already started his own 501C3, the Barber Foundation. McIntosh had established the foundation as a tool to engage the staff and the students of the barber shop in philanthropy, in good works, together for the community. Along with barbering skill, McIntosh was teaching his students that they would be owners of shops someday and would need to be involved in the community. “I am not successful unless the community is successful. It’s never about the money you give,” he would tell them. “It’s about the community and what we can do collectively to make the transforming difference.”

Lester and McIntosh talked together about generosity, helping folks with serious needs, getting them headed in the right direction so they could be part of the community. They decided to try to form a giving circle from among McIntosh’s clients at his salon and barbershop.

Lester and McIntosh attended one of the first conferences on African American philanthropy together in Baton Rouge and met Black leaders in the field.

Sponsored by the National Center on Black Philanthropy, the Conference invited Black leaders to consider that philanthropy does not mean “just rich people.” It is not “something you do when you get the big contract, like the sports heroes do.”

They also discussed the reality behind the statistics they all knew: there are more Black men in prison than in college; the recidivism rate for Black men released from prison is 70%.

With a grant from the Ford Foundation, Lester began to investigate how philanthropy could be helped to shed its rock hard association with wealthy whites and become a rewarding opportunity for the African American community to apply its giftedness to their fellow citizens in need.

As Lester worked through his projects on grassroots giving at the Ford Foundation, he developed practical ways to teach the tools of philanthropic giving circles to grassroots community groups. The natural community around the barber shop became a logical starting point for both men to try out their model of an African American giving circle.

Darryl Lester and Tim McIntosh and their group succeeded in organizing the giving circle they called A Legacy of Tradition (A LOT). ALOT is all male. Lester says: “In working with them, I’ve come to realize that brothers sometimes don’t feel like they have a conversational outlet. We get together and talk about what it means to be a better father, a better husband, and a better man in the

context of giving back. I recognize that some of these brothers might be coming to the table because they are thinking about giving back, but they are also coming because they need support. We need to support each other.”

McIntosh explains that he usually finishes by telling the new recruits to the giving circle a story that is special to him. It’s the one about the two doctors standing by the edge of the river when they see the body of a man floating by. As they watch, he stops struggling and begins to sink. Both docs jump in, drag the man out, apply CPR, and get him stabilized. While they pause to rest, they look out and see another man, also in his last struggle, dropping beneath the surface. They pound in again, pull him out and get him breathing again and then shake their heads trying to...when they see a third man. Same story. One doc throws himself in the water stroking hard toward the body. The other man is pulling on his boots. The first doc yells, “what are you doing?” The second doc, half way up the hill, responds, “I am going to see why these guys are falling into the river like this, and try to stop it.” McIntosh wins recruits with his story. His members want to be the second docs.

Founding members all shared the Renaissance Barber Shop connections and a commitment to work together as Black male philanthropists. Its members are collectively focused on impacting and bridging the societal gaps faced by African-

American and Caribbean males in the areas of education, collective giving, and community responsibility.

The founding members of the circle are close friends. They report that two important factors attract members and keep them involved: ties of friendship, and a strong desire to connect with their own cultural traditions. According to Daryl Lester, “We all feel a burning desire to get back to our roots. We want to connect our children to values of the past. Like with mutual aid societies. We need to get back to that ... to reclaim the extended family. People have a huge sense of urgency. They are tired of materialism. People come for the connectedness with each other – not just for change in community.”

A LOT meets monthly with 10-15 members. Each makes an annual donation of \$350. Eventually they found out that Lester was able to get the Ford Foundation to match these gifts 3 to 1 the first year, 2 to 1 the second, and 1 to 1 the third. They all talk about the great tradition of philanthropy in their families. The members of the circle exchanged stories and developed a set of ideas that they could introduce to their own families so their own kids would have stories of philanthropy, the ones from older generations and from their own parents. Philanthropy is centuries old

in African American culture. Members wanted to be sure their children and the community's children knew that fact.

ALOT honors the long, extraordinary history of generosity among African Americans. It overturns the stereotypes among whites and blacks about the leadership caring by Black men and is comprised of ordinary African American men. Its members are collectively engaged and focused on impacting and bridging the societal gaps faced by African-American males in the areas of education, collective giving, and community responsibility.

