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Michael Brown, CEO,
Travel + Leisure Co.

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PARTNERSHIP

TRAVEL + LEISURE JOIN EATONVILLE FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

BY MELODY BOSTIC BROWN



Travel + Leisure Charitable Foundation board member Melody Bostic Brown highlights the official kick off of the Eatonville Scholarship Program during Orange County Public School's First Day of School press conference at Hungerford Elementary School.

It was a humid day in August at Hungerford Elementary in Eatonville, Fla. The sweltering temperatures were no match for the electric energy of the school's teachers, community leaders and employees of Travel + Leisure Co. Students smiled brightly as they walked across a red carpet lined with colorful balloons. Some kids were a little more subdued—it was the first day of school, after all. Once inside their classrooms, an unexpected surprise turned those smiles and scattered frowns to cheers!

When the Travel + Leisure Charitable Foundation launched in the summer of 2021, its focus was intentional: make a difference in the communities where people vacation as well as where they live. The nonprofit is beginning to fulfill that mission in the town of Eatonville, the oldest and one of the most influential Black-incorporated municipalities in the country. Now, Eatonville students have access to the Foundation's scholarship program and educational resources to help them realize their potential.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

The Travel + Leisure Charitable Foundation is the vision of Travel + Leisure Co., the world's leading membership and leisure travel company with nearly 20 lifestyle vacation brands. Headquartered in Orlando, its team was inspired by the work of philanthropist Harris Rosen, whose dedication helped transform the city's Tangelo Park neighborhood. Thirty years ago, that area's elementary school was centered in an underserved and drug-stricken community. Today, it has a grade-A rating.

"As the work of Harris Rosen has demonstrated, real change is possible when corporations work hand in hand with local communities to engage citizens in programs driven by a shared purpose. Travel + Leisure Charitable Foundation's partnership with Eatonville and Orange County Public Schools is focused on empowering the next generation of students to accomplish their academic and professional goals," said Michael Brown, president and CEO of Travel + Leisure Co.



Michael Brown, president and CEO at Travel + Leisure Co., celebrates the first day of school with Hungerford Elementary principal, Leticia Harris, and Eatonville Mayor, Eddie Cole.

The significance of Eatonville is unmistakable. Nestled about 30 minutes from the pandemonium of Orlando's theme parks, Eatonville was incorporated in the late 1800s and quickly became a sanctuary for African Americans through self-government and economic development. Following the Reconstruction period, the town invested in educational opportunities for Black families, with teachings modeled after the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Eatonville was pivotal in the literary world thanks to Zora Neale Hurston, the Harlem Renaissance author who vividly captured its essence in her novel "Their Eyes Were Watching God," noting the dignity and complexities of Black life. The ZORA! Festival, named after the writer, draws thousands of people to the area each year.

Education and culture are at the heart of the Travel + Leisure Charitable Foundation. One of the nonprofit's first endeavors took place at Hungerford Elementary at the start of the 2021-2022 school year. As kids skipped across the freshly polished floors to meet their teachers on the first day, they were quickly greeted with the sight of brand-new backpacks. The Foundation donated 350 book bags—one for every student in kindergarten through fifth grade—filled with pencils, folders and other essentials to kick off the year. Students high-fived and fist-bumped one another as some parents became overwhelmed with emotion, grateful that the potential obstacle of purchasing school supplies was gone, and that their children would remain focused on the most important thing: their education.

"Orange County Public Schools believes that with the support of families and the community, we can create enriching and diverse pathways that lead our students to success. We are fortunate to have incredible community partners that invest in the success of our students," said Orange County Public Schools Superintendent Barbara Jenkins.

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

The Foundation's emphasis on education isn't limited to elementary students in Eatonville, but also high schoolers pre-

paring for their next phase. The Travel + Leisure Eatonville Scholarship Program provides financial support for students who live in the town, previously attended Hungerford Elementary School, and graduate from Edgewater, Evans, and Wekiva high schools. Students receive scholarships toward tuition or other costs, such as books or housing. The intent behind the scholarship is to ensure that students avoid any financial interruptions to their postsecondary education.



Michael Brown, president and CEO of Travel + Leisure Co., welcomes students for their first day of school at Hungerford Elementary School in Orange County. The Travel + Leisure Charitable Foundation donated 350 backpacks filled with school supplies to every child at Hungerford to help set them up for success this school year.



Michael Brown, president and CEO at Travel + Leisure Co., celebrates the signing of Travel + Leisure Charitable Foundation's Eatonville Scholarship with representatives from the Orange County School Board, Orange County Public Schools and Eatonville Elementary.

"The Travel + Leisure Eatonville Scholarship Program will allow well-deserving children in our community the opportunity to attend public college or vocational school in Florida, without financial barriers," said Eatonville Mayor Eddie Cole. "This will add educational resources to the Town of Eatonville, and children who participate in this program will be able to fulfill their dreams without facing financial challenges. We are so honored to be a recipient of this program."

The Foundation collaborates with guidance counselors at each of the three high schools to identify eligible recipients. Thirteen high school students qualified for this year's scholarships. The program can fund up to 200 scholarships per year, and the Foundation is continuing to identify additional students who may qualify for the program. The Travel + Leisure Charitable Foundation has a six-member board of directors, all employed by Travel + Leisure Co., responsible for helping the nonprofit realize its mission, including the scholarship program. The board members, who advocate and volunteer their time to a number of community initiatives, are: Chief Human Resources Officer Kimberly Marshall, Vice President of Process Management and Improvement Simmon Reed, Senior Vice President of Human Resources Marla Tichi, Vice President of Global Supplier Diversity Jose Nido, Global Content Director Melody Bostic Brown, and Destinations Sales Manager Crystian Alatorre. The board also oversees the Foundation's community engagement efforts throughout Eatonville.

PLANNING FOR EXPANSION

Education is often noted as the cornerstone of great neighborhoods. Many who live in Eatonville—including its leader, the exuberant Mayor Cole—would likely say the town already



Michael Brown, president and CEO at Travel + Leisure Co., announces Travel + Leisure Charitable Foundation's Eatonville Scholarship at a press conference, alongside Harris Rosen, Eatonville Mayor, Eddie Cole, and superintendent for Orange County Public Schools, Barbara Jenkins.

exudes greatness, but that it is augmented through community and corporate partnerships that invest time and resources in the area. The Travel + Leisure Charitable Foundation has plans to expand its reach in Eatonville with endeavors that include the town's Chamber of Commerce, Boys and Girls Club, as well as mentoring opportunities for families who live there.

While the mission of Travel + Leisure Co. is to put the world on vacation, the motivation behind the Travel + Leisure Charitable Foundation is to partner with its communities to have an enduring and meaningful impact. If you'd like to learn more about the Foundation, contact charitablefoundation@travelandleisure.com.



Melody Bostic Brown is a member of the Travel + Leisure Charitable Foundation Board of Directors. She is also the Global Content Director for Travel + Leisure Co. — leading the voice of its brands across marketing and editorial touchpoints.