



**Branches**  
Grow Deeper, Climb Higher

# BRIDGE BUILDER

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### Mission Statement:

To serve, educate and inspire people through student, family and financial stability services in partnership with our communities.

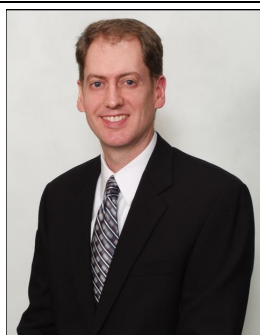
### Get Involved:

If you would like to know more about how to donate and/or volunteer, please contact us at:  
305-442-8306  
info@branchesfl.org



**Branches**  
Grow Deeper, Climb Higher

## From the Desk of the Director



### Happy 25th to Branches Florida City!

Dear Friends,

Branches as an organization had a game-changing moment 25 years ago. It was in Florida City post Hurricane Andrew when volunteers as part of the United Methodist relief and recovery effort organized a week-long Vacation Bible School. It started off slowly as 0 (yes, zero!) children showed up on the first day. But by the end of the week, more than 50 children were participating!

From that simple beginning, a summer youth worker named Kim King (who later became Kim Torres) was hired in 1994 to work with the children and their families. Some months later Kim named the tiny operation 'Branches Outreach'. Asked why she chose the name Branches, she replied, "Besides coming from the Bible verse of John 15:5, I liked the imagery of a tree which was simple to draw and I needed things to be simple in those days!"

At the heart of the work has always been a very fundamental premise that ALL people are valuable. Branches is a place where children and families are valued and are given the opportunity to discover their gifts and talents and realize their God-given potential. Branches overall impact is a result of Kim's expansive vision to create a place that fosters a community of hope. The result is that students, participants, volunteers and staff members all become valuable members of Branches.

In recognition of Kim's 25 years of faithful service, please consider making a \$25 donation or any amount in multiples of \$25 (such as \$50, \$100, \$250, \$2,500, etc...) in honor and appreciation of Kim Torres. We have all been blessed by her unwavering commitment to service and making this world a better place for so many. Thank YOU Kim!!!

With Hope and Gratitude,

*Brent McLaughlin*

Brent McLaughlin  
Executive Director



Branches Florida City circa 2009.



Branches FL City kiddos circa 2005. One is a high school senior and the others are in college today!



Kim and Branches kids during a recent Summer Shade Camp!

## Branches Happenings

### Summer Shade Camp = Not Just Fun & Games!

Thanks to the generous support from our donors, the 2019 Branches' Summer Shade Camp provided a safe, fun and caring environment for 387 children this summer! This 7 week-long day camp which takes place at each Branches site, allowed our children to practice math and reading through exciting lessons and enrichment activities. This helps prevent summer learning loss and ensures that all our students are ready for the next grade this school year. Of course our kids also had lots of fun, visiting places like Zoo Miami, Extreme Action Park, Ninja Lounge, Grapeland Water Park, Monkey Jungle, Rocket World, SkyZone, Paradise Cove, Bird Bowl, Jungle Island, the movies, ice skating and much more.

In addition, Branches is proud to have employed 43 of our youth this summer to serve as Summer Guides (camp counselors) to help lead the activities of summer programming. Branches' staff and AmeriCorps members provided support, but this employment offered our guides a chance to build their resume, learn employable skills, practice leadership and earn some money. Last but not least, Branches' Climb to College & Career (CtC&C) program also served 181 youth this past summer. The CtC&C initiative prepares youth to succeed in their chosen educational path beyond high school, ultimately being able to qualify for a Branches scholarship. Summer Shade Camp provided them with college readiness and career exploration; for six weeks they were able to exercise the knowledge, skills and mindset needed to take that next step. Forty of our middle and high school students also attended a Miami-Dade College Immersion Visit exploring the different career options that may come their way, including the Performing Arts, Film & Music Production, Biological Dissection Demo and Chemistry.

Branches understands the value of hiring our youth and providing the soft skills required to succeed in the real world. Our entire community must come together to support our youth and provide them with real opportunities to help them grow and achieve long-term success in life. Thank you to all the dedicated funders of our Climb youth program for believing in our ability to affect change, and most importantly, for believing in our kids.



