



COASTAL CONNECTION

NEWSLETTER | SPRING 2023

WELCOME

Several months ago, we promised to send out to you a second newsletter covering our United States-based ministries. While in some ways not as dramatic as our international work, it is, we believe, just as impactful. It will be our plan in the future to send out newsletters twice a year: one in the summer and one in the winter. We think this schedule will work best for timely sharing. Again, thank you for your support and prayers. Please enjoy this read.

EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH INVESTMENT (EWI) PROGRAM

In the fall of 2021, we started our Empowering Women through Investment (EWI) Program with our inaugural class of 10 professional women in the Shreveport-Bossier City area. The main purpose of this program is to assist in the development, education, and engagement of financial planning and financial literacy for a traditionally underserved community. As a 2019 report from the TIAA Institute and Global Financial Literacy Excellence Center (GFLEC) shows, African Americans constitute 13% and Latinos constitute about 15% of the American population and thus both groups play a critical role in the function, success, and sustainability of the economy in the U.S. today. Yet, compared to whites, African Americans and Latinos score significantly lower on the Personal Finance Index on eight indicators (earning, consuming, borrowing, saving, investing,

insuring, understanding risk, and gathering information) by a measure of 38% (AAs/Latinos) to 55% (whites). And even more importantly for our program, women of color often score even lower on these metrics. These

gaps are a detriment to the upward trajectory of women and particularly for women of color that are professionals in our community—providing an opportunity for us to partner with some of these incredibly impressive women to assist in their development and financial education.



The program began in the fall of 2021 with these 10 women with the goal of having nine educational classes over an 18-month period. Our first class graduated 9 out of the 10 women who successfully completed the program in December 2022. In addition to the financial literacy

program, each woman was part of a collective stock club in which Coastal Connection invested \$12,000. Throughout the 18-month period, the women in the program collectively made the decisions about how to invest the monies with the help of the program instructors, getting real experience with the stock market and its highs and lows. At the end of the program, each graduate received their own portion of that collective investment as part of their graduation and success. We could not be prouder of these 9 women, and we look forward to continuing to help them as best as we may as they continue in their personal and professional endeavors.

We importantly want to give a special shout-out to our incredible instructors Nancy Stich and Kathy Pratt. Without their expertise, experiences, and honesty, this program would not be possible. They have gone above and beyond in helping these ladies succeed and we cannot thank them enough for what they've done with EWI.

At the completion of the program in December 2022, the graduates each received their portion of the investments and those checks have been distributed. In addition, on their exit interviews, each graduate of the program completed a survey providing key feedback about their experience in the program to help ensure its success and growth for future classes.

In looking and planning for the next class of EWI, we are looking to recruit candidates to start a revised program—a more intense 9-month program spanning September 2023 to May 2024. This allows the monthly class sessions to follow the traditional school year calendar and will likely make the process more focused and stable. We look forward to moving this program forward and hope to continue to bridge the gap between low financial literacy of women in the Shreveport-Bossier community and empower them through investments and education.

SCHOOL FOOD PANTRY PROGRAM

The Food Pantry Program for the 2022-2023 school year served 10 schools reaching about 4,200 students. More than 40,000 snacks/drinks were distributed. Special thanks goes to our partner, the Food Bank of Northwest Louisiana.

This year we have tried to streamline the distribution of the food items by having some of the items shipped directly to the schools from Sam's Club. We still deliver drinks since they don't ship for free. And, when available, we also obtain items from the Food Bank as well. This also makes the operation less labor-intensive for us. Exploring other ways to get items to the schools in an easy, low-cost way is ongoing.

We were also able to help secure a speaking opportunity for a local 5th grade student from one of the schools we serve – she spoke at the annual fundraiser for the Food Bank of Northwest Louisiana. She did a fantastic job, and we appreciate her principal helping set this up. This sweet young lady told everyone how the Food Pantry Program has helped her and her fellow students.



Above: A truck filled with various snacks/drinks to be distributed to Caddo Parish schools.

In speaking to the impact of our program, Belinda Stewart, principal of Atkins Elementary, says, “Thank you so much for being so amazing. The children have truly cherished and enjoyed their weekend meals. You have blessed them abundantly and we are so grateful.” Principals, counselors, and instructional coordinators alike have expressed their gratitude for our help in providing food to help the neediest of all their students. At some schools, food is provided in-house for students who miss breakfast or leave before lunch.

Some schools opt to send home weekend bags for students who will be hungry without school mealtimes over the weekend. Each school uses the Food Pantry Program as they see fit for what their students need from them most.

We will continue to provide help to our 10 current schools and are in communication with another potential school to add to our program for next year. Helping combat food insecurity for children in our parish remains a #1 priority for Coastal Connection—especially in our state where food insecurity affects 20% of Louisiana’s kids.

