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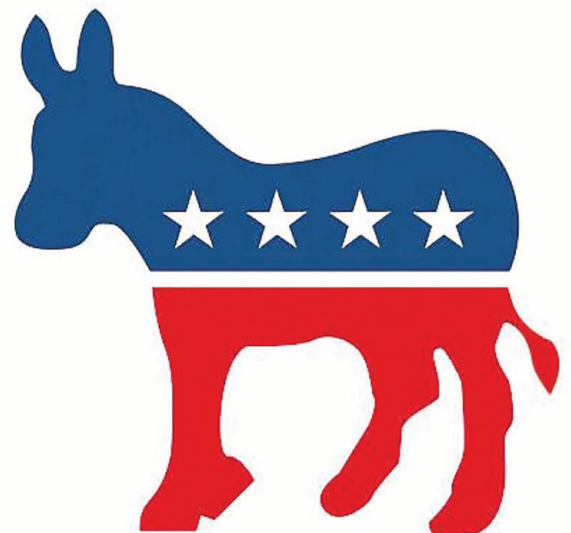
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MORE *than* BASKETBALL....



RESIDENTS OF INGLEWOOD AND SOUTH L.A. STAND TO SCORE WITH STEVE BALLMER, CHAIRMAN OF THE CLIPPERS, THE NBA'S MOST PHILANTHROPIC TEAM, AS THEIR NEIGHBOR



Dianne Lugo
Staff Writer

When Steve and Connie Ballmer plunked down \$2 billion to buy the Los Angeles Clippers, they were doing more than rescuing an underperforming NBA franchise from controversy and disarray.

The Ballmers were embracing Los Angeles as a community. And now, as they seek to relocate one of the league's top teams to a new 18,500-seat arena in Inglewood, it's becoming clear just who has benefitted the most from that embrace – children and communities of color, especially African Americans.

Since purchasing the team in 2014, the Ballmers have brought their own brand of generosity to town, investing heavily in an array of nonprofits and programs to ensure the next generation of low-income residents have a better shot at the American Dream.

The results have been as transformative as a six-player trade.

Thanks to the Ballmers' giving, Los Angeles police are now walking beats and coaching youth sports in several inner-city neighborhoods; crime at a South Los Angeles park has disappeared; and the Los Angeles Unified School District is remaking its behemoth bureaucracy.

Juvenile offenders are now given a second chance to avoid jail through social programs; tens of thousands of school kids can see the classroom board for the first time; and kids can play pick-up games on hundreds of public basketball courts with pro-caliber backboards and gleaming new surfaces.

These outcomes and other high-impact funding have turned heads in the nonprofit world and earned the Ballmers praise from Inside Philanthropy as the "one of the largest funders of anti-poverty work in the country."

Angelenos are just now starting to take notice. That's because, unlike Steve's YouTube-worthy courtside theatrics, the former Microsoft CEO and his civic-spirited wife have approached their philanthropic endeavors with a strategic humility.

In neighborly terms, they're not the kind of folks that show up with a casserole for the pot luck and then take the leftovers home. Rather, they're the type that arranges for the delivery of a five-star buffet and then slips out the back, happy to let everyone else

enjoy the feast.

Now with plans to move their team a short walk from L.A.'s new NFL Stadium, the Ballmers are poised to become a bit more public as they do the same for Inglewood.

As part of the proposed arena development, the Clippers will negotiate a Community Benefits Agreement that will outline additional civic contributions and support for residents beyond the economic boom of construction and service jobs that come with a new sports arena.

Whatever those contributions wind up being, Inglewood residents will learn what communities in South, Central and East Los Angeles already know: In philanthropy, as in basketball, the Ballmers are all-in.

If there was any doubt, it was swept away as soon as the Ballmers took over the team in 2014. They inherited an understaffed front office, a perennial underachiever on the court and a foundation that shared office space but otherwise was starved for cash.