**THANK YOU to all our generous donors for supporting Branches' programs!**

All donors from March 24th to September 17th, 2019 are listed at [www.branchesfl.org/news/newsletters](http://www.branchesfl.org/news/newsletters)

A special thank you goes out to our premiere supporters:

Trish & Dan Bell \* Aramark \* BB&T \* Sandy & Rodney Bell \* Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church \* Himan Brown Charitable Trust \* Internal Revenue Service  
Miami-Dade County OMB GC \* Ocean Reef Community Foundation  
The Batchelor Foundation, Inc. \* Peacock Foundation, Inc. \* The Children's Trust of Miami-Dade  
United Way Miami-Dade \* The UPS Foundation \* Volunteer Florida

# Branches Happenings

## Black Tie & Blue Jeans Benefit Dinner and Auction



Philanthropic Chairs Dan & Trish Bell, Awardees Marile & Jorge Luis Lopez, Esq. and Branches' Executive Director Brent McLaughlin

Branches celebrated its' 16th Annual Black Tie & Blue Jeans Benefit Dinner and Auction on Saturday, April 27, 2019 at the JW Marriott Marquis Miami. Over 500 guests attended and helped to raise over \$400,000 for Branches' programs which provide services and life-changing opportunities to working families and their children so they may break the cycle of generational poverty.

The event was co-chaired by Gala Chairs Victoria & Jason Randolph and kicked off with a cocktail reception and a silent auction, followed by dinner and dancing, as well as an appeal and an exciting live auction, led by Master of Ceremonies Mr. Ron Magill of Zoo Miami and Auctioneer & Board Member Mr. Scott Howard. The event also honored power couple Marile & Jorge Luis Lopez, Esq. with the Trish and Dan Bell Community Empowerment Award for their dedicated support of our South Florida community. In addition, five of Branches High School seniors shared their personal journey with the guests and how

Branches has impacted their lives. Branches is proud to once again report a 100% graduation rate from High School; 16/17 seniors are attending college and 1 senior is joining the military. Proceeds from the evening's appeal supported Branches' Summer Shade Camp and all appeal donations were doubled by a \$1:\$1 match thanks to a generous Challenge Grant provided by Trish and Dan Bell.

**Branches would like to thank all who supported Black Tie & Blue Jeans. In particular, we want to recognize the following premiere sponsors:**

**Trish & Dan Bell**  
*Philanthropic Chairs*

**Himan Brown Charitable Trust**  
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*Bronze Sponsors*



Lee Lennon and Luis Amarillo De Freitas, Benefit Dinner Chairs Victoria and Jason Randolph



Linda Fortson, Elise Braddy, Angela Fairchild, Yvonne Washington, Katrina Wright



Some of the Branches Florida City Choir members are all smiles with Branches Board Chair Rodney Bell.



MC Ron Magill and Rita Magill, Maria Carvalho and Superintendent Alberto M. Carvalho

# Thank You, Branches Sponsors & Stakeholders!

List includes contributions received by Branches from March 24, 2019 to September 17, 2019. If you sent a contribution during this period and do not see your name on the list, please contact us at (305) 442-8306 x1005.

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## **Between \$10,000 and \$19,999**

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Sperger, Jennifer  
Sperger, Peter  
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The Financial Clinic  
Tannehill, Thomas  
Trombino, Roger  
Weems, Cynthia  
Zankl, Linda & McEnany, Patrick  
Zapletal, Laurie A.

## **Between \$200 and \$499**

Anazco, Beatriz  
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Aungst, Emily & Kristopher  
Ball Mehta, Eileen

*Continued on Page 5*

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Fitzgerald, Kathy & Scott  
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Gonzalez, Leandro  
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Norell, Robin  
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Ayala, Citali  
Ayyar, Dave  
Bachmann, Karla & Peter  
Baez, Jocelyn  
Baggett, Daniel  
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Ballesteros, Jenny  
Barattini, Charles  
Barzyk, Janine  
Beard, Melanie  
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Benitez, Debbie  
Beyene, Jonathan  
Bieler, Elizabeth  
Bitar, Lauren  
Blanco-True, Erbi  
Bodin, Carrie & Amory  
Bounds, Bruce M.  
Bovo, Viviana & Steve  
Brooks, Teresa Gayle  
Brunnette, Jillian  
Buckanan, Keisha  
Burdette, Katie  
Burstein, Melisse & Mark  
Cabrera, Harold  
Carrodegua, Vincent  
Cetta, Susana  
Cohen, Melanie L.  
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De la Osa, Ana  
De la Vega Prive, Ivonne  
Diaz, Luis  
Diaz, Vanessa  
Dominguez, Eduardo  
Dossett, Elena  
Dubuc Wightman, Danielle  
Dyches, Anita & Jim  
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Fajardo, Aurelio  
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Floyd, Suzanne

