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I am both humbled and honored to address you as the new Executive Director of Side by Side. It is a role I have embraced with dedication and enthusiasm, building upon the remarkable foundation laid by our founding Executive Director, Cindi Johnson.

Cindi’s visionary leadership has been instrumental in shaping Side by Side into what it is today. Her foresight and adaptability have guided us through challenging times, and I am profoundly grateful for the wisdom she has imparted upon me.

While our business model undergoes adjustments to accommodate the evolving post-pandemic charitable giving landscape, and the needs of our aging membership and their caregivers, our Clubhouse model program remains the guiding set of standards that steer our course.

As I step into my role, I am reminded of a timeless truth: The only thing constant in life is change. While we may encounter shifts and challenges in the coming years, I firmly believe Side by Side is built on a solid foundation. I have witnessed the unwavering dedication of our team, the resilience of our members, and the thoughtful involvement of our community. Cindi’s leadership has left an unforgettable mark on our organization and her legacy will continue to inspire us as we navigate the path ahead.

My focus moving forward will revolve around fostering membership growth, ensuring the financial stability and security of our organization, and optimizing our technological infrastructure. We are diligently enhancing our data collection and reporting capabilities to better showcase the positive impact we have on our community.

Above all, I want our members, families, and all stakeholders to know I am dedicated to Side by Side and its mission. Your trust and support are invaluable to me, and I want to assure you I am here for the long-haul.

My interactions with family caregivers have been more frequent and rewarding than I initially anticipated. As many of you know by now, I am an open book, valuing transparency and straightforwardness. I am eager to get to know you better and develop a more comprehensive understanding of your long-term service needs.

My journey to Side by Side has been driven by a deep-seated desire to help others. As a licensed Speech-Language Pathologist, I have dedicated my career to helping families and working with individuals with brain injuries and other injuries since 2010. This natural inclination to make a meaningful difference in the lives of others is what drew me here, and it remains the driving force behind my commitment to our organization.

I extend my gratitude to Cindi for her exemplary leadership and to all of you for your enduring support. Together, we will continue to build upon the legacy of Side by Side, ensuring this organization remains a beacon of possibility and hope for brain injury survivors and their loved ones.

Thank you for entrusting me with this important role. I look forward to the journey ahead with you all by my side.

Joshua “Josh” Blackmon, M. Ed., CCC-SLP
Executive Director

Leadership Succession Plan Timeline

2016
Developed a comprehensive program expansion and leadership succession plan in preparation for the upcoming retirement of key leadership positions.

2019
Commenced the implementation of the succession plan, starting with the retirement of the founding Business Manager.

2020 - 2021
Appointed the Board Treasurer to the position of Chief Operating Officer/Chief Financial Officer, a critical step in the execution of the succession plan. The plan was then interrupted by the need to respond to COVID-19.

2022
Marked a significant milestone in the leadership transition as the founding Program Director retired. A need for organizational restructuring arose when filling the vacant Program Director role, coinciding with unplanned staff turnover in the Development Director position. Welcomed Fernandas as the new Clubhouse Manager.

2023
Welcomed Josh as the new Executive Director and initiated comprehensive knowledge transfer of this key leadership role.

2023
The Quality Assurance & Operations Manager will be promoted to the role of Financial Director in preparation for the retirement of the COO/CFO, creating a new position to be filled before the end of the year: Compliance & Billing Manager.

2024
The retirement of the founding Executive Director, Cindi, in May will mark the successful conclusion of the succession plan and the beginning of an exciting new chapter for Side by Side.
A Fast, Fluid and Flexible Transition

In 2013, Cindi Johnson began to contemplate her retirement as the founding Executive Director of the only day program for adults with brain injury in Georgia. She sought a way to ensure the nonprofit organization she built would continue to thrive without her steadfast leadership.

Three years later, Side by Side’s leadership team embarked on an 18-month strategic planning process to bolster capacity with a focus on organizational sustainability. While Side by Side has experienced turnover among its staff, it has had stable and devoted leadership since opening its doors to program participants in 2000. Cindi and the Board recognized early on that the most significant challenge would involve transferring over two decades of experience, prompting them to devise a gradual succession plan for key leadership positions.

