

PRESS RELEASE
SEPTEMBER 23, 2020
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Pine Bluff Educational Endowment, Inc. Makes Presentation to Simmons First Foundation

On behalf of its Board of Directors, Mac Bellingrath, President, Pine Bluff Educational Endowment, Inc. (PBEE), presented a \$500,000 grant to Simmons First Foundation on September 23, 2020, to benefit senior high school students in Jefferson County. The Generator, an innovation hub, and an initiative of Go Forward Pine Bluff, will use the earnings from the grant to support after-school programs to educate students on job readiness, bridge and career-focused curriculum such as coding, digital literacy, social media and other career pathed subjects, as well as entrepreneurship courses.

PBEE was formed in 1999 by local leadership to help provide a private school option for grades 9 through 12 that was not available at that time through a civic-Catholic partnership. The school was to be operated by St. Joseph Catholic Church and was to accept students without any preference for denomination or religious affiliation, all at the same tuition rate. Land was acquired for the school on West 73rd and groundbreaking was in October 1999. The property was sold in June to Friendship Education Foundation.

PBEE is dissolving and will dedicate the entirety of its remaining assets after dissolution costs to support local students. Bellingrath states, "...the directors want to keep within their original mission; thus want to enhance the educational experience of local senior high school students."

The \$500,000 grant will be invested by Simmons First Foundation and the earnings on the investment will be used by The Generator.

Mildred Franco, executive director, The Generator, "is delighted and honored that The Generator will be the beneficiary of the investment proceeds and will honor the wishes of PBEE by providing opportunities for local students that are not provided, or will enhance, those in the schools. The program aims to orient students with the skills necessary to compete in the 21st century in coding and STEM, and explore entrepreneurship."

The Simmons First Foundation was established in 2013 to help Simmons Bank give back to the communities that have been so vital to its continuing growth and success. Former Simmons Bank CEO Tommy May heads up the foundation and, along with Mary Pringos a former Simmons Bank director guides it in its mission to build stronger and more vibrant communities for the future. First and foremost, the foundation aims to improve the lives of children through programs that enhance education and healthcare. The foundation has also provided the seed money for "Go Forward Pine Bluff," a community renewal program that focuses on economic development, infrastructure and government, education, and quality of life. Foundation funding is provided by an endowment established by Simmons Bank.

The Generator is an innovation hub powered by Go Forward Pine Bluff (GFPB), one of the economic development initiatives of the GFPB plan. The purpose of The Generator is to generate economic growth through programs, partnerships, and technology. The Generator aims to empower makers, dreamers, and doers that generate a thriving and inclusive community by providing space, tools, and programs to encourage innovation and entrepreneurship.

Go Forward Pine Bluff (GFPB) started as a grassroots effort of a group of 100 diverse volunteers – age, race, gender, economic stature – who spent 2016 developing a strategic plan to grow the tax base of our community based on four pillars: Economic Development, Education, Government and Infrastructure, and Quality of Life. The GFPB Plan is funded by a 7-year 5/8th cent sales tax passed overwhelmingly by 70% of the voters, business investments, private donations, and grants. A public-private partnership was formed with the City of Pine Bluff to ensure the funding is utilized appropriately to implement the 27 initiatives in the plan. GFPB seeks to increase the revenues of the city, retain population, relocate population, and attract tourism and consumers. Our goal is to establish the necessary working relationships to move Pine Bluff forward. Learn more at www.goforwardpb.org.

For more information, contact Mac Bellingrath, 870.692.2600, Mary Pringos, 870.489.5867, or Mildred Franco, 870.939.6898.

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