Foster, Michael  
Furniss-Roe, Tina  
Gallo, Denis  
Gibson, Patricia & James  
Giostra, Elizabeth & Jerrold  
Gipps, Paul  
Golden, Anthony  
Gonzalez, Emilio T.  
Gonzalez, Lindsey  
Goodman, Tina  
Greenman, Beth  
Groh, Elizabeth  
Gutierrez, Thomas  
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Meyers, Bobbi  
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Molina, Maria  
Monestime, Marline  
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*Continued on Page 6*

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## Up to \$199, continued from Page

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Neil, Judith Pauline  
Nelson, Kipp  
Nicolakakos, Thomas  
Noppenberg, Jane & John  
O'Day, James  
Olsen, Hannah  
Olson-Dodge, Patty & Michael  
Ordonez, Ana  
Osmann, Daphnie  
Owen, Samantha  
Paraso, Aimee  
Paz, Ruth  
Perez, James  
Perez, John  
Plotkin, Lowell  
Pomeray, Lori & John  
Quesada, Gonzalo de  
Quinones, Elda

Quintero, Norma  
Ramig, Peter  
Ramos, Jairo  
Ramos, Joely  
Reiter, Ryan  
Rios, Ivet  
Rizo, Axel  
Roberts, Lisa  
Robinson, Dreena  
Robinson, James  
Rodrigo, Martha  
Rodriguez, Alexandra  
Sablich, Hanai  
Sacasa, Lydia C.  
Salinas, Diana  
Sanchez, Hector B  
Sanchez, Marlyn  
Sanders, Corey  
Santana, Gustavo  
Saratic, Milena  
Schapiro, Jenna & Evan  
Shelley, Susan & Robert III

Shlichin, Minerva & Silvio  
Shrader, Lee  
Silverglade, Saralee Y  
Singer, Daniel  
Skipp, David  
Smith, David John  
Sole, Joaquin  
Stokes, Dreema  
Tesfaye, Adey  
Thompson, Betsy  
Tirado-Truong, Natalia C.  
Toyawanich, Julie & Agulnik, Mark  
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Watts, Nancy & Dean  
Wright, Katrina  
Young, Daniel Te  
Zinn, Curran & Marcelo

## In Memory Of Darlene Deppman:

- ♦ Deppman, Ed
- ♦ Alexander, Nancy Gross
- ♦ Allen, George and Kristin
- ♦ Allen, Kristin & George
- ♦ Bitar, Lauren
- ♦ Burstein, Melisse
- ♦ First UMC Miami
- ♦ Furniss-Roe, Tina
- ♦ Hamende, Mark
- ♦ Hector, Nancy T.
- ♦ Ho, William
- ♦ Howard, Scott
- ♦ Knowles-Kerwin, Marcia
- ♦ McLaughlin, Brent
- ♦ Nelson, Kipp
- ♦ Norell, Robin
- ♦ Olson-Dodge, Patty & Michael
- ♦ Pike, Isabelle
- ♦ Randolph, Jason
- ♦ Ruiz, Nidia
- ♦ Smith, David John
- ♦ Tannehill, Thomas
- ♦ Thompson, Betsy
- ♦ Warren, Audrey
- ♦ Watkins, Melanie W. & James N.

## In Honor Of Brent McLaughlin:

- ♦ Alfonso, Richard
- ♦ Ault, Donald Gregory
- ♦ Aungst, Kris
- ♦ Ball Mehta, Eileen
- ♦ Bell, Rodney
- ♦ Deppman, Ed
- ♦ Edwards, Jack
- ♦ Furniss-Roe, Tina
- ♦ Howard, Kathy & Scott
- ♦ Iszler, Timothy J.
- ♦ Molina, Maria
- ♦ Morgan III, James Elmore
- ♦ Onsgard, Robert
- ♦ Randolph, Jason
- ♦ Ruiz, Nidia
- ♦ Watts, Nancy & Dean
- ♦ Weems, Cynthia
- ♦ Zapletal, Laurie A.