“Is it often the case with the best-laid plans,” Cindi explains, “our strategy was interrupted and sidetracked due to an unexpected need for reorganization and the COVID pandemic.”

Side by Side pushed forward, reassured by its long-standing mantra—fast, fluid, and flexible. This mantra is essential of both members and staff at any moment simultaneously and encapsulated the core qualities Cindi and the Board looked for in the new leadership team.

**FAST** — The ability to pivot and respond quickly to situations that are unexpected

**FLUID** — The ability to act smoothly and without unnecessary drama

**FLEXIBLE** — The ability to adapt cognitively and be willing to move on to plan B, C, D, E...

Plans gradually fell back into place when Fernandas Robinson assumed the role of Clubhouse Manager in October 2022, followed by Joshua “Josh” Blackmon as the founding Executive Director of the only day program for adults with brain injury in Georgia.

Fernandas arrived at Side by Side with over two decades of experience working in residential neurobehavioral settings within the brain injury community. He excels at managing teams and demonstrates a dedicated passion for connecting with members and caregivers.

Three months later, Josh joined the team with over a decade of experience as a licensed Speech-Language Pathologist. Throughout his career, Josh has worked with individuals with brain injury in multiple capacities and environments. His skill set, combined with a desire to find a long-term employment position, made him an ideal candidate for the Executive Director role.

“Josh possesses ambition, patience, humor, intelligence, compassion, and a willingness to get his hands dirty literally and figuratively,” Cindi proudly notes. “He embodies the qualities of a true servant leader.”

For Josh, being a servant leader entails being willing to engage in the same work as any other team member or staff. He emphasizes that this commitment to shared responsibility fosters trust and respect among those he leads.

True to his commitment, Josh wholeheartedly dove into his new role, learning the responsibilities of each work unit (Maintenance, Kitchen, and Business) and closely collaborating with administrative staff to learn the intricacies of operating a nonprofit organization.

The Side by Side Board of Directors played an active role throughout the transition. During the hiring process, Josh met three longstanding Board Directors to understand their motivations for serving Side by Side and gain insight into their organizational priorities.

“It made me feel really comfortable to know how involved the Board is, so I knew how supported I would be in my role,” Josh remarks.

Following a few Board meetings since his arrival, Josh received positive feedback from Board directors expressing heartfelt appreciation for his efforts thus far. To ensure a comprehensive knowledge transfer was conducted before Cindi’s retirement, Cindi and Josh had weekly leadership meetings, with Josh progressively and strategically assuming more responsibilities instead of a sudden, overwhelming handover of tasks.

Additionally, Jim Long, Side by Side Board Chair, met with Josh on a monthly basis to assess the progress of the transition, offering feedback and support.

Josh has developed a solid understanding of Side by Side’s operations and is focused on maintaining stability at the Clubhouse, ensuring it continues to serve the brain injury community in alignment with its mission and scope of services.

“At this point, my goal is to help Josh fully appreciate the delicate balance between supporting the program, managing the facility, fundraising proactively, and handling organizational operations—without losing hope that there will ever be balance,” Cindi explains.

As Side by Side navigates its first major leadership transition, the organization as a whole has embraced the change, finding solace in the strong foundation laid by its founding leadership team.

With most of the overarching responsibilities now in Josh’s capable hands, Cindi plans to retire in May 2024, allowing Josh to develop his leadership style independently, unencumbered by the founder.

“I will always be available for advice and to impart Side by Side history whenever someone is willing to listen,” Cindi notes, smiling at the number of times she has enthusiastically shared wisdom from her metaphorical Clubhouse soapbox. “And, of course, there’s always Game Night!” Cindi jokes, her infectious smile lighting up the room.

Humor aside, Cindi feels nostalgic when reflecting on the precious Clubhouse Moments that have always had a way of brightening her day. Moments when one member helps another member, when a member tries something new or generously allows another member to try the task they themselves have clung to mightily, sometimes for years. Or, when a member explains to a visitor that we are a family here.

