

Bank of America East Central Florida team led by Mannino well-connected to communities; Elevate Brevard at Family Promise looks to uplift Cocoa residents

By Ken Datzman

Bank of America has long embraced the concept of giving back to communities, whether it's mentoring, awarding neighborhood grants to nonprofit organizations, or being part of and financially supporting a coalition of partners working together to uplift the lives of people through a new initiative.

Community partnerships have been at the center of Bank of America's success working with local organizations to create economically and socially vibrant communities.

In East Central Florida, for instance, its community partners include Neighbor Up Brevard, Habitat for Humanity of Brevard, Crosswinds Youth Services, Club Esteem, Boys & Girls Club, United Way of Brevard, Junior Achievement, and Food Brings Hope, among others.

"Bank of America remains focused on advancing social justice and economic mobility through education and employment, affordable housing, and health care, for example," said Peter Mannino, Bank of America's market president for East Central Florida, which includes Brevard, Volusia, and Flagler counties.

"I live in Brevard. The work we do is close to my heart. This is my local community. We care about all the partnerships we have with the nonprofits we serve in the region."

His company's newest outreach effort is Elevate Brevard, a collaboration of community partners working closely to improve the lives of Cocoa residents by increasing access to post-secondary educational opportunities and sustainable employment.

Mannino and Jarin Eisenberg, chief operating officer at Groundswell Startups in Melbourne, chair the Leadership Circle for Elevate Brevard. The Leadership Circle is comprised of many local community leaders from the business sector, education, and the nonprofit community.

Elevate Brevard is currently under the wing of Family Promise of Brevard, a leading organization focused on ending family homelessness through community-driven collaborations.

Dr. Synthia Michelle Doaks, a longtime educator, is the director of Elevate Brevard. She earned her doctorate degree in education from UCF and previously was the community partnership school director at Endeavour Elementary in Cocoa. Dr. Doaks has an MBA degree from Webster University. Tara Pagliarini is the executive director of Family Promise of Brevard.

"Dr. Doaks and Tara have done an amazing job basically shepherding Elevate Brevard into its own organization. But it's currently under the Family Promise umbrella," said Mannino.

He added, "Through a 'collective impact model,' Elevate Brevard is designed to bring together the business community, the nonprofit community, and the education sector to figure out how they can increase the number of kids and adults pursuing post-secondary education or certificates, so they can essentially obtain a living wage and break the cycle of generational poverty. This involves getting these kids to believe that they can not only go on to college or a certification program, but also get a good job."

Launched in 2020, the partnership is part of the Florida College Access Network and utilizes a collective impact model to identify and assist households living below the Federal Poverty Level, as well as those in the ALICE population, or "working poor," as defined by United Way,



BBN photo — Adrienne B. Roth

Peter Mannino is market president for Bank of America's East Central Florida region, which includes Brevard, Volusia, and Flagler counties. His company works closely with nonprofit partners addressing economic mobility in communities and much more. He co-chairs the Leadership Circle for Elevate Brevard, a collaboration of community partners working to elevate the lives of Cocoa residents by increasing access to post-secondary educational opportunities and sustainable employment. His Leadership Circle co-chair is Jarin Eisenberg, chief operating officer at Groundswell Startups.

said Mannino. The acronym stands for "Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed." ALICE is a new way of defining and understanding the struggles of households that earn the Federal Poverty Level, but not enough to afford a bare-bones household budget. For far too many families, the cost of living outpaces what they earn.

Brevard is the 17th Florida College Access Network in the state. "Florida has these networks in place around the state where organizations come together to try to achieve the same goals of increasing post-secondary education or certifications. They were looking for a partner to form their next network in Brevard. And Tara (Pagliarini), being the outstanding leader she is at Family Promise, stepped up last year to really get this project up and running," said Mannino.

The Florida College Access Network "sparks fresh thinking, showcases actionable ideas, and partners with communities" working to improve educational achievement for all Floridians, especially first-generation college students, low-income students, adult learners, and other students outside of the mold of the "traditional" college student.

Elevate Brevard is addressing the barriers residents face while trying to achieve education or training beyond

high school, he said. The objective of this cross-sector group is to identify ways to better partner in order to increase the number of Brevard residents with a college degree or an industry-recognized credential. "We're working to close employer skill gaps and elevate families out of poverty," said Mannino.

The plan is to start in the Cocoa community and eventually roll out strategies for all of Brevard County. Family Promise stepped forward to serve as the "backbone organization" for this collaborative effort.

"Cocoa High School is the model to start this project," he said. "A lot of organizations are seeing great success at Cocoa High. Initially, we are focused on increasing the rate of FAFSA applications that are completed. Every single year, millions of dollars are left on the table because students who are graduating from high school do not fill out the federal form for free student aid." The Free Application for Federal Student Aid is available to all students.

