

BRIDGE BUILDER

WHAT'S INSIDE

Summer 2021

- Financial Wellness - Page 2
- 18th Annual Black Tie & Blue Jeans - Page 3
- Donor Thank You's Pages 4-8
- Back to School Bash - Page 9



Mission Statement:

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

Get Involved:

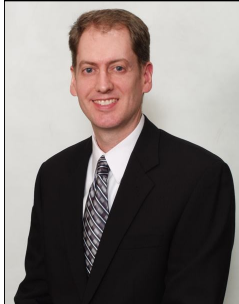
If you would like to know more about how to donate and/or volunteer, please contact us at:
305-442-8306
info@branchesfl.org

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From the Desk of the Director

Paying it Forward by Investing in Youth



Dear Friends,

Twenty-one years ago, we hired one youth to serve alongside our summer staff providing enrichment programs for children. We layered in additional training and support for this youth to foster personal growth. It was such a success that we now refer to it as the 'Summer Guide' paid internship program for Branches' youth. For many years now, we have been hiring at least 30 and sometimes up to 45 youth to serve as Summer Guides.

This program has become much bigger than just a job! Youth learn essential leadership and life skills and realize they have much to contribute and give back. In fact, many of our youth eventually sign up to serve at Branches as young adult AmeriCorps members!

This year for example 9 of our 20 AmeriCorps members were former Summer Guides. Having grown up at Branches makes them uniquely equipped to become highly effective team members. Vicky who is a current AmeriCorps member, student at Miami Dade College and former Summer Guide, said, "Being part of the Branches' team is like a dream come true! I've learned so much at Branches and have been challenged in so many ways to never stop growing and learning. Because of this opportunity to keep serving, it is making me a better person overall and a better nursing student at MDC."

Thank you for your support of Branches which is an investment in youth and young adults as together we create life-changing opportunities for them!

With Hope & Gratitude,

Brent McLaughlin
Executive Director



Branches hosted Spring Break Camp for all our students and brought fun visitors on-site!



Reading and learning about horses through our new Literacy Program at Whispering Manes!



Celebrating our 17 High School Seniors with a party, gifts and waffle bar at the Everglades Alligator Farm.

Financial Wellness Update

Leading Tax Prep through a Pandemic



Branches is proud to once again have served as the Miami-Dade County head agency for the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program, leading Miami Tax Pros which offers free tax help to people who need assistance in preparing their own tax returns.

This past tax season has certainly been the most challenging to date. Faced with a global Pandemic in late March of 2020 due to COVID-19, all VITA sites across the country were forced to shut down. Yet Branches was able to quickly pivot and reinvent the way it provided tax preparation in order to keep serving. Branches developed a "Walk-Up Window" tax prep concept where clients could leave their paperwork with a Branches financial coach and then answer questions via phone. The demand for tax prep service was high as people who qualified for the stimulus payments were eager to file. Thankfully Branches was able to provide taxes once again in early April and was one of the first VITA sites to re-open in the state of Florida.

Branches and its partners are very proud to share that so far in 2021, we have been able to prepare 7,495 free tax returns and secure over \$10 million in tax refunds for our local residents. Thank you to all the volunteers who helped make this possible, especially considering the immense challenges this past year. Filing one's taxes was not only important in order to receive a possible stimulus check, but Branches' staff, volunteers and partner sites also checked if individuals 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 is also excited to share that Miami Tax Pros will soon be known as Florida Tax Pros as we expand to serve not just Miami-Dade but also Monroe, Collier and Escambia Counties. For several years, Branches has provided ongoing support and resources to neighboring county VITA programs that have been in need. We have provided volunteer and site coordinator training, ongoing technical assistance calls, and presented on best practices for tax prep, volunteer retention, taxpayer recruitment, and fundraising to programs that have reached out to us directly and through partnerships. Thanks to a grant from Citibank and in partnership with Code for America, we joined a national coalition of community partners and dedicated volunteers to provide virtual free tax filing assistance through the Get Your Refund initiative and are training partners on how to use the virtual platform. We are excited about next tax season as we hope to reach and serve even more people in need of quality tax prep services.