Most of all, Cindi remarks, “I’ll miss working with members I’ve known for 15-20 years. We’ve walked side-by-side through many phases of our lives, and I will treasure those memories forever.”

As Cindi prepares to step into a well-earned retirement, she leaves behind a legacy of resilience, joy, and unwavering commitment. Side by Side’s successful leadership transition reflects not only the strength of its founders but also the adaptability and spirit of an organization that has always put its members, families, and community at the forefront.

With Josh at the helm and a supportive Board of Directors, Side by Side stands ready to embrace a future filled with hope, growth, and continued service to those in need. As the sun sets on one chapter, it rises on another, illuminating a path forward that is sure to be as bright as the hearts it touches.
Immersing new staff in the work-ordered day is an essential aspect of onboarding, including administrative staff. Staff learn early on that members operate their Clubhouse, with staff available to facilitate individual success through collaboration and empowerment.

Introducing rehabilitation professionals to the Clubhouse model can be challenging after working in the clinical field. Side by Side’s new leadership team, Josh and Fernandas, already understood how to support adults with brain injury; therefore, Cindi Johnson—experienced in the clinical field and a champion of the Clubhouse model—focused on orienting them to the model.

Josh reflected on the contrast saying, “I’ve spent the last 13 years of my career in more acute, clinical settings. At first, it was hard to wrap my head around serving people for the lifespan.” Instead of focusing on short-term rehabilitation goals and seeing patients for typically no more than two weeks to a month, the Clubhouse model offers long-term services where participants are no longer viewed as patients and membership is voluntary and without time limits.

Fernandas found Clubhouse to be a refreshing change, though he too had an adjustment period. “Initially, I had to take a step back and tone down a little bit because I’m wired to see things from a clinical side, as structured with guidelines and boundaries,” he admitted. “This work is not about me telling someone what to do. It’s about us doing the work together.”

Cindi valued Fernandas’s dedication to building relationships—a core aspect of the Clubhouse model—and she appreciated both Fernandas and Josh’s openness to the model, even when it meant adapting their established norms.

For Fernandas, this was not his first encounter with Side by Side. He had visited Side by Side previously when he was an administrator at Restore Health Group. However, Josh’s introduction to Side by Side began with a member-led tour—a glimpse into the vibrant world of Clubhouse, where the capability of the model unfolded before him.

As Josh mingled with members and staff, he felt a deep sense of belonging. “That was the turning point for me,” Josh recalled. “Seeing the collaboration that happens here. I understand why we encourage people to come and tour because that’s when you truly grasp the magic of Clubhouse.”

Side by Side’s new leadership team has learned a lot about the model in a short time, but they recognize that this approach to rehabilitation is abstract and requires ongoing reinforcement to maintain its principles. The organization will maintain its close relationship with Clubhouse International and the International Brain Injury Clubhouse Alliance (IBICA) and will remain an active participant in IBICA Community Chats as well as the annual IBICA conference. Additionally, when scheduling and funding allows, they plan to travel with members to a Clubhouse training base to gain additional perspective from another successful Clubhouse model program.

Observing how a strong Clubhouse navigates challenges while preserving its culture is invaluable. These opportunities for training and collaboration are a testament to the model’s 70+ year longevity.

Together, Josh and Fernandas are committed to the Clubhouse model approach to rehabilitation, ensuring that Side by Side continues to foster a sense of belonging and purpose in participants that transcends the shared experience of living with a brain injury.
**Board of Directors**

**2022-2023 FISCAL YEAR**

**BOARD LEADERSHIP**

Jim Long, Chair (Gerber Holder, retired)
Tracey Wallace, Vice Chair (Shepherd Center)
Yogita Tailor, Secretary (Pelvic Rehabilitation Medicine)
Sarah Duffy, Treasurer (Slalom)

**BOARD DIRECTORS**

Mark Gannon (Savell & Williams, retired)
Lorie Hutcheson (Shepherd Center)
Elizabeth George (Magistrate Judge of Fulton County)
Jocelyn Smith (Emory University)
Al King (British Petroleum)
George “Brick” Johnstone (Shepherd Center)
Sue Dunlap (Accord Care)
Annie Tran (Slalom)
Heather Miller (Emory University)
Katherine Creek (Shepherd Center)

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**What Side by Side Means to Members**

*It Takes a Clubhouse*

Side by Side has successfully managed numerous transitions over the years, but one thing remains constant: the dedication of its members.

