

# The Philanthropic Response---Giving Voice to Our Hearts

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By David A. Odahowski, President  
Edyth Bush Charitable Foundation

When President George W. Bush and Florida's Governor Jeb Bush were consoling those devastated by Hurricanes Charley, Frances, Ivan, and Jeanne, they were not only acting as our democratically elected leaders, they were there as fellow citizens practicing a unique American value known as philanthropy and volunteerism. When profit-making corporations like Anheuser-Busch, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida, Darden Restaurants, Royal Caribbean International, and Celebrity Cruises sent money, product, and volunteers to alleviate suffering caused by Florida's largest natural disaster, they were not only making a smart business decision, they were also part of America's philanthropic tradition. Finally, when individuals like Rich DeVos, Wayne Huizenga, and many others, who through the benefits of America's political and economic system and its Judeo-Christian heritage donated millions of dollars to people and communities they do not know or never have visited, they too are part of America's most distinctive virtue – philanthropy and volunteerism.

As we celebrate National Philanthropy Day across the United States and Florida this month, we join our fellow Americans in one of the most widely shared values in our nation. Across America, 89 percent of all households voluntarily contribute to charity with an average contribution of \$ 1,620 dollars. What is even more demonstrative of our belief in the value of philanthropy is the fact that in this instant-messaging world in which we live, almost 84 million adults find the time to volunteer. This army of compassion represents the equivalent of over 9 million full-time employees at a value of \$ 239 billion dollars! Without the margin of excellence that philanthropy generates, our quality of life in Central Florida would be considerably different. Many of our most cherished nonprofit institutions such as Rollins College, Florida Hospital, the Heart of Florida United Way, WMFE Channel 24 and 90.7 FM, and the Bach Festival Society might not exist, or would do so marginally, without the beneficence of philanthropy and volunteerism. As individuals and collectively as a community, our philanthropy and volunteerism represents the single most powerful voice apart from the ballot box we can have as to the future of Central Florida.

For all the devastation that was heaped upon Central Florida this past hurricane season, it seems counterintuitive that the destruction caused by nature's wrath would produce a community building energy, the likes of which modern day Central Florida has not seen before. The response of government at all levels, businesses, nonprofits, and our faith-based organizations in addressing the disaster needs of the people of Central Florida was almost symphonically conducted, never missing a beat. As a community we found more resources of energy, more talent, and more resolve to meet the immediate challenge facing Central Florida and its citizens. After billions of dollars of physical damage and incalculable impact on the people who live in Central Florida and on those who enjoy our

world-class weather and attractions, we are now better prepared and have a plan to face future natural disasters. What will it take for Central Florida to solve our lingering concerns with our public schools, transportation, population density, water quality, diversity, those in need of medical care, and our elderly? What are we waiting for Central Florida; the man-made equivalent of a category five hurricane? The lessons from Hurricanes Charley, Francis, Ivan, and Jeanne are that Central Florida governments, businesses, nonprofits, and faith-based organizations have the ability to meet these concerns, if they resolve to collaborate and have the willingness to find the resources to achieve a preferred quality of life. We need to harness the community-building energy brought by natural disaster to solve our man-made concerns. We need you, as an individual and collectively as a community, to act from your hearts. When we act, we give voice to our hearts.

As we enter into the season of giving, let your voice be heard by praying for peace. Let your voice be heard by voting in this year's election. Let your voice be heard by patronizing businesses that have a true concern for the community. Let your voice be heard by your giving and volunteering. Central Florida and the entire country are better off because philanthropy and volunteerism gives voice to our hearts. Just imagine the silence that would exist without them.