

GUEST COLUMNISTS

Hospitality leaders turn attention to Eatonville

Within sight of Central Florida's popular tourist destinations are neighborhoods that deserve more.

Many of them are distressed, underserved places where desperation exists instead of hope. They are forgotten places, where talk of the future rarely means going to college but rather how to get the next meal on the table or pay this month's bills.

It does not have to be like this, but we cannot do it all alone. We need your support, and your communities need you.

When the Harris Rosen Foundation first started the Tangelo Park Program in Orlando 29 years ago, residents from the Tangelo Park neighborhood were committed to end their community's infiltration by drug dealers — a recurring topic in the media. This was not how the Tangelo Park community wanted to be defined.

Today, the Tangelo Park Program provides comprehensive educational opportunities with free preschool, parenting classes and full college or vocational school scholarships — including free tuition and books, and room and board — for everyone eligible in the community. The turnaround has been quite remarkable.

Close to 100% of Tangelo Park high school students graduate, and grades have risen dramatically while crime rates have declined by 80%. And now Tangelo Park students are successfully attending college with great hope for the future.

The success of the Tangelo Park Program has encouraged a second Harris Rosen Foundation community initiative in another underserved neighborhood, the Parramore community in downtown Orlando. The Parramore neighborhood is approximately five times larger than Tangelo Park and has demonstrated an equal promise of success.

At this very moment the private sector is desperate to find qualified individuals to fill voids in their operations. What better way to fill the voids than to create a Tangelo Park Program in every underserved community in Florida and throughout America, giving our youngsters the skills they will need to succeed and thrive?

The Travel + Leisure Co. last year joined the effort to change America, one community at a time. As a partner in the hospitality industry, Travel + Leisure Co., working with the Orange County Public Schools, supports this life-changing program for the residents living in the historic Eatonville community.

The next generation of Eatonville neighbors can now achieve their academic and professional aspirations as the Travel + Leisure Charitable Foundation will offer its first scholarships to high school graduates this spring.

Through the years, the Rosen team has repeatedly demonstrated to other community leaders and businesses throughout the nation that the Tangelo Park model is not only affordable but highly effective. Simply speaking, it is an approach that eliminates educational and financial inequity.

One would think it would be an easy sell, but sadly it has proved not to be. There are dozens of diverse neighborhoods remaining to be adopted in Central Florida and thousands more across America.

Travel + Leisure Co. represents the first corporate partner to join the movement. We ask everyone to bring awareness of this mission to your employer. Get involved.

Companies, we ask you to join us and adopt a neighborhood in need. We are wasting millions of minds in America, something we can no longer afford to do.

Harris Rosen is president and COO of Rosen Hotels & Resorts and of The Harris Rosen Foundation. Michael Brown is president and CEO of Travel + Leisure Co.