The members are the engine that keeps the Clubhouse running, especially during times of limited staffing or changes in leadership.

When there are gaps to fill, members step up without hesitation. They understand the work that needs to be done and embrace the responsibility with enthusiasm.

Regardless of the task, members are always there, ready to lend a helping hand. This sense of shared ownership and collaboration is a testament to Side by Side’s success.

The members demonstrate that Side by Side is about more than just living with a brain injury; it is about the desire to contribute and the fellowship that binds us together. They find fulfillment in their work and take pride in helping new staff understand how best to support them.

Through every challenge, the essence of Side by Side remains unshaken: the members are the core, and their commitment to each other and their Clubhouse motivates us to advance our mission.

**What should people know about Side by Side?**

*“Happiness.”*

*What does Clubhouse mean to you?*

*“It gives me another way to cope with my affliction. It gives me something to do, a purpose otherwise than watching TV all day. I can be engaged by it.”*

*What should people know about Side by Side?*

*“This is a good place to come. No question you will find a way to deal with your affliction here.”*
Q & A with Side by Side’s New Leadership Team

JOSHUA “JOSH” BLACKMON
Executive Director

What advice do you have for a new member?
“Be prepared to put in the time, the work, the effort, and all of your strengths. We all rely on each other to be as successful as we can be.”

What advice do you have for a caregiver?
“Embrace it all. Embrace the opportunities for your member during normal program hours, embrace the social activities we provide because you need and deserve the respite, and embrace the communication you receive because we’re a team. We are here to support you and make your life as a caregiver easier.”

What are your passions outside of work?
“I love traveling internationally, but I do not travel as much now that I have kids. I really enjoy getting involved with the activities my kids are involved in—soccer, gymnastics, basketball. We’re always thinking of seasonal activities we can do as a family to expose our kids to what life has to offer. Oh, and I am not a cook, so my family and I love trying new restaurants and foods.”

What is your biggest pet peeve?
“Punctuality. I have high expectations for punctuality, both for myself and for other people. Even if someone does not think something is important, they should still appreciate the others in attendance and show respect for other people’s time and efforts.”

What is an item on your bucket list?
“I’ve always wanted to visit Australia and experience the true outback, and to go on a month-long cross-continental cruise where you can see multiple sites.”

FERNANDAS ROBINSON
Clubhouse Manager

What advice do you have for a new member?
“Keep an open mind. Limit your expectations, take in everything, and decide what Side by Side will be for you.”

What advice do you have for a caregiver?
“Cherish your time because it’s invaluable. Caregiver burnout is a real concern and self-care is so important, so make the most of any respite you have. When your member is with us, they are in good hands. Don’t spend that time worrying about how they’re doing or what they’re doing. Taking care of yourself is just as important as taking care of them.”

What are your passions outside of work?
“I’ve learned I have a green thumb and enjoy working in my yard. I put my headphones on and do my landscaping, it’s a great way to decompress. I also have a ministry and I enjoy the chance to contribute to the positive service we do in the community. Outside of that, I am a real big sports fan. I love keeping up with the Braves, Falcons, and Hawks!”

What is your biggest pet peeve?
“When people exhibit selfish, narcissistic, or entitled behavior, making everything about themselves and playing the victim. I also do not appreciate lying and believe that everyone should treat each other with respect. People do not need to be harsh to each other.”

What is an item on your bucket list?
“I really want to travel to Africa, that would be a once in a lifetime experience. Also, if the Atlanta Falcons ever make it to another Super Bowl in the future I want to be there to cheer them on!”