Meanwhile, Lester's NGAAP was engaging African American men and women into a leadership giving circle. Women like Wendy Blue express real pride in their work together. Wendy, an articulate electrical engineering graduate and former executive at Lenovo, currently middle school math teacher, remarks that her circle honors all the people who listened to King's message by extending the caring. She joined in an animated explanation of the grants her circle, Next Generation of African American Philanthropists (NGAAP), had made.

NGAAP first funded a rural area near Raleigh. None of the people there had ever had city water or sewer despite a State law mandating the availability of water to

rural communities in North Carolina. NGAAP's gift to the West End Revitalization Association to send representatives to the capital to make WERA's case, to prepare materials explaining their problems without sanitation systems, to clarify that the people knew what the State was supposed to do under the law. NGAPP's gift created the attention and support WERA needed to get the various government decisions needed to connect this large former sharecropper population to running water. They did not give a major gift, but they gave the amount that got the job done.

NGAAP also funded Glory to Glory House of Refuge to empower Women HIV patients whose lives are complicated by substance abuse and other addictions to live more healthy self-directed lives. Along the same lines, NGAAP funded Durham Proud, a small non-profit that works to develop and reward responsible behavior among young people and deter court-referred juveniles from repeat offenders.

Another of the CIN Giving Circles, WAY OUT, composed mostly of African American professionals in the human services area, made one of their early grants to the renovation of Haven House, a house for homeless women managed by a non-profit.

Their starter gift attracted local department stores and other businesses and craftsmen to offer useful services and gifts to make the house a real home. The Way Out gift leveraged a transforming outpouring of donations, including furniture, appliances, bedding, and food. The community wanted to be a part of such a good deed. The women who volunteered as staff in the house and their clients lived differently, lived much better, because the whole community committed philanthropy together—community or grassroots philanthropy, initiated by African American leaders.

But while women spoke eagerly of the dramatic change their gifts had enabled, the men present had personal stories that would make King deeply proud of the energy he still triggers, some forty years after his assassination. King would hear Antoine Medley and Tim McIntosh.

McIntosh is a college educated business man in Durham, NC. He speaks with youthful energy and commitment that are set off by the slightly graying hair at his temples. He explains that he has owned beauty salons and barber shops. He now owns The Renaissance barber shop and the Park West Barber School, where teaches an 11 month curriculum in barbering preparing students to sit for the state

license exam. McIntosh is also developing a school for those who want accreditation as teachers of barbering.

His is a trade that demands professional training, a State exam, and an interview with the members of the State Barber Board for certain candidates for a license. The state of North Carolina requires 1528 hrs of barber school. If a student has a felony, the student must appear before the NC Barber Board. McIntosh had served admirably on the Barber Board, so his advice to the men he trains is a great advantage to them in getting their licenses and if necessary, re-entering society successfully.

McIntosh has developed a growth strategy for franchising his Renaissance Barbershops and his Park West Barber Schools statewide. Entrepreneur *par excellence*.

They pooled their funds and members nominated local non profits with good reputations for strong work in the community. Circle members made site visits, interviewed clients, staff and board members. They invited proposals and evaluated them. They favored the smaller groups without big staffs who also lacked sophistication about grant writing.

One day, McIntosh heard on an NPR radio program how many Black men developed high blood pressure and suffered serious cardiac problems and early deaths as a result. He saw himself in the picture of change. He consulted with his client, Emilia Frederick, a professor in the Department of Nursing at North Carolina Central University. Her advice helped him direct his next steps. He went to the Health Department in town and sought to set up a blood pressure screening site in his barbershop. He negotiated with the North Carolina Central University Nursing School to send volunteer student nurses to administer the tests and bring educational pamphlets for his clients. McIntosh launched an ad for free haircuts for any man who had his blood pressure measured! The event took place on a Saturday. There were 60 screenings. 60% had high blood pressure. Statistics say 35% of African American men have hypertension. It was a great event for the students of the Park West Barber School and the nursing students of North Carolina Central University to participate in making a difference in the community. McIntosh continues this work in the community advancing health of other Black men.

Now, men talk about BP and support each other in getting and taking the medication that will help keep them healthy. This initiative of the Barber

Foundation was held at Park West Barber School. Entrepreneurial philanthropy in any man's book.