WAREHOUSE AND SHIPPING

Our warehouse and shipping activities have been quite busy over the last twelve to eighteen months. With the help of CHRISTUS Highland, CHRISTUS Central Louisiana Surgical Hospital, Rapides Regional Medical Center, a dental practice in Lafayette, and several other donors, we were able to fill up an 18-wheeler with a 64-foot trailer and send it to our partners, Hospital Sisters Mission Outreach (HSMO) in Springfield, IL. They collect medical supplies and medical equipment and have distributed to 530 mission organizations in more than 95 countries since 2002. We are currently collecting medical equipment for our next shipment that is scheduled to go out in early July 2023.

In December of 2022, we relocated our use of warehouse space in the same building, but we downsized from 5,000 square feet to 2,500 square feet. This space is much more appropriate and better for us to manage. The downside, however, was once we moved in, a terrible freeze came the week of Christmas, freezing our pipes and causing them to burst in our space. As you can see from the picture, we lost all of our medical supplies due to the water damage. But we have begun to rebuild.

Another successful event for us was the workday that we had with LSUA and LSUE Nursing and Allied Health programs. It felt like Christmas morning for them – they were able to select medical equipment, medical supplies, furniture, and some appliances that they could use to train nurses, lab technicians, surgical techs, rad techs, and more. Please see the group picture to get an idea of their haul (*right*).

We have several upcoming pickup dates scheduled with local healthcare organizations. We are partnering with HSMO and St. Dominic’s Catholic Hospital in Ibadan, Nigeria to send a 40-foot shipping container of medical equipment and supplies. It is our current belief that we can successfully begin that voyage in late July with an arrival date roughly 90 days later. Finally, we have continued to make small shipments of medical supplies to Ona Ville Community Health Clinic in Haiti. With all the challenges in-country, it has been difficult, but we have been creative.



DROIDS & DRAGONS TRIVIA FUNDRAISER



In early February 2023, we hosted our fourth annual Droids & Dragons trivia fundraiser, partnered with the Food Bank of Northwest Louisiana. The funds raised go to the local school food pantry and school backpack programs run by Coastal Connection and the Northwest Louisiana Food Bank respectively. We had our biggest and best year yet, hosting about 20 teams and raising about \$35,000! We had two core divisions—an open general division and a collegiate division where 6 colleges across 4 states were represented!

We want to give a huge thanks to our partner in the Droids and Dragons trivia fundraiser—the Food Bank of Northwest Louisiana. Without their partnership and dedication to the

continual growth of the fundraiser, it wouldn't be where it is today! In addition, we also want to thank CHRISTUS Highland for operating as our host sponsor yet again and for allowing us to use their incredible educational facilities to host the event and be our tech space for the night. We also want to thank our wonderful emcee Greg Atoms, Assistant Director of Content at Townsquare Media and founder of Geek'd Con, for his continued support of the event!

We need to send our biggest appreciation to all of the sponsors for the event, without whom we couldn't have raised nearly as much as we did and who helped make the event a major success. Thanks to the following organizations for their continued help: CHRISTUS Shreveport-Bossier, Ingalls Information Security, Ronpak, United Healthcare, Willis-Knighton, CHRISTUS Coushatta, LinkUp, Makers Design, Don & Monty Lloyd, Merrill Lynch Smithwick, Bickham, Pratt, and Pou, and David Raines Community Health Centers. We look forward to continuing to partner with each of these incredible organizations in the future.

A special shoutout to our team winners—both in the trivia competition and in the best team name and best use of theme categories!

Open:

- 1) Let the Wookiee Win
- 2) The Fireballers
- 3) Sith Happens

College:

- 1) Pocket Logic (University of Arkansas at Little Rock Medical School)
- 2) Livin' La Vida Yoda (Florida State University)
- 3) Psych You Out (University of West Florida)

Best Use of Theme: I was getting a beer...what's the question again?

Best Team Name: Sith Happens

Please be sure to keep a lookout for our updates about next year's Droids and Dragons trivia night which will be in early March 2024!

LOCAL FOOD PANTRY SUPPORT

Inflation and the economic challenges have made it much harder for many to be able to afford or even find food in our community. To that end, the Food Bank of Northwest Louisiana has begun construction on a new food pantry that will be located next to their new warehouse. This food pantry will be open five days a week. Most food pantries in our communities are only open a limited number of days per month. Not every day and, for many, not even weekly. To help the Food Bank of Northwest Louisiana and the local American Heart Association chapter who are working with local food pantries to address the issues of access, we have begun working with several local organizations such as CHRISTUS Highland, PAM Specialty Hospital of Shreveport, and Haynes Peavy LLC to secure stainless steel shelving that can be used to store the food in multiple food pantries. If you know of locations where we can get more shelving, please let us know.



THANK YOU

We want to say thank you to all of our donors who continue to support our ministry during these crazy times. As you can see, our ministry is alive and working to carry out its mission. We will continue to pray for you and your families.

Yours in Christ,

Stephen and Mona Wright