**FLORIDA
TAX PROS**

"More than ever, Branches' actions to deliver the training, set up your sites and provide tax preparation services were commendable and remarkable. Please extend my sincerest thanks and appreciation to your volunteers. True leaders like you are the backbone of our free tax preparation programs!"

Gina Ruiz-Fernandez — Internal Revenue Service, Sr. Stakeholder Relationship Tax Consultant

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

All donors from Nov. 23, 2020 - May 17, 2021 are listed at www.branchesfl.org/news/newsletters

Trish & Dan Bell * United Way of Miami-Dade * The Children's Trust
 Joy & Robert Kelly * Volunteer Florida * Himan Brown Charitable Trust
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 Emergency Food & Shelter Program * North Dade Medical Foundation * Nancy T. Hector
 The Kirk Foundation * Miami-Dade County – RER * Agape * Darrell Windle & Dave Samber
 Miami-Dade County - OMB Grants Coordination * Florida Annual Conference UMC
 The Kelly Foundation * Truist

Black Tie & Blue Jeans Recap



Gala Chairs, Victoria & Jason Randolph pictured with their children.

On Thursday, April 29th at 7pm, Branches celebrated its 18th Annual Black Tie & Blue Jeans REIMAGINED Virtual Gala and Online Auction. Hundreds of guests tuned in to watch the show and helped raise over \$420,000 for Branches' programs focused on providing life-changing opportunities for families and their children so they may break the cycle of poverty.

This year's Gala was virtual and was made possible thanks to Gala Chairs Victoria and Jason Randolph, MC Ron Magill and Philanthropic Chairs Trish and Dan Bell who committed to a Matching Grant of sponsorships and donations towards the Gala. The event featured an interactive chocolate tasting led by Chef

Nicole Patel of Delysia Chocolatier, a presentation by one of Branches' college students Samantha Romain, as well as two beautiful arrangements sang by 3 sisters of the Branches Florida City Choir. In addition, Branches' Online Auction went live the evening of the Gala and was open for bidding for two weeks, proving once again to be a success.

Premiere sponsors of the event included Shining Star Sponsor, The Himan Brown Charitable Trust, as well as Platinum Sponsor, Truist. Gold Sponsors included Rodney H. Bell, Kathy & Scott Howard, Missy & Jim Morgan, Victoria & Jason Randolph, The Huizenga Family Foundation and The Tonkinson Foundation.

In April 2020, Branches was forced to cancel its 17th Annual Gala just weeks before it was supposed to take place due to COVID-19. Fortunately, Branches' many supporters helped make the non-event a success to raise resources during a very difficult time for this community. Since the COVID-19 Pandemic hit the Miami community, Branches has been working tirelessly to serve our children & families. We ramped up our meal service and to date have provided over 29,000 grab-and-go meals for our children and families. Within 24 hours of the schools closing last March, Branches' Grow & Climb student services team began connecting with children, youth and families via phone calls, text messages and Zoom meetings. Socially distanced on-site services resumed in August. The Achieve team is providing virtual financial wellness services through financial coaching, small business and emergency assistance. The Achieve staff has provided over 4,800 virtual financial wellness sessions and has provided over 1,280 small businesses with business coaching services. Thank you to everyone for making Branches' COVID-19 response possible!



Clockwise: MC Ron Magill of Zoo Miami - Brent McLaughlin, Executive Director of Branches - 3 sisters with the Branches Florida City Choir - Samantha Romain, Branches College Student

Philanthropic Chairs, Trish & Dan Bell

Thank You, Branches Donors & Stakeholders!

List includes contributions received by Branches from November 23, 2020 to May 16, 2021. 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.

\$20,000 and above

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 Kelly, Joy & Robert
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 The Miami Foundation
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 Capital One Services, LLC
 Emergency Food & Shelter
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 North Dade Medical Foundation
 Hector, Nancy T.
 Miami-Dade County - RER
 Agape
 Windle, Darrell & Samber, Dave
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Between \$10,000 and \$19,999

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 Howard, Kathy & Scott
 Huizenga, H. Scott
 Kelly Foundation
 Morgan, Missy & James Elmore III
 Shepard Broad Foundation
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 Ashby, Lucy
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Continued on Page 5

