

A Family Commitment

An Interview with Arthur Blank,
The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation



Arthur Blank

EDITORS' NOTE Arthur Blank co-founded The Home Depot in 1978 and retired from the company as Co-Chairman in 2001. Through the foundation and his family's personal giving, Blank has granted more than \$250 million to various charitable organizations.

ORGANIZATION BRIEF

The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation (<http://blankfoundation.org>) was formed in 1995 and promotes innovative solutions to improve the lives of youth and their families, seeking results that move communities beyond what seems possible today. The foundation invests in early childhood development, education, green space, and the arts, and leads giving programs for each of the Blank Family of Businesses, including the Atlanta Falcons.

Would you highlight your vision in starting The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation and the key mission of your work?

Given the good fortune I've had in business through the success of The Home Depot, I wanted to give back to society in a tangible way. My second goal has been to share the joy of philanthropy with my children. Through their work on the board of the foundation, they are able to make a difference in areas they care about. In the process, they're learning about best practices in philanthropy, and they are working together on important public issues. I also have three younger children. Through the family foundation, we're giving them opportunities to volunteer and to learn about helping others. They will also become trustees and understand the family's commitment to making a difference.

How do you focus your efforts at the foundation and would you highlight some of the key initiatives?

We decided to focus the majority of our investments on the city of Atlanta where we live. We are able to address problems that we see every day and we can work with nonprofit partners who we know and trust. We also decided to build our programs around the areas where we have the most personal passion.

That led us to education and youth development, the arts, and the environment. Within each of those interest areas, we have tried to be very specific about what we are able to accomplish and which partners have the most capacity to make significant change. Examples of initiatives where we have offered significant leadership include the Atlanta BeltLine, prevention of childhood obesity through the work of our Atlanta Falcons Youth Foundation, and early childhood education. We want to make a difference in the lives of individuals through direct grants, and at the same time, help change public policy and systems so we can make lasting change.

How critical is it to put metrics in place to track the impact of your philanthropic efforts?



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When we make investments, we work with our grant partners to decide how we're going to know if we've been successful. It is challenging, but as in any business, it's critical. In our philanthropic work, it's not just about numbers – we get to know our grantees and the people they serve. Our staff and trustees make site visits, so we can see what's happening on the ground. We also try to find innovative ways to measure results. For example, in our Falcons Fitness Zones, where we work to encourage kids to be more active, we've given many of them wristwatches that measure the number of minutes they are moving each day. Not only can our partners at the YMCA and Boys & Girls Clubs see what the kids are doing, but the kids themselves get motivated when they can see it themselves. ●



Penny McPhee

The Atlanta BeltLine

By Penny McPhee,
President and Trustee,
The Arthur M. Blank
Family Foundation

THE ATLANTA BELTLINE provides a network of public parks, multiuse trails, and transit along a historic 22-mile railroad corridor circling downtown and

connecting 45 neighborhoods. It's the most comprehensive economic development effort ever undertaken in the City of Atlanta. Compared to other cities, Atlanta has a shortage of public green space; our trustees understood immediately that the new parks and trails created by the BeltLine would form an Emerald Necklace around Atlanta that would enhance the quality of life. The Blank Foundation was one of the first organizations to recognize the promise of the BeltLine. Our \$5-million investment was one of the largest and earliest private contributions. Though the BeltLine is still in the early stages of development, four new parks and more than 10 miles of trail are already open.

While increasing access to parks and green space is the most obvious benefit of this program, our BeltLine investments also support our commitment to youth fitness and the prevention of childhood obesity. Other areas that will be affected by the BeltLine include clean air, art in public places, and community development. Transit on the BeltLine will allow real school choice for students all over the city – something that today is only wishful thinking because of the lack of good public transportation.

The Atlanta BeltLine Partnership has raised nearly \$36 million toward its goal of \$60 million in private funds. Private support is critical to allowing the project to move at a vigorous pace so we can start enjoying the BeltLine amenities right away. It's a 30-year project, but a lot of progress has already been made. For national foundations, the Atlanta BeltLine is an opportunity to invest in a state-of-the-art development project that will showcase park design, sustainability, health, affordable housing, and 21st century transit. Given the transformational public health benefits, it's also a special opportunity for foundations focused on health and for health insurance companies eager to promote wellness and bring down medical costs. ●