Nourishing Progress: The Impact of Healthful, Accessible Services

We embarked on a remarkable project this fiscal year and are thrilled to share the results we achieved thanks to the generosity of the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta, the Frances Hollis Brain Foundation, and the International Paper Foundation who share our vision.

A VISION OF ACCESSIBLE NUTRITION
Our vision for this project was simple yet profound: to make nutritious foods easily accessible to our members. This vision became a reality from October 2022 to March 2023, when we were able to offer FREE daily lunch and fresh, nutritious snacks to members. We knew that, with the support of our charitable partners, we could advance healthy food initiatives for our membership. The impact of their contribution was inspiring.

We achieved a staggering 97.9% increase in lunch participation and administered 1,507 free fresh snacks over the six-month project period, with an average monthly increase of 19% in healthy snacks eaten, culminating in an astounding overall increase of 120.9%.

This project not only increased access to nutritious food; it also fostered healthier behaviors among members and staff. Through the “Fun With Food” educational group, members were empowered to make informed choices about their health and wellness. Members gained a deeper understanding of why eating healthy is important, how to evaluate the nutritional value of foods, and learned valuable skills for managing food supplies.

Behavioral change is incremental, especially for individuals with brain injury-related disability, but we have made progress through providing consistent exposure to health and wellness education. Our members are embracing more fresh foods, staying hydrated, setting targeted wellness goals, and participating in more fitness opportunities.

While we celebrate our achievements, our mission is far from complete. The need for accessible, nutritious food remains paramount.

To continue providing healthy, nutritious foods at little to no cost to our members, we invite you to join us in this journey. Together, we can enhance the quality of life of those we serve, one nutritious meal at a time.

1,507 FREE FRESH SNACKS CONSUMED
120.9% OVERALL INCREASE IN FRESH SNACKS CONSUMED
97.9% OVERALL INCREASE IN LUNCH PARTICIPATION

We are grateful for the generosity of our partners and the hard work of our dedicated staff and volunteers. Together, we are making a difference in the lives of those we serve.”
### Revenue and Expenses Summary

**FOR THE 2022 - 2023 FISCAL YEAR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REVENUE</th>
<th>$ 1,033,644</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private Gifts, Grants and Governmental</td>
<td>715,730</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program Fees</td>
<td>317,914</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL REVENUE</strong></td>
<td><strong>$ 1,033,644</strong></td>
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<tr>
<th>OPERATING EXPENSES</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Program</td>
<td>889,496</td>
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<td>Management and General</td>
<td>117,155</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fundraising</td>
<td>62,423</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL OPERATING EXPENSES</strong></td>
<td><strong>$ 1,069,074</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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With an operating deficit of more than $35,000 this fiscal year, we navigated financial hurdles compounded by overlapping salaries during the leadership transition and a shifting charitable giving landscape. Despite these circumstances, we strategically utilized our financial reserves and charitable contributions to ensure continuity in services for our members and families. The deficit underscores the need for targeted fundraising efforts in the coming years to restore the Clubhouse to a pre-pandemic financial position.

### Mission Statement

**Side by Side Brain Injury Clubhouse advances the long-term well-being of people with brain injury-related disability and their families through skills development, support and advocacy.**

### Vision Statement

**People with brain injury-related disability have access to services that assist them in managing health and well-being so they can contribute interdependently and safely at home, work and in the community for the best possible quality of life.**

### Jawbones vs Sawbones

**Topgolf Edition: A Swinging Success**

In March 2023, as the sun dipped below the horizon, guests gathered at Topgolf Atlanta for an evening of friendly competition, networking, and, most importantly, benevolent support for Side by Side’s mission.

After the challenges posed by COVID, we cherished this chance to reconnect in-person with our supporters. Their presence was not just a sign of support; it was a testament to their dedication in advancing our mission.

Thanks to the collective generosity of 34 sponsors, we raised $40,000 for the Side by Side Scholarship Fund, helping individuals in need access our brain injury support services.