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Up to \$199, continued from

Page 3

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 Dowling, Mary Jane
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 Dufrain, Natalie
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 Durand, Samantha
 Ebbert, Marlin
 Elizalde, Damaris
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Donors Through the United Way Miami-Dade Campaign

- ◆ Sablich, Hanai
- ◆ Saltos, Melissa

Gifts For the Anniversary of

- ◆ Paula & Dave Jasinski from Cheryl Andrews

Gifts For the Birthday of

- ◆ **Baby Luke Arnold Randolph** from Isabelle Pike, Patricia & Ernesto Scerpella, Lori Thomas, Lee Lennon and Consuelo Tarazona.
- ◆ **Darrell Windle** from Robert E Semon, Michael G Samber, Sandra Davis, Nina Adams, Barbara Huyler, Geraldine King, John B. Hirsch, Judie Green, Alexander Domanskis and Martha Zych.

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- ◆ Amanda Avid from Lucy Ashby
- ◆ Beth McLaughlin from Cynthia Grgurich
- ◆ Chelsea Mandler from Nathan Mandler
- ◆ Cornerstone UMC from Jacqueline Damman
- ◆ Crystal Adams from Team VIP of Crowe Foundation
- ◆ Kim & Danny Armstrong from Linda Ashby
- ◆ Esther Santiago from Rosario Santiago
- ◆ Face to Face Mental Health Services from Elsa Agramonte
- ◆ Isabelle Pike from Mark Trowbridge
- ◆ Jhonny Mercado from German Valencia
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- ◆ St. Fleur Family from Lula Folgosa
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- ◆ Tech Girl Power from Amaka Amalu
- ◆ The Bachmann Family from Karla Bachmann
- ◆ Trish & Dan Bell from Bronwyn Miller
- ◆ Victoria Shorten Randolph from Sandra Lee Zankl and Linda Lee Zankl
- ◆ Yvonne Gibson from Hillary Taylor

Gifts In Memory of

- ◆ Charles Newton King from
 - ◆ Amy Gay
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 - ◆ Mary & Joseph Fetsch
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 - ◆ Patricia & Richard Morgan
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- ◆ Edsela Sierra from Damarys Isler
- ◆ Eric Lemke from Andrew Lemke
- ◆ Evy Udell and Sharon Miller from Bronwyn Miller
- ◆ Jeanne Robinson from Carolyn Ruth Robinson
- ◆ Judy Gordon from Bonnie Green
- ◆ Muzaffar Anvery from Nick Khan
- ◆ Pam Maher from Kathleen White
- ◆ Roland Robinson from Sam Skogstad III
- ◆ Waldo Ratzlaff from Donna Ratzlaff

Gifts In Memory of

- ◆ William (Bill) McLaughlin from
 - ◆ Audrey Beeney
 - ◆ Bobbie Donald Yoder
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 - ◆ Cindy & John Sellers
 - ◆ Constance & Lyndell Oller
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In-Kind Donations