## In Honor Of:

- ♦ Gracieuse Joseph from Marline Monestime
- ♦ Jerry Giostra from Elizabeth Giostra
- ♦ Kim Torres from Robin Norell
- ♦ Michelle Shrader from Lee Shrader
- ♦ Team dbakers from Beth Greenman

## Gifts Through United Way:

- ♦ Coto Dou, Jeannette
- ♦ Pike, Isabelle
- ♦ Stafford, Leonora Denise Gilyard
- ♦ Vanderdray, Katrina

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## In-Kind Donations

### **Back to School**

- ♦ Aetna - 3 boxes of school supplies.
- ♦ Banco do Brasil - 96 backpacks and several boxes of backpacks and school supplies.
- ♦ Baptist Health S FL - Homestead Hospital - 3 boxes filled with backpacks and school supplies.
- ♦ BB&T Brickell - 9 cases of water for the Back to School Bash.
- ♦ BBVA Compass Bank - 5 bags and boxes of school supplies.
- ♦ Carnival Foundation - 100 backpacks, binders, crayons, pencils, markers, glue sticks and scissors.
- ♦ Crowe, LLP - 1 box and 6 bags of assorted school supplies.
- ♦ Dou, Jeannette & Remy - 20 backpacks filled with supplies.
- ♦ EPIC Hotel - One large box and 1 bag filled with assorted school supplies.
- ♦ HSBC Bank USA - 9 boxes of school supplies and several backpacks.
- ♦ JLL- Property Management Office- 5 boxes and bags filled with school supplies.
- ♦ JP Morgan Chase Bank - 8 backpacks and 1 box of assorted school supplies.
- ♦ Norell, Robin - 1 box of index cards, 1 box of three ring binders, 1 box of sticky notes, 1 box of USB Flash Drive, 2 backpacks.
- ♦ PEO Chapter A - 2 boxes of school supplies.
- ♦ Regions Bank - 10 boxes of office and school supplies plus binders.
- ♦ Royal Caribbean International - 3 boxes of assorted school supplies.
- ♦ Shinnery, Brian - 1 box of pens, pencils, highlighters and 3 binders.
- ♦ TD Bank- Bird Pointe - 1 box of assorted school supplies.
- ♦ USI Insurance - 50 backpacks filled with supplies.

### **A huge THANK YOU to Alma:**

Alma Advertising hosted an amazing Back to School Party at Branches Florida City with face painting, temporary tattoos, inflatable slide, lunch, t-shirts for everyone and snacks. Alma also donated over 120 backpacks filled with school supplies including jump drives and headphones plus 20 cases of copy paper and several boxes of extra school supplies.

**We are so grateful for your support!!**

### **Other In-Kind Donations:**

- ♦ Aldi, Inc. - A \$100 gift card.
- ♦ Balkin, Lisa - 3 bags of baby clothing, shoes and accessories; 1 baby tub, 3 bags of toys.
- ♦ Banyan Community Health Center Inc. - 12 Dell computer monitors; 13 computer monitors, 4 keyboards.
- ♦ Bell, Trish - 1 Singer sewing machine and 1 spotlight machine.
- ♦ Benditte, Gabriele & Reinhard - 1 baby high chair and training potty.
- ♦ Berberian-Bignon, Maida - 250 ceramic plates and mugs.
- ♦ Castan, Daria - 1 Story & Clark piano and piano stool.
- ♦ Cornerstone Church - Julie Callaway: 1 box of school supplies and Teacher Appreciation gifts for team members.
- ♦ Curtis, Lupe - 1 large sectional couch.
- ♦ First UMC Coral Gables Men's Group - Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner for CtC&C Boot Camp on August 9, 2019 and Breakfast on August 10, 2019.
- ♦ Furniss-Roe, Tina - 1 wheelchair.
- ♦ Howard, Kathy & Scott - Queen sized comforter set with pillows, 2 lamps, 1 set of full dishes. Catered Italian Lunch for CtC&C Boot Camp on August 10, 2019.
- ♦ JP Morgan Chase Bank - 10 boxes of non-perishable food items and basic necessities.
- ♦ Morgan, Beth - 10 boxes of books, 2 boxes of movies, 1 box of musical instrument and 1 box of board games.
- ♦ Pike, Isabelle - 16 umbrellas.
- ♦ Publix Super Markets, Inc. - \$150 gift card.
- ♦ Read to Learn Books for Free - 10 boxes of books.
- ♦ Regions Bank- Coral Gables - 1 box of certificate frames and various décor items; 3 boxes of Christmas Décor; four elegant lobby chairs; school supplies, toys and plastic footballs.
- ♦ Topping, Kerri - 6 SAT prep books.
- ♦ United Healthcare - 320 bottles of water, 162 bags of chips, 150 Granola variety and 90 Fruit snacks and 10 cases of water.
- ♦ **IBERIABANK - 30 credenzas, 2 cubicles, 1 round conference table with chairs, 8 blue padded chairs, 1 reception area sofa and chair, 40 black office chairs, 1 coffee table and 2 chairs. THANK YOU so much!**

