



# NEWS

## A LEADER'S REFLECTIONS

*Inside ...*

**The Many Faces of Nubian Square  
Passion Projects & Partnerships**



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The numbers represent the scale of trust donors have placed in this institution, and the power of translating philanthropic intent into impact.

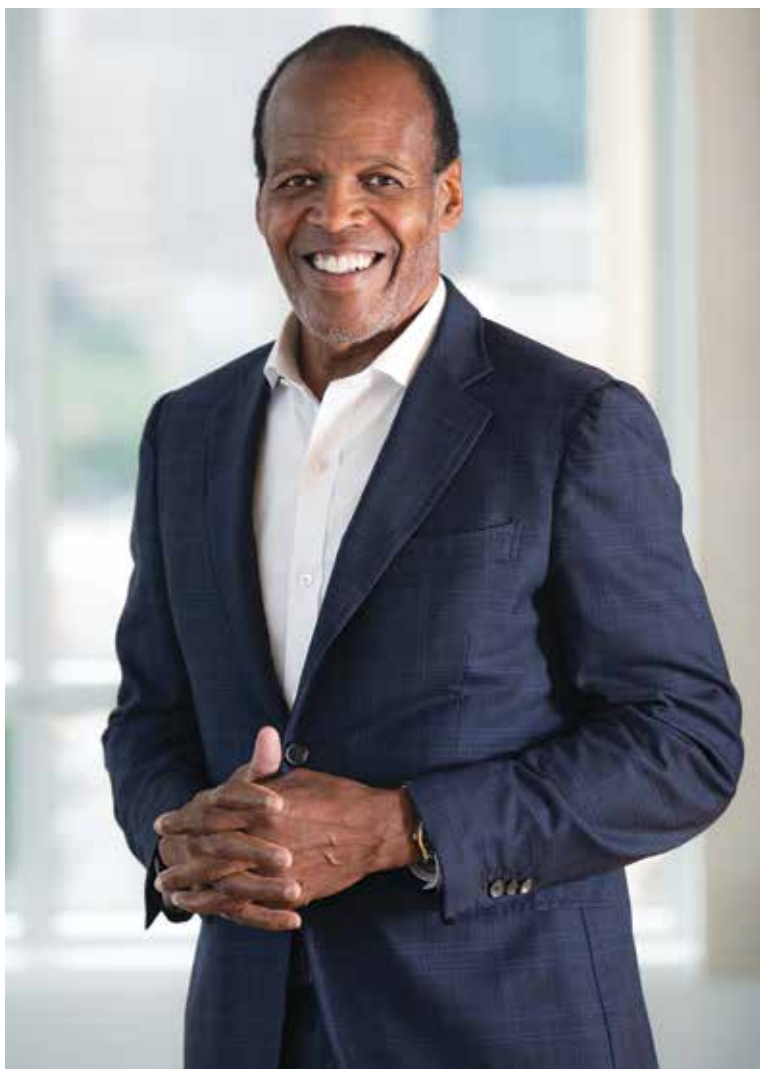


Photo: Richard Howard

## A LEADER'S REFLECTIONS

**W**hen I arrived at the Boston Foundation in May 2021, I said I believed TBF could help translate moral urgency into civic action. I still believe that. What I did not fully anticipate was how much this institution would teach me. Our nonprofit partners, the communities we serve, our staff, our passionate donors—all changed how I listen. What a gift.

### What we built together

Five years ago, TBF's assets stood at roughly \$1.6 billion. Today they stand at \$2.7 billion. When I arrived, we were directing around \$160 million a year into the community. This year, we are on track to receive \$512 million in total contributions and disburse \$392 million in grants to the communities we serve.

