

Urban League of Greater Madison: Pleasant T. Rowland Foundation announces \$1,000,000 gift to help transform Black entrepreneurship for generations to come

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(Madison, Wis.) (Nov. 23, 2021) – The Pleasant T. Rowland Foundation today announced a \$1,000,000 gift to support the Urban League’s new Black Business Hub in South Madison.

The Black Business Hub is set to become the Madison region’s premiere Black-led enterprise center devoted to incubating, accelerating, and networking under-served entrepreneurs. The Hub will be a highly visible 81,000 square foot, 4-story building located at the corner of Park Street and Hughes Place. The building will provide a dynamic array of spaces for existing businesses and aspiring entrepreneurs including pop-up vending spaces, retail storefronts, small business offices, co-working spaces, a shared commercial kitchen, and other spaces that support innovation and entrepreneurship.

“While The Hub will be a destination that will serve the entire Madison region, it’s location in South Madison – Madison’s oldest African American enclave – is significant” said Urban League CEO, Ruben L. Anthony, Jr. “We’re confronting the risk of gentrification and showcasing a new model of inclusive economic development.”

Pleasant T. Rowland stated that, “From my own experience, I understand the power of an entrepreneurial vision to impact families and communities for generations. The disparity in access to entrepreneurial opportunity in Dane County is extreme, and unfortunately has been exacerbated by the pandemic. I am inspired by the Urban League’s vision and pleased that our investment can help bring that vision to

life.”

Data has shown that only .4% of Dane County businesses with more than one employee are Black owned. According to Anthony, “this staggering disparity has flown largely under the radar despite growing awareness of the Madison region’s extreme racial disparities in health, education, and employment.” The Urban League and partners like the Madison Black Chamber of Commerce are seeking to tackle this challenge in new and innovative ways. “If the Urban League can’t bet on these small business owners and entrepreneurs, then who will?” said Anthony. The Black Business Hub will be much more than a building. It will be a self-contained, full service ecosystem of resources devoted to incubating, accelerating, and networking Black and other under-served entrepreneurs. This place-based, Black-led system of entrepreneurial empowerment will include training, coaching, networking, and other programming that will serve hundreds of current and aspiring entrepreneurs annually. The Hub Accelerator Program has also raised funds that will be given as direct grants and partially forgivable loans to members of the Black Business Hub community.

The Black Business Hub Building and Accelerator Program is a \$25,300,000 project that has already garnered tremendously broad community support. The generous \$1,000,000 gift from the Pleasant T. Rowland Foundation is a huge step towards the Urban League’s need to raise at least \$3,000,000 in the short term to ensure the project can begin construction before the end of 2021 and be completed on time. Anthony explained that “Pleasant Rowland’s generous gift is the largest single private donation in ULGM’s history, and I believe that this generosity will inspire others in the community to follow her lead and get us to a successful groundbreaking next month.”

The Urban League is calling on other individuals, companies, and foundations to help it achieve both its immediate and future fundraising goals. If you are interested in supporting this effort, please call ULGM CEO Ruben L. Anthony, Jr., at (608) 729-1208.