Under The Three Toy Shops

- ◆ Alvarez, Karen - One box of toys
- ◆ Armstrong, Kim & Daniel - Six toys
- ◆ Ault, Donald Gregory - Two large boxes of toys
- ◆ Aungst, Emily & Kristopher - Seven toys
- ◆ Ball Mehta, Eileen - Three Toys
- ◆ Baptist Health S FL Homestead Hospital - Two large boxes of toys and six \$25 Walmart gift cards
- ◆ Bibb, Kathleen & Charles - A Power Your Fun Unicorn Robo Pets
- ◆ Blitch, Dale & Dianne - An extra large box of toys
- ◆ Burdette, William R. - A Remote Control Car for Kids
- ◆ Chavez, Maggie F - Forty-three toys
- ◆ Cox, Margaret - Two toys
- ◆ Deppman, Ed - A Marvel Black Panther Basic Mask
- ◆ Dyches, Anita & Jim - An Old Spice Body Wash Variety Pack
- ◆ Ebenezer UMC - A medium box of toys
- ◆ Eldredge, Patricia Ann - Six toys
- ◆ Espinosa, Joshua David - Two toys
- ◆ Furniss-Roe, Tina - A Melissa & Doug Grocery Basket Play Set
- ◆ Garman, Melanie - Two toys
- ◆ Handal, Jess - One toy
- ◆ Horman, Janet - Two toys
- ◆ Howard, Kathy & Scott - One large box of toys
- ◆ Irizarry-Lopez, Carmen Victoria - Four gifts
- ◆ Iszler, Timothy J. - Eleven gifts
- ◆ Kowalski, Kathleen & Robert -Three toys
- ◆ MASKmission - Several toys and masks for children and youth
- ◆ McCarthy, Kaylin - Two toys
- ◆ McLaughlin, Karen & Brent - A small box of toys
- ◆ Metz, Lee C. - Three toys
- ◆ Meyer, Susan - Seven toys
- ◆ Morgan, Patricia & Richard - Several toys
- ◆ Palmer Trinity Private School, Inc. - Fifty gift cards + over three hundred toys + youth holiday gifts
- ◆ Pike, Isabelle - Three toys
- ◆ Prothro, Rebecca & Carleton- - Four toys
- ◆ Rodriguez, Jessica - Three toys
- ◆ Ruiz, Nidia - Two toys
- ◆ Shalwani, Jennifer - Three toys
- ◆ Sotham, Margaret - Five \$25 gift cards for our youth
- ◆ Soto, Julimar - A GoPorts Premier Soccer Ball with Premium Pump
- ◆ Trowbridge, Mark - Four basketballs
- ◆ Van Gundy, Kelly - A Power Your Fun Unicorn Robo Pet
- ◆ Vazquez-Pena, Ana - Seven toys

Other In-Kind Donations

- ◆ 305 Feeds - Dinner every Friday in October for our Branches Florida City students
- ◆ Aetna Better Health of Florida - 240 CVS Oral Care Travel kits, 216 Dove go fresh Deodorants, 252 Right Guard Total Defense Gel Anti Perspirant Deodorants, 252 Total Home Disinfecting Wipes, 252 Total Home Ultra Soft Bath Tissue (Mega Sized Rolls), 252 Golden Graham Treat Bars and 252 Gold Emblem Classic Blend Trail Mix
- ◆ Anderson, Toni - An Enfamil Welcome Pack
- ◆ Baptist Health S FL - Homestead Hospital - Twelve cases of 24 pack water bottles
- ◆ Barrinat, Tessie & Goldfarb, Alan - A new Fisher Price infant swing
- ◆ Bi-Lo Winn-Dixie HQ – Four \$50 gift cards
- ◆ Brodie, Patricia & Marshall - A sewing machine and a case of crayons
- ◆ Cerda, Jen - Air Hockey Table
- ◆ Chefs on the Run Assorted Cuisine - Providing hot meals for two families for Christmas
- ◆ Delta Upsilon Sigma chapter of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority - About 200 toys for Branches students
- ◆ Farmshare Miami - Groceries and fresh food items for our families
- ◆ Feeding South Florida –Groceries for our families every Thursday and Friday
- ◆ First UMC Homestead - Ten Christmas trees
- ◆ GOJA - One hundred Blue Dog backpacks, fifty Ladybird red backpacks and fifty Cow pink backpacks
- ◆ Gran, Jacki - Provided the Cardona Family at Branches Florida City with \$400 for their electricity and water bills, plus \$1,000 for Christmas and basic needs
- ◆ Hegler, Karen - 155 Easter bags with candy and treats + goody bags for Branches students
- ◆ Hickey, Raquel & Darryl - A Wii U Unit with motion bar, four controllers, five Nunchucks, one dual controller charging station, one single controller charging station, twenty-one games, eight controller covers and four Nunchuck covers
- ◆ Irizarry-Lopez, Carmen Victoria - A twin mattress for a Branches Lakeview family, a game console/ table, a Swiffer and a foam cooler
- ◆ Johnson, Renee - Two all natural deodorants
- ◆ Kendall UMC Day School - 71.24 pounds of food
- ◆ Kennedy, Amanda - Adopted three Branches Florida City families and donated toys, sheets, towels, Chromebooks, Walmart gift cards, Marshalls gifts cards and more

Continued on Page 8

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Other In-Kind Donations, Continued from Page 7

