

The Miami Times

St. Thomas law school celebrates major donation

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June 4, 2004

The St. Thomas University Benjamin L. Crump College of Law is benefiting from restaurant chain Denny's \$3.3 million pledge to support 14 institutions across the country with its new Nationwide Community Alliance.



Denny's presented a \$500,000 gift to St. Thomas University's Benjamin Crump College of Law after a press conference at the school last week. (Courtesy of Denny's)

Besides St. Thomas University (STU), other beneficiaries include the NAACP and National Urban League, as well as the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Association on Corporate Responsibility, League of Latin American Citizens, National Action Network, and U.S. Hispanic

Leadership Institute, among others.

This philanthropic effort is part of Denny's mission to collaborate with community groups to recognize civil rights leaders and support efforts that align with the company's five pillars: business diversity, human and civil rights, education, community involvement, and cultivating an inclusive leadership pipeline.

'After George Floyd, we've seen corporations

make commitments only to find that less than 20% of those companies honor those commitments," said NAACP President Derrick Johnson. "We must as a society move beyond the 'otherizing' of our neighbors in this country to ensure we are better. Therefore, I commend Denny's for standing true to their commitment (and) not walking away. We must all redouble our efforts to ensure that corporate behavior is accountable to all of us.'"

At an STU press conference announcing the alliance last week, Denny's presented a \$500,000 gift to the university's Benjamin L. Crump College of Law, renamed in 2023 after civil rights and personal injury lawyer Ben Crump. The gift will be used to provide scholarships to law school students.



Attorney Ben Crump speaks inside a courtroom inside St. Thomas University's School of Law at a ceremony renaming the school in his honor last year. (stu.edu)

"A portion of (our) investment is an endowment of a \$500,000 scholarship fund that we are donating to the St. Thomas University Benjamin L. Crump College of Law," said Brenda Lauderback, Denny's board chair. "This will allow this esteemed institution, which is among the most diverse law schools in the country, to continue its mission. It will also prepare the next generation of great legal minds in their fight for equality and inclusion and advocate for the leaders in their communities."

"We are honored to collaborate with leaders in this new alliance and are grateful to Denny's for the scholarship support, which will help educate the social justice leaders of tomorrow, keeping the mission of equity and justice alive for decades to come," said Crump.

STU's law school, which is comprised of 75% Black and Hispanic students, recently earned the second-highest bar passage rate in the state.

The \$3.3 million, to be dispersed over five years, will help deploy resources for initiatives led by the 14 organizations and bring Denny's existing Mobile Relief Diner to more communities. The Mobile Relief Diner is a fully functional kitchen on wheels that travels across the nation to serve hot meals in underserved neighborhoods and help communities recover after natural disasters.

"Denny's is continuing to allocate significant resources to our partners in supporting their organizations to deploy global initiatives on the ground, in cities and towns across the nation," said Lauderback. "We are on a mission to bring unity to the communities we serve."

According to the corporation, Denny's has served approximately 75,000 meals through its Mobile Relief Diner effort since 2017.

"We appreciate Denny's reaching out to help communities during times of disaster," said Congresswoman Frederica Wilson last week, recalling when representatives from the corporation offered to serve hot meals to her district after Hurricane Ian two years ago.

"I said, 'It really didn't hit us as hard as it hit Central Florida. I had the Denny's truck meet me (in Orlando) and the people stood in line for hours and days as Denny's fed them,'" she continued. "I was actually out there flipping pancakes and it wasn't even my District. So, thank you so much for uplifting Miami Gardens, Miami-Dade County ... and especially the Ben Crump STU School of Law."



A team of Denny's workers prepare hot breakfast inside of the company's Mobile Relief Diner, which travels across the country offering meals in communities recovering from natural disasters. (shortyawards.com)

It is unclear how much of the \$3.3 million is designated for South Florida or when the Mobile Relief Diner will travel to Florida cities.

"President Armstrong and I often talk about building bridges.... One of the tenants in building the bridges for the Ben Crump Center for Social Justice is having representation in the C Suite," said Crump, praising Denny's commitment to corporate social responsibility. "If we have investments in diversity, equity and inclusion, it not only makes the community better, but it makes our corporations better."