All that changed – dramatically – when the Ballmers arrived. They beefed up the front office into the one of the biggest and most astute in the league, brought new excitement to the court and, with Connie serving on the revamped L.A. Clippers Foundation board, elevated the nonprofit's game.

Steve increased the team's cash contribution to the Foundation from zilch to \$3 million a year. Now, five years later, the franchise's nonprofit arm donates much more than that of any other Southern California sports team – and more than three times than its Staples Center rivals, the Los Angeles Lakers.

According to the most recent disclosure forms, the Clippers spent \$3.5 million on local programs and grants in 2017, compared with \$1.9 million by the Los Angeles Kings Care Foundation, \$1.7 million by the Dodgers and \$964,175 by the Angels of Anaheim.

The Lakers, who left Inglewood for Staples Center in 2000, spent \$695,458 – in sixth place behind the LA Galaxy (\$735,314) but ahead of the Anaheim Ducks (\$543,014).

The L.A. Clippers Foundation's new financial firepower has translated into bigger impact and better programming throughout targeted communities, said Denise Booth, the team's Vice President of Community Relations & Player Programs.

"It's a new level of resources and support that allows us to fund much larger commitments to other organizations," said Booth.

The results have been impressive.

“
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”

Besides its trademark Jr. Clippers program – which provides uniforms and other assistance to city rec center and youth basketball leagues – the Foundation co-sponsored its first “Scifest SoCal,” a two-day event where at least 15,000 local students learned about science, math and technology from leading professionals in the field.

But the Foundation’s most impressive inroads of late have been into local classrooms and the public basketball courts that are the hub of activity for African American youth.

Double-teaming with the nonprofit Vision to Learn, the L.A. Clippers Foundation has committed \$3 million to screen and provide free glasses to public school students whose families can’t afford eye care.

So far, the program has served 12,000 students in the Inglewood Unified School District, 80,000 students in Long Beach and is now working its way through 600,000 pupils in Los Angeles Unified, the nation’s second-largest school district.

Halfway through that task, the Foundation already has provided 26,230 pairs of glasses to LAUSD students, mostly Hispanics, who otherwise might have fallen behind or risked misdiagnosis as learning disabled because of their poor eyesight. They also are promised new prescriptions as needed through the 12th grade.

The reenergized L.A. Clippers Foundation also is scoring big with its ambitious \$10 million program to resurface all of the Los Angeles Dept. of Recreation and Parks public basketball courts.

The project sprang from a plea by Mayor Eric Garcetti for the Clippers to consider fixing some of the most neglected rec courts – those with broken backboards, missing nets or warped floors – before the 2028 Summer Olympics.

Some? We’ll do them all, Ballmer said.

The result: The Clippers Community Courts program, which in just a year has resurfaced 189 out of 346 L.A. public courts. Those located indoors now bear customized center logos featuring a Clippers emblem and the name of the park.

In addition to the \$10 million city parks effort, the Clippers Community Courts program also extends the same treatment to selected school playgrounds, such as the one unveiled in January at Inglewood’s Crozier Middle School.

Gillian Zucker, the team’s President of Business Operations, made it clear there’s more in store while speaking at the unveiling of the court, located a short distance from the proposed Clippers Arena site.

“I think you know we feel pretty strongly about your city and it’s because we intend, just a few short years from now, that this will be our home too,” Zucker said to an assemblage that included Clippers players, students, community members and Inglewood Mayor James T. Butts.

“So we’re very proud that this is the very first of what we hope will be many Clippers Community Courts here in Inglewood,” said Zucker.

Although better known, the L.A. Clippers Foundation is only one of the vehicles the Ballmers are using to give back to minority communities.

Their more powerful and far-reaching one is the recently formed Ballmer Group, a private entity that pursues funding opportunities nationwide, as well as in the three urban areas where the Ballmers have personal ties – Detroit, where Steve grew up; Seattle, where the couple lives; and Los Angeles.

The fund’s activity represents the fullest expression of the couple’s philanthropic strategy and approach.



