

## GUEST COLUMN

# LET'S ESTABLISH A LEGACY OF CHANGING AMERICA ONE COMMUNITY AT A TIME

Never before has the art of giving back been more relevant than now, when there is much less to give.

It is clear that virtually every human being and enterprise has been negatively impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In Orlando, the hospitality capital of the world, our collective industries have been devastated. All of us continue to remain steadfast in our belief that, in time, visitation levels will return to normal, and our businesses will once again thrive.

However, during this time, our underserved communities have suffered disproportionate socio-economic hardships and now require more care and concern than ever before.

Close to 30 years ago, I came to the

realization I had been blessed beyond my wildest dreams. I felt compelled to offer a helping hand to those in need.

I learned about Tangelo Park, a small diverse community of 3,000 residents in the International Drive corridor. At the time, crime in the neighborhood was rampant and an unacceptably low number of youngsters graduated from high school.

By implementing a program that provides free, quality preschool and the promise of free two- or four-year college or vocational school, decades later, the community is thriving. High school graduation rates soared to nearly 100%, and crime declined by close to 80%. Many scholarship recipients return to Tangelo Park after college, serving as role models to the neighborhood's youth.

The majority said because their undergraduate degrees were free — with all books, room and board and tuition paid for through the scholarship — they were financially positioned to pursue advanced degrees. Many graduates returned from college to serve local residents in the roles of educators, counselors, childcare providers, pharmacists, attorneys and medical professionals.

Given Tangelo Park's proven success, in 2017, we adopted the downtown Orlando community of Parramore, where the need is five times greater than that of Tangelo Park.

Most recently, I was humbled by the Tangelo Park program's expansion through a generous commitment by Michael Brown, Travel + Leisure Co.'s foundation president and CEO. The company stepped up during a pandemic to adopt the historic Eatonville community, committed to replicating the preschool and scholarship programs of Tangelo Park.

Today, there are more than 25 diverse neighborhoods remaining to be adopted in Central Florida. Our proven template for transformation works.

Now more than ever, it is imperative to offer hope and to elevate communities that have experienced incredible depths of suffering, pre-, during and post-pandemic.

My hope always has been to establish a legacy of changing America one community at a time through the promise of education. To lead by example, I started in my own backyard.



Harris Rosen

I implore area businesses to serve as role models for our great nation.

If, individually, local businesses would adopt one of the underserved neighborhoods in their respective communities, together we would transform many thousands of lives.

Future generations would bask in the bold endeavors of our community leaders and reward our entire city in a most profound fashion.

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*Harris Rosen is president and COO of Rosen Hotels & Resorts.*