## Branches Happenings

### Making Entrepreneurs' Dreams a Reality

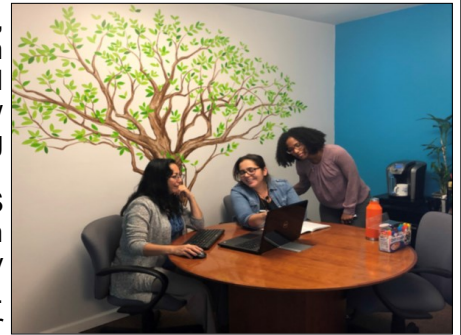


Branches' Micro-Business Development Program, ASSETS, increases opportunities for economic mobility and wealth creation by supporting participants to start, enhance and grow profitable and sustainable businesses. Entrepreneurs increase business knowledge, skills, and confidence to achieve their goals through one-on-one coaching, training, and ongoing support.

Program participants receive capacity building services in all of the main components of business ownership: idea readiness, legal compliance, marketing and advertising, accounting, finance, human resources, operations and sales, and access to capital. Here are two participant highlights:

**Nadia Decius, Sweet Delight Cheesecakes:** With the support of ASSETS, she was able to formalize her business, becoming legally compliant. She is in the process of becoming a vendor at Florida International University and works from a commercial kitchen to offer catering services. Nadia is now keeping track of her business finances and has formalized her accounting process with the implementation of Quickbooks Online.

**Mahmoud Alejandro Casta, Medimac USA:** After working with ASSETS over the past year, Mahmoud has increased his sales by 100.80% YTD in comparison with 2018. He has been able to expand his clientele and diversify his services in the repair, maintenance, and installation of medical equipment. With a higher credit score, he is getting ready to apply for a credit line or micro-loan for working capital. Thank you to all the funders of the ASSETS program. You are helping entrepreneurs provide for their families while making their small business dreams a reality.



### Oasis Camp: RESET

From March 24-27, over 200 of our middle and high school students were able to get away and enjoy a few days at the Warren W. Willis Camp in Leesburg, FL. Warren Willis, a camping ministry of the Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church provides a Christ centered camping experience that transform the lives of young people. Branches has been blessed to use their facilities and plan an amazing spring break week for our kids for the last 15 years,

Thanks to the generous support from Trish and Dan Bell, Branches students have the opportunity to take part in this amazing experience and take a break from the challenges of their daily lives and come to an Oasis. Branches students look forward to attending this camp all year long and for many of them, Warren Willis Camp is the first time they leave their community. Campers' schedules are packed with activities for the different age levels; middle and high school students each have different themed programming that allows them to work together to accomplish specific goals. Each morning starts with a quiet time on the lakeshore singing songs and reflecting on God's purpose for their lives. Some of the fun activities range from crafts to cooking, from soccer to ropes course, and from dancing to yoga.

This special camp is truly a place for growth, love, experiencing God and for branching out in ways our students never thought they could, and it is an experience that will impact our Branches campers forever.



Archery is a favorite activity!



Quiet reflection time on the Lake is a true blessing and enjoyed by all.



SAY CHEESE!!