Guided by analytics and loads of data, the fund seeks to create large-scale impact by working with governments and systems, as well as individual programs or organizations.

In other words, the Ballmers are placing big-stake bets that either significantly scale-up worthwhile efforts or create more extensive networks aimed at breaking the structural barriers that keep many people of color, including African Americans, trapped in poverty and despair.

A look at the Ballmer Group’s local program shows how it works on the ground.

In a little more than two years, the fund has donated over \$100 million to 60 Los Angeles-area organizations that are working for change in the areas of education, youth development programs, criminal justice reform, job training, violence prevention and trauma intervention.

Nina Revoyr, Executive Director of the fund’s L.A. office, said that as in all of their philanthropic ventures, the Ballmers make their donations based on hard data.

“We’ve looked at third-grade reading scores, percentage of families below the federal poverty level, unemployment rates, graduation rates, single parent household rates, uninsured child rates, unemployment rates, incarceration rates, unintended pregnancies, access to healthy foods,” she said.

Once the Ballmers identified the issues and communities of most concern, they partnered with well-known nonprofits or directly with government units to push macro change.

Hence, the Ballmer Group joined the Weingart

Foundation in paying \$15 million for the recruitment and hiring of doctors at the new Martin Luther King Jr./Drew Medical Center so that South Los Angeles residents receive top-quality health care.

The Ballmer Group also kicked in \$16.5 million to support the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools, a collaborative effort that operates LAUSD campuses in high-need areas, including South L.A. and Watts.

And it gave a combined \$2 million to the Los Angeles Police Department – \$1.5 million to augment community policing efforts in South Los Angeles and \$500,000 to help the department recruit more black, Asian-Pacific Islander and female officers.

The community policing money, which the Ballmers contributed at the request of Los Angeles City Councilmembers Marqueece Harris-Dawson and Curren D. Price, Jr., has helped build bridges between the LAPD and residents living around crime-plagued Harvard and South parks.

“Because it allows police to engage the community in a partnership, and not in a punitive way, it shifts the dynamic,” said Revoyr. “People trust police more and there’s a reduction in crime. At Harvard Park, we went from several murders in and around the park to none in the first year of the program and the community has been able to reclaim the park.”

The Ballmers are also supporting more complex and innovative approaches to long-term problems.

They contributed \$3 million towards SLATE-Z, an initiative that pulls together 50 public and private organizations to train and employ 10,000 South Los Angeles residents in living-wage jobs.

The effort, which is being coordinated through L.A. Trade Tech, targets community members living in a federally designated “promise zone” that is roughly five miles wide, between Central Avenue and Crenshaw Boulevard.

In step with Los Angeles County’s efforts at criminal justice reform, the Ballmers also have given a total of \$2.25 million to local and state nonprofits that address the over-incarceration of predominantly black youth and men.

These efforts, coordinated through organizations such as the Liberty Hill Foundation and the Anti-Recidivism Coalition, power programs to divert juvenile offenders into social-service programs instead of jail, as well as programs that connect those being released from prison to housing, jobs and even college classes.

Revoyr says Inglewood has always been on the Ballmers’ radar, even before they thought about relocating the team.

“It is safe to say we are actively exploring opportunities for meaningful contributions in the Inglewood community related to children and youth, education and educational supports,” she said.

The fund also is looking at ways to make a difference in the San Gabriel Valley, Long Beach and the Antelope Valley, where there have been highly publicized deaths of foster children.

The aim is always the same: Change the world so that even the poorest kid has the chance to become the next Steve Ballmer.

“Steve and Connie believe that the kid who grows up in Watts and Westmont should have just as much opportunity as a kid that grows up in Beverly Hills,” said Revoyr.

“Now people assume that children, just by virtue of their zip code, are not going to succeed. Steve and Connie are working hard to make sure those kids have a chance to succeed as much as anyone else.”



Left: Steve and Connie Ballmer at community event; Right: Steve Ballmer high-fiving kids at a community program supported by The Ballmer Group.