Our sponsors were not just par for the course; they were the stars of the evening, illuminating the path to greater health equity for Georgia’s brain injury community. Their generous contributions pave the way for stronger partnerships, meaningful collaboration, and a brighter future for those we serve.

In the Topgolf bays, laughter and competition filled the evening—especially at the Hole-In-One Bay. In the end, the Sawbones team—Learning Services and Up-lift Home Care (Bay 216)—emerged victorious. Their triumphant smiles mirrored the success of the entire event. The leading golfer of the evening was Wes McDaniel of the Hansford-McDaniel Jawbones team who amassed an impressive 222 points. Way to go, Wes and Bay 216!

The true champions are the individuals we serve. They come to Side by Side seeking more than a place to gather; they come to be valued for their abilities, to increase their independence, and to offer their family caregivers well-deserved, and much-appreciated, respite.

Since 2000, more than 800 individuals and their families have found solace and support within our programming and community-based services. As our business model shifts and inflation continues to increase expenses, it is the charitable contributions of each and every individual who inspired us to drive positive change that ensures people in need get the opportunity to take a swing at rebuilding their life after brain injury.

The success of our ninth annual Jawbones vs Sawbones fundraiser was a testament to the community’s commitment to advancing services for this underserved community.

Your contributions, your presence, and your spirit made this night unforgettable. Together, we are making a meaningful difference in the lives of those we serve. Thank you for being a part of our incredible journey.

**ALL SIDE BY SIDE MEMBERS RELY ON CHARITABLE SOURCES TO ACCESS OUR BRAIN INJURY SUPPORT SERVICES.**

Topgolf event photos by: Jacquelyn Saylor
In Gratitude for our Supporters

FROM JULY 2022 - JUNE 2023

Philanthropic giving plays a pivotal role in Side by Side’s mission of serving the brain injury community. These contributions ensure the individuals and families we support have access to critical services for rebuilding and managing life after brain injury. In the 2022-2023 fiscal year, the following individuals and organizations made a significant impact in advancing health equity for Georgia’s brain injury community. Thank you!

INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTORS

Julie Abram
Julie Adkins
LuRae Ahrendt
Jorge & Maria Alvarado
Robert Angstadt
David Asbury
Holly Badger
Jason Bankston
Deborah Barron
Patricia Bass
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Barbara “BJ” Toohey
Brian & Lisa King
Carolyne Crichton
Chuck Carter
Cindi Johnson
Deborah Cousineau
Gail Doggett
Greta Hurst
J.R. McCollum
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Virginia Hale
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Wendy Willhoite
Ray Seymore
Kathleen Hartman
Walter & Virginia Vaughan
Linda Fleming
Willa Cleveland

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Colleen Nikoupour
Bill Francis
Sarah Copeland
Billy Von Schriltz
Mark & Kathie Gannon
Cindi Johnson
Len Al Haas
Mimi Kiser

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 Adams Realtors
 Albert M. Pearson, III, LLC
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 Arches Brewing
 Atlanta Black Nurses Association
 Beacon.Care
 Bennett Graphics
 Bennett Thrasher Foundation
 Center for the Visually Impaired
 Central Georgia EMC Foundation
 City of Stone Mountain
 Clements and Sweet, LLP
 Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta
 Comprehensive Care Group
 DeKalb County Human Services Department
 Drew, Eckl & Farnham, LLP
 Frances Hollis Brain Foundation
 Fried Goldberg, LLC
 Georgia Department of Community Health
 Gerber & Holder
 GFWC Lilburn Women’s Club
 GFWC Stone Mountain Women’s Club
 Goodman & Goodman, LLP
 GreyStone Power Foundation
 Hansford McDaniel, LLC
 The Holy Lane Foundation
 Hyatt & Hyatt, P.C.
 International Paper Foundation
 Jackson EMC Foundation
 Jordan ADR
 Law Offices of Andrew E. Goldner, LLC
 Learning Services, Collage Rehabilitation Partners
 Network for Good
 Oak Grove United Methodist Church
 Parsons & Associates, P.C.
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 Scott Hudgens Family Foundation
 Shepherd Center
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