One day, Mrs. McIntosh sent her son an article from her Maryland newspaper about a prison in her State that had opened a barber training school to give soon to be released men the chance to learn a good trade. McIntosh saw another great opportunity to make a difference in North Carolina.

McIntosh sent the article to the NC Department of Corrections and made a series of discussions with Nicole Sullivan and the staff of the Office of Research and Planning of the NC Department of Corrections to see about following Maryland's example.

While awaiting approval and the State grant money to fund the work release prisoners to study barbering, McIntosh learned about a man who had a year left in his sentence and badly wanted to be a barber. After investigation, McIntosh learned the Department had a job training program that would allow the man to attend McIntosh's Park West Barber School. The Guess Road Prison facility had a Study Release Program which had to be reactivated which would allow an inmate to attend barber school. The grant money paid for his tuition. The details had to be

worked out logistically in terms of transportation, responsibility, scope of training, local prison facility participation. Ultimately, everything but full transportation funding could be arranged. Transportation would cost \$14 per day. The State only had enough funds to pay \$7 per day. McIntosh recognized a dream was about to be deferred . Not on his watch...

He decided he would assure transportation to and from the prison so Covington could complete the course of study. McIntosh drove to the prison every morning for eleven months to pick Fontain Covington up at 5:30am so McIntosh could get back in time to open the school and start classes with his students. He delivered Covington back to the prison each day as well, counting on one of his instructors for rides from time to time. Personal philanthropy works: time, treasure and talent—for real.

Covington completed his barber training and passed his license exam. McIntosh went with him to his interview with the members of the State Barber Board that he had been a member of. The man passed their approval and secured his barbering license. After passing his success, Fontain immediately went back to his home town of Greensboro NC and began working in a local barbershop.

After 15 years in prison, eight for his first offense and seven for his second, six months after he was released, Covington got his chance to re-enter society differently this time. He has been out over a year and is doing well. The State of North Carolina and Tim's fellow taxpayers also got a gift from Tim McIntosh: over \$30,000 per year for yearFontain Covington stays home and barbers. The State made about a 400% return on its investment in the transitional program for Covington—a gift to taxpayers from the philanthropy of Tim McIntosh and A LOT.

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Since the success of Mr. Covington the Dept of Corrections has partnered with Central Carolina Community College to begin a barber school program.

Meanwhile, Tim's Park West Foundation and Barber School provides some of the needed funding and A LOT supports any special needs that the work release prisoners have as they finish their training and prepare to resume life. All ALOTs members know the recidivism rate for Black men. They all see themselves as part of the solution, as philanthropists.

To illustrate his point, he explains that he noticed a wide curved street crossing with no stop light or pedestrian waiting light or button. It had always been dangerous. He became even more concerned when he saw the greater danger to

the seniors in the assisted living facility that was located on one of the corners. The older people could not always get to the opposite side of the large street fast enough to avoid the cars racing up the hill. The traffic had no warnings about the pedestrian traffic. A serious accident seemed likely.

McIntosh called the division of City Hall which is in charge of traffic and transportation. They sent the folks out to perform the necessary studies on the intersection. I continued to follow up with them to ensure the process was moving along. After about 3 months the city installed 4 crosswalk lights and buttons on that busy intersection. Action before accident. The time he spent to address a problem was Tim's gift to fellow citizens and their families. Personal philanthropy, engaged citizenship.

As he was reviewing his own life one day, he came to the conclusion that the encouragement he received made a big difference to his completing high school and eventually college as well. McIntosh decided he would give free haircuts to any child who makes the honor role. These children also got to put their names in a for a book scholarship prize contributed by The Zawadi Fund created by the Lester's and for a lap top contributed by Antoine Medley's non profit, "Future Black Men of America."

Antoine Medley holds a bachelors degree in economics from Virginia Tech, and is an IT Professional for a consulting company located in Colorado. He is also a philanthropist. Through a partnership with Virginia Tech, he takes admission-eligible Black students to visit his alma mater so they can consider applying. He has developed a website to galvanize the Black alumni of Virginia Tech and currently has close to 500 members! Once his alumni entrepreneurship came to the school's attention, he was asked to serve on an advisory board of the university. He will probably be a trustee when he is in his fifties. He will have earned it.

