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Photo by Bill Feig

BIG BROWN, BIG HEART

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When you meet James Joseph, the 6-foot-8 UPS Driver and former Harlem Globetrotter in person, you totally *get* the “Big Brown” nickname. Not so obvious at first glance however is Joseph’s big, generous heart and his desire to help others. Brown is the founder of the Baton-Rouge based Reaching Back Fund – a philanthropic organization dedicated to doing good works in the community wherever there is need. Formed with the help of Baton Rouge community leaders, the fund operates largely on contributions of both of time and money donated by UPS employees. Together with Big Brown, they also determine where and how the funds are distributed.

In their efforts to help wherever they can, the Reaching Back fund has provided everything from meals, air conditioners, school supplies and so much more. For example, during the COVID pandemic they purchased and delivered hand sanitizer to every school district in Louisiana. Because of his untiring work, Big Brown was a Blue Cross Angel Award recipient in 2021.

“The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members.”

–Coretta Scott King

In the summer of 2021 Big Brown reached out to the YMCA of Greater New Orleans with a gift of \$5,000 from the Reaching Back Fund to provide swimming and water safety lessons free to adults and young people in our community. The donation honored the memory of a UPS colleague whose daughter lost her life in a drowning accident. Since that initial donation, the Reaching Back Fund has gifted a total of \$13,000 for these life-saving lessons. The need is great in our region as Louisiana has one of the highest drowning rates in the country.

Recently the YMCA partnered with Big Brown and Pan American Life Insurance to benefit an area non-profit. When Pan American moved out of their CBD location they wanted to donate their surplus supplies so they reached out to the Y for help. We contacted Big Brown who knew exactly where they were needed –The Leona Tate Foundation for Change, Inc.

On a typically hot and muggy Saturday morning Big Brown and a team of UPS volunteers arrived at the Pan American offices loaded up the supplies and delivered them to their new home in the lower ninth ward. The donated items will benefit operations at the permanent memorial site and exhibition dedicated to preserving the legacy of the McDonogh Three and their historic role in desegregating New Orleans public schools in the 1960s. To learn more about the Leona Tate foundation visit:

<https://www.leonatafoundation.org/>



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United Way of
Southeast Louisiana

For more information about the YMCA of Greater New Orleans and to stay up-to-date with community programs and events, join our mailing list or follow us on social media:



Visit www.ymcaneworleans.org/our-y-impact-stories/ for more wonderful Y stories!

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