

# The Columbus Dispatch

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## BUSINESS

# Thirteen Black philanthropists to know in Columbus



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The Columbus Dispatch

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In honor of Black Philanthropy Month, The Dispatch highlights 13 Black philanthropists in Columbus.

**Philanthropy:** What Black Philanthropy Month means to Columbus donors

## Larry and Donna James

Supporters of the Columbus Museum of Art, King Arts Complex, Lincoln Theatre; co-founders of the African American Leadership Academy and the Center for Healthy Families

“I’m going to miss you guys.”

That’s what Donna James said to the 62 pieces of art she and her husband, Larry, 71, managing partner at law firm Crabbe, Brown & James, donated to the Columbus Museum early this year. Featuring prominent Black artists, the collection is currently on view through Sept. 25.

But the Downtown couple said the contribution was well worth the sacrifice.

“It’s a proud moment for people of color to come in a place like this and see a breadth of opportunity that they never even knew existed,” said Donna, 65, who is managing director of business and executive advisory services firm Lardon & Associates, and chair of the Victoria’s Secret board.

“Everything we touch—it’s about creating opportunities for people to reach their aspiration, or be inspired so they do have an aspiration.”

## **Archie and Bonita Griffin**

Operators of the Archie Griffin Scholarship Fund and the Archie and Bonita Griffin Foundation Fund

Encouraged by Ohio State coach Woody Hayes to “pay it forward,” Archie Griffin, 68, of the Northeast Side, has been providing student athletes with scholarships to the university for years. The acclaimed former OSU running back and former president and CEO of the Ohio State University Alumni Association said the importance of education was instilled in him by his parents.

Griffin and his wife, Bonita, 66, also give to churches and support a variety of other central Ohio organizations, including the United Way, Kings Arts Complex and Lincoln Theatre.

## **Alex and Renée Shumate**

Supporters of YWCA Columbus, Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus Metropolitan Library, Black churches

For the Shumates, philanthropy is not just about time, talent and treasure — but also touch.

“It's fine to write a check, but I think it's more meaningful when you actually have a part in it, and have something to say about its direction,” said Renée, 57, external affairs manager at American Electric Power, who also served as board chair of YWCA Columbus.

Inspired by the organization’s mission to eliminate racism and empower women, the Gahanna couple co-chaired a significant capital campaign for the YWCA. The receiving balcony of the YWCA Columbus ballroom is named in their honor.

“We want to empower and strengthen our institutions, said Alex, 70, a senior partner at the Squire Patton Boggs law firm, "so that, beyond our lives, (they) are still having a positive impact on the community.”

## **Lawrence and Monya Funderburke**

Operators of the Lawrence Funderburke Youth Organization

Driven by his Christian faith and desire to help children, former Ohio State and NBA athlete Lawrence Funderburke, 51, founded LFYO. He and his wife, Monya, 52, serve young people,

families and communities with a variety of social, educational, nutritional and financial programs.

## **Catherine Willis**

Longtime volunteer at the Martin Luther King Branch of the Columbus Metropolitan Library and founder of Urban Strings Columbus youth orchestra

Catherine Willis has left her mark on the Martin Luther King Branch of the Columbus Library. Visitors can see her name printed on the painting of the civil rights icon that hangs inside the library. They can also see a display of African artifacts that she handpicked in Senegal.

But her real legacy lives on through the many children she has engaged and inspired.

“I always loved the library when I was a child,” said Willis, a retired school teacher who is in her 80s and lives in Delaware County. “I know that reading can just take you other places. I tried, in my teaching, to incorporate the value of the library for children and their parents. And then, they offer different services. Any kind of social problem, they have the information so that they can help you solve it. So, it is a very important place.”

## **Michael and Janelle Coleman**

Supporters of Ohio University, YWCA Columbus, KIPP Columbus, John Glenn College of Public Affairs, Columbus Museum of Art

Furthering education, arts and social justice are important to both former Columbus Mayor Michael Coleman, 67, and his wife, Janelle, 50, who works for the American Electric Power Foundation. Both longtime supporters of the Kings Arts Complex, Columbus Urban League and Lincoln Theatre, the Blacklick couple also is passionate about giving back to the Black community.

## **Dwight and Renée Smith**

Supporters of Nationwide Children’s Hospital; founders of the Thanks Be To God Foundation and the My Special Word nonprofit

The Smiths’ support of Nationwide Children’s Hospital is pretty simple: “Kids come in, and they leave feeling better,” said Dwight Smith, 65, who is a board member at the hospital, and

chairman and CEO of Sophisticated Systems technology firm.

The Lewis Center couple's love for children extends to the My Special Word nonprofit, which provides programs and digital books that stress the power of positive words.

Dwight said they also are driven by their religious faith.

"We've been blessed," he said. "We do a lot of things. I get far too much credit. (Renée) gets far too little. And, at the end of the day, we both step back and give the credit to God."

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