"FAFSA is only the first step. We are focusing on how to integrate more families into the process and increase graduation rates. If the model proves to be successful at

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Cocoa High School, we could see it expanding into other parts of the county that need the same kind of assistance,” said Mannino.

This is just one example of Bank of America’s hands-on involvement and commitment working with partners to better communities. Mannino’s company is also supporting the Melbourne Regional Chamber’s new Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force. Bank of America Merrill Lynch is a “Champion Sponsor” of the Task Force along with Shelter Mortgage Florida and Natasha Cartagena Spencer of Shelter Mortgage Co. in Melbourne.

Jamara Wilson is the chairwoman of the DEI Task Force. She runs Progressive Cleaning. The DEI Task Force was born out of an “identifiable need to create professional equity for all businesses across the Space Coast.” The DEI Task Force exists to be a “facilitator and connector” of the best resources for businesses to utilize when seeking to understand diversity, equity, and inclusion. Their value proposition is to become a focal point for community conversations around DEI and provide business leaders with access to information and expertise that will help them build more economically and socially inclusive partnerships and practices.

“We have formed an incredibly diverse Task Force at the Melbourne Regional Chamber,” said Mannino, who is one of the 11 members of the DEI Task Force. “We have developed a Professional Equity Sponsorship Program. The goal of the program is to provide potential Melbourne Regional Chamber partners in underserved communities or demographics the opportunity to join the Chamber and build their personal and professional brand equity through resources, financial assistance, and engaging programming exposure, thus diversifying and strengthening our partner base. We are going deep. We are reaching out trying to have a lasting impact on Brevard County. Bank of America is a proud sponsor of this initiative along with other great partners in the area.”

Recently, Bank of America selected two students from the East Central Florida region for its summer internship program. Dozens of high school students apply for the paid summer internship experience with a nonprofit, topped off by a one-week trip to Washington, D.C., where they “collaborate, gain leadership training, and really see what it means to be a community-minded young person, and more importantly, how to take that experience into the future,” said Mannino.

He said a local panel selects the applicants for Bank of America’s “Student Leaders” program. “We will be announcing the two Student Leaders within the next couple of months,” he said.

Since 2014, the Student Leaders program has been a part of Bank of America’s ongoing commitment to youth employment and economic mobility. Bank of America annually connects more than 300 community-minded high school juniors and seniors from nearly 100 communities to employment, skill development, and service.

“The students come from many diverse backgrounds, but all are united by their drive of community,” said Mannino.

Without access to career skill-building opportunities like the Student Leaders program, many young people may be left behind in a fast-changing job market.

Additionally, in 2021 Bank of America awarded a \$50,000 grant to the Neighborhood Center of West Volusia. It was named Bank of America’s East Central Florida region “Neighborhood Champion” for its work to prevent homelessness and provide shelter to needy people in Volusia County. The bank gave the organization the grant to increase “rapid rehousing” throughout the community.

“The Neighborhood Center of West Volusia provides

services to people who are really having a tough time in life, dealing with homelessness and hunger and trying to get back on their feet. We have a lot of great organizations in Brevard that do similar work. We will be looking to award that grant again in 2022,” said Mannino.

As a Bank of America Neighborhood Champion, the Neighborhood Center of West Volusia will also participate in leadership training delivered by experts in the nonprofit sector on topics like human capital management and increasing financial sustainability.

The Neighborhood Center of West Volusia has been providing services to the community for more than 50 years. The agency’s services include several programs that lead to economic and social mobility, including food pantries, direct financial assistance for rent and utility payments, and life-skills training.

Since 2016, Bank of America, in the East Central Florida region, has funded \$1.7 million in grants and matching gifts, advancing racial equality and economic opportunity and addressing needs brought on by the pandemic. Bank of America Charitable Foundation provided grants and matching gifts on behalf of employees.

Total contributions donated to local nonprofits and community needs by East Central Florida employees totaled \$358,000, during the same time period. A portion of this amount was matched by the Bank of America Charitable Foundation.

Twenty-three thousand employee volunteer hours were contributed locally as part of Bank of America’s annual goal of giving 2 million volunteer hours across the company.

“We are also growing our banking presence here,” said Mannino. “One of my jobs as market president is to make sure we are delivering all of our lines of business to customers that need our services. The greatest pleasure from this job is delivering the capabilities of a global organization from a team that has deep roots here.”

He added, “We have a tremendous amount of respect for local competitors, but I always like to point out that the roughly 400 colleagues throughout our three-county region all live in local communities and many have generational roots. Many of the colleagues grew up in their respective communities. They are involved as volunteers in their communities. I am very proud of that.”

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