# Branches Happenings

## Branches' Back to School Bash - Another Success!

Over 100 guests attended Branches' 3rd Annual Back to School Bash on August 8th, 2019 at the University of Miami's Newman Alumni Center. Guests mixed and mingled as they enjoyed the DJ, drinks and delicious appetizers. Guests were also able to fill a new backpack with school supplies and write a note of encouragement for a Branches student. A special thank you to Simply Healthcare for their generous support, as well as Team FootWorks, Alan Goldfarb P.A., Plaza Construction, Kathy & Scott Howard and Missy & Jim Morgan for sponsoring this fun event and of course our incredible restaurant partners for bringing such yummy treats for our guests: CA Pizza Kitchen, Pisco y Nazca, Seasons 52, Titanic Brewery, DBakers, Xio's Catering, Vicky's Bakery and Misha's Cupcakes.

We are also grateful for the wonderful support of all our school supply drive partners who helped us make sure all 441 of our Branches' children and youth went back to school ready to learn. A special thank you also goes out to the following donors who went above and beyond: Alma Advertising Agency, BB Americas, Carnival Cruise Lines and the Templeton Family. Here's to an awesome school year!



The Simply Healthcare Team is all smiles!



Gail Mastro, Laurie Huseby, Irelys Milhet, Bobbi Meyers and Karen Plaster



2019 Herbert C. Parlato Volunteer Award Honoree Dreena Robinson and ED Brent McLaughlin



Volunteers are busy stuffing backpacks for Branches'



Keisha Buchanan and Mahi Abdelmonem

## VITA : Tackling Taxes Thanks to Terrific Volunteers



Branches staff strike a pose at the volunteer thank you reception.

Branches is proud to lead Miami Tax Pros and to once again have served as the Miami-Dade County lead agency for the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program which offers help to people in our community that need assistance navigating the tax preparation system, are low income or have special needs. Our volunteers and staff also help filers check if they qualify for special tax credits such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) among others. About 60% of individuals living in Miami-Dade qualify for VITA, yet less than 2% are taking advantage of it.

Branches partnered with United Way of Miami-Dade in order to educate our community about VITA and spread the word about this free service to key neighborhoods. Branches and its partner VITA sites are very proud to share that together we were able to prepare

11,045 free tax returns and secure over \$13 million in tax refunds for our local residents. We are incredibly proud of this accomplishment!

To celebrate the 400+ volunteers who helped make VITA possible, Branches hosted a special thank you reception at the University of Miami's Lennar Foundation Medical Center rooftop on Friday, May 17th to show our sincere appreciation for their hard work. Together, these amazing volunteers served a total of 13,120 hours helping individuals prepare taxes free of charge. Thank you again to everyone involved in this incredible and truly worthwhile community effort!



VITA Volunteers are all smiles at the Luau Celebration Dinner.



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## Branches To Celebrate 19th Thanksgiving Meal Delivery Anniversary

Thursday, November 28, 2019

To mark the 19th year of this meal delivery program, we will prepare and deliver meals from 9 sites on Thanksgiving Day throughout Miami-Dade and Broward Counties to feed at nearly 5,000 community members in need. But we need your support! Some ways you can help:

### Be a Premiere Sponsor!

- **\$5,000—Thanksgiving T-Shirt Sponsor**
- **\$2,500 —Thanksgiving Site Sponsor**  
(Provides 500 meals )
- **\$1,000 —Thanksgiving Sponsor**  
(Provides 200 meals)
- **\$500 — Thanksgiving Supporter**  
(Provides 100 meals)

For sponsorship details, please contact:  
**Isabelle Pike at**  
**[ipike@branchesfl.org](mailto:ipike@branchesfl.org) / 305-442-8306 x1002**

### Raise Additional Support!

- Help us raise cash and in-kind donations to support the Thanksgiving Day Meal Delivery.
- Organize food drives (workplace, church, school, etc.) to collect non-perishable food items for the Thanksgiving meals. All non-Thanksgiving food items are distributed by our partner churches' food pantries to community members in need during the year.
- Organize volunteer teams to help with meal prep and delivery on Thanksgiving Day.

**For food drive and volunteer details,  
visit [www.branchesfl.org](http://www.branchesfl.org)  
and click on Events, Thanksgiving!**



When this ministry began in 2001, we delivered about 600 meals. In 2018, we delivered almost 4,600 meals with the help of over 800 volunteers. THANK YOU again to our supporters who faithfully help us each year to provide for those who have little. God Bless!