In addition to his other projects, Medley was a founding member of A LOT working with Lester and McIntosh, his barber. Medley has also started his own non-profit called "Future Black Men of America," a 501C3 that he says helps him, the oldest of four boys, to honor his parents. His goal is to intervene on the lives of Black boys, who, he mentions, go wrong, go to prison, and go back after release at stunning levels. Recidivism, he notes as earnestly as Tim McIntosh had, tops 70% in some places. Medley invests his time and his own contributions with other Black men to engage Black boys and girls BEFORE they make mistakes that get them into trouble.

One of the group's past activities was to sponsor a city wide African-American Knowledge Bowl. The idea is to grow young people's familiarity with African American heritage beyond the confines of the national focus in the month of February. Approximately 20 students in the city prepared for many weeks, show up, and compete in the quiz program.

This year the middle school children actually outclassed the high school entrants! Competition is fierce. The Knowledge Bowl offers laptops as prizes. Mothers regularly tell Medley what he most wants to hear: "This contest has changed my boy's life!"

Since his firm gives away slightly used laptops, Medley recycles them as scholarships, awarding laptops statewide to highly successful low income students going off to college.

Medley, 37, is a homeowner and is raising two daughters with his wife who is also a professional. He says as he watched his daughters grow, he began to consider what legacy he would leave them. He knew he wanted to make a good living and leave them a good example and a good inheritance. He decided he wanted to leave

them more: a stronger community as well as an inheritance. He decided to do good and to do well, as the saying goes.

Medley often has his children round up older toys in the home and they take them to the Goodwill. He explains that not all children have the same things that they have and that by giving their toys away, they are making another child less fortunate happy.

Over the past 2 years, Medley and his non-profit has provided a Black Santa for the Christmas holidays. He saw a need that was pointed out to him by his own daughter. Once he saw the need that she felt, he moved to address it by organizing and providing the Black Santas at neighboring malls.

“A Legacy of Tradition” gets a stretch contribution from each member annually. Members receive requests from small non-profit organizations that are serving African Americans men and boys with difficulties. They are currently supporting the local Big Brothers/Big Sisters. The Big Brother/Big Sister organization opened a new computer lab in Durham and they were in need of a SmartBoard. The group also funded a small non-profit group that provides books and organizes Black men to read to children in and out of local elementary schools. The last group they

funded was a local private middle school, Nativity, that prepares very needy African American and Hispanic boys for highly competitive prep schools and high schools. Circle members study the impact of their dollars and remain involved in the organizations they fund and re-consider their gifts annually.

Finally, Medley organizes a class for middle school children called “Dare to be King.” This program offers close to two hour per week mentoring sessions. The program helps the young men learn how to deal with decision-making, violence, and fatherlessness. Medley and members of the Legacy of Tradition want the next generation of African American boys and girls to learn their legacy and become part of it while they are still growing up. They want them to expect to be givers not just takers in their future. They want them to learn the heritage of Dr. King as a giver to others.

An analysis of the impact of Antoine Medley’s life by age 37 would include his impact on a significant numbers of his fellow college educated professionals, on the children who participate in the programs he has launched and on young fathers in the community who have him as a role model close to them in age and experience.

As the group around Medley and McIntosh spoke many gave credit to their families for teaching philanthropy. One remembered his great grandfather who rejected the name “philanthropist.” He said he never earned very much but he did give \$500 to the building of the first Community Hospital back in the early 1920’s. Another remembered his parents who had taken in, raised, and educated several cousins whose parents had lost their way. Still another, recalled her parents who drove two hundred miles to pick up a niece who had been abused and gave her a secure and permanent home with their children. Others remembered grandparents’ stories of their sharecropper parents giving money to the Church to help families with crises and to rebuild the churches when they were burned down. The more they all learned about philanthropy by doing it through their Circles, the more they realized what a strength it has always been in the African American community.

Their memories make an important point not validated by the lack of recognition most communities offer African Americans as donors, as gift prospects, as Trustees of community foundations. Their lives show the vital assets these young Black professionals create in the community around them. The “content of their character” stands as a tribute to the great tradition of American philanthropy. They ARE philanthropists. They are the adults King envisioned African

Americans could give the nation, if justice rolled down like mighty waters. They are the gifts he sent forward in time to our twenty-first century. This generation of African Americans does know King in their own unique way. Now, America needs to get to know them.

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