- ◆ Key Biscayne Community Foundation - Ninety-eight boxes of Conchita Long Grain Rice 12/5 lbs each, Ninety-eight boxes of Conchita Parboiled Rice 12/5 lbs, 80 boxes of Conchita canned Chickpeas 24/15.5 oz., 70 boxes of Conchita Dry Black Beans 24/12 oz., Eighty-eight boxes of Conchita Aloe Vera Drink 12/1.5 lt. and Eighty-eight boxes of Conchita Mango Aloe Vera Drink 12/1.5lt.
- ◆ Lane, Chris - Furniture, bedding, dinnerware and kitchen appliances and utensils
- ◆ Magill, Rita & Ron - Provided a Branches Florida City family with \$1,000 for Christmas.
- ◆ Manuel Faria - Two large bags of books
- ◆ MASKmission - Seventy-five masks for Branches Florida City
- ◆ Miami Dolphins Foundation - Five hundred meals for Branches Florida City families
- ◆ Morgan, Patricia - Valentines for staff, college kids cards and \$5 gift cards
- ◆ Morgan, Patricia & Richard - Twenty Amazon gift cards for our college students
- ◆ Neighbors 4 Neighbors - \$3,000 value of Walmart and Publix gift cards.
- ◆ Neighbors 4 Neighbors - Catered dinner by Catering The Event by Susan Bleemer and \$20 CVS gift cards to our Branches South Miami families
- ◆ Palley, Lisa - Two large boxes of water bottles, one box of drawstring backpacks, two shirts and a book
- ◆ Palmer Trinity Private School - A box of masks and a large box of assorted toys for Branches Bucks store + 25 gift cards for Branches youth
- ◆ Palmer Trinity Private School - Three bags of baked goods
- ◆ Pike, Isabelle - A big kid booster car seat and an umbrella stroller
- ◆ Read to Learn Books for Free - Two hundred Christmas/ Holiday themed books and two hundred teen books
- ◆ Salani, Deborah - A new Dell desktop computer and 22 inch screen
- ◆ Sanko, Jill Steiner - Several boxes of toys including a Calico Corners house and accessories, a large Q-BA-MAZE set, Lego sets and more.
- ◆ Sanko, Jill Steiner - Three hundred and six snack sacks for Branches Florida City students
- ◆ Shorten, Victoria & Randolph, Jason - Three Similac NEOSURE and one Similac Pro-Sensitive formulas and large bag with baby boy clothing
- ◆ Sonshine Via De Cristo - Preparing four hundred meals for Thanksgiving Meal Delivery at the FUMC Coral Gables site
- ◆ Tannebaum, Lisa - One bag of soap and one bag of toothpaste + several boxes of DVDs, board games, games and arts & crafts supplies
- ◆ The Hall Law Firm - Four monitors, four backup batteries and two wired keyboards
- ◆ United Healthcare - 55 refurbished HP Laptops
- ◆ United Way of Miami-Dade - One box of 600 count masks + four boxes of 100 count Medium gloves + four boxes of 100 count large gloves + Seventeen cases/boxes of individual hand sanitizers
- ◆ Van Gundy, Kim & Stan - Two chromebooks & cases, two bluetooth headphones, three sets of bedding, a football, a longboard, an RC flyer, two graphic novels & an anime book and a cozy robe for a Branches Lakeview family



Amaka Amalu-Anderson, founder of Tech Girl Power and Branches Board member, teaching our girls about STEM through super fun activities.



Branches' Financial Coaches facilitating discussions during the 2021 Florida Prosperity Partnership Conference, where Branches was also a featured presenter.



Branches
Grow Deeper, Climb Higher

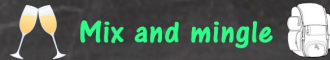
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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

SAVE THE DATE!

Join us for a fun happy hour event as we raise resources to help our students begin the school year ready to learn.



Mix and mingle

Build a backpack with supplies for a Branches student!

Join us as we honor a Branches volunteer with the 2021 Herbert C. Parlato Volunteer Award!



THURSDAY

AUGUST

5

6:00 - 8:00PM

ELKS LODGE
SOUTH MIAMI
6304 SW 78TH STREET
SOUTH MIAMI, FL, 33143

Cost: **\$35 Donation** (\$40 at the Door)
RSVP at www.branchesfl.org/Back2SchoolBash