On the cover:  
Interview with  
*Boston Globe* in  
Nubian Square.  
Photo:  
Todd Sperry

These numbers represent the scale of trust donors have placed in this institution, and the power of translating philanthropic intent into impact. To achieve that impact, TBF took action—both inward and outward facing—toward ambitious goals over the last five years:

- We listened and learned from community, built trust, and partnered more closely with grassroots and nonprofit leaders.
- We strengthened the partnership among the Board, staff, donors, and community, building the alignment and shared ambition needed to move TBF forward.
- We reinforced our equity funds, which are in a magnificent place, growing and thriving and serving the AAPI, Latino, and LGBTQ+ communities.
- We thought and iterated how we frame our work to optimize the complex interconnectedness and many levers working together in community ecosystems—of which TBF is one part.
- We created the Greater Boston Partnership to Close the Racial Wealth Gap, which is approaching its initial \$25 million goal and on track to generate \$170 million in home equity for more than 700 first-time homebuyers.
- We established a learning and measurement function, one of the first at a community foundation, which has helped us make great strides in how we think about and measure impact.
- We rebranded and launched a marketing team.
- We continued to strengthen our research capacity, especially through Boston Indicators, a powerhouse of fact-finding, truth-seeking, and thought leadership at TBF.
- We launched a climate initiative.
- We invested in the technology infrastructure this institution needs for the next decade, including a deliberate and ongoing conversation about how to use AI for good while staying true to our values.
- And, as the federal government compounded its assault on democratic rights and freedoms, seeking to erase the cultural, social, and human identities of those we serve while starving vulnerable communities of life-sustaining resources, we launched Meeting the Moment in two timely phases: Sustaining Families ensured that hungry residents could get food and nourishment following the 2025 SNAP cuts; Supporting Our Immigrant Neighbors stood with and supported immigrant communities and the organizations that serve and protect them amid federal threats, policy changes, and cruelty.

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Lee Pelton with the Shifting Power and Advancing Justice movement leaders in spring 2024.

Photo: Craig Bailey

These accomplishments are huge, and there are hundreds more. I am immensely proud to have been at the drawing board on some of these; an advisor to others; and a champion, supporter, or sounding board for many more. That said, none of this happened simply because of me. It happened because our staff showed up every day, listened and

thought deeply about where and how TBF could make a difference. And they did all that in close partnership with community leaders, donors, policymakers, and others.

### Equity as a throughline

Moral urgency and institutional ambition are not in tension. The bigger and stronger TBF becomes, the greater its obligation to use its power in service of those who need it most and to remove structural inequities that have been with us far too long. Fighting for closing the racial wealth gap, for housing affordability, civic participation, immigrant rights—these examples are not isolated. They are all instances of challenging the same underlying systemic flaws. I am proud that TBF has had the courage to take on the big issues, to name them, and to act.

### A closing thought

This institution has served Greater Boston for more than 110 years. Its legacy does not belong to any single leader. It belongs to every staff member who has wrestled with a hard grantmaking decision, stayed late to support a community partner in crisis, or found a way to do more with our resources in service of the people who count on us. It belongs to every nonprofit organization that has labored to bend the arc of history toward justice, to all the donors whose generosity has enabled our work, and to the advocates and policymakers who have helped codify progress and stamp it into our daily life.

TBF is not recruiting a new CEO to fix a broken organization but to lead a thriving one. This institution is not in transition. It is in motion. I do believe that the best chapters of this Foundation's story are still ahead. You—as a participant in Greater Boston's civic life—will help write those chapters, and I can't wait to see what you put on those pages.

Thank you. From the very bottom of my heart, thank you.

## REIMAGINING NUBIAN

**TBF** is exploring a place-focused approach to amplify the impact of our grants, investments, and partnerships in areas where overlap can be mutually reinforcing. For instance, in Nubian Square—the historic commercial and cultural heart of Black Boston—we are zooming in on education, culture, and business. These are deeply entwined, as can be seen in our education-to-career pathways work, with multiple partners uniting to ready students for college, further training, or the workforce upon graduation. TBF served as guarantor on investments to help move Franklin Cummings Tech from the South End to Nubian Square and, down the street at Roxbury Community College, directed a significant grant to help launch the Center for Economic and Social Justice. At the same time, we have supported and invested in cultural centers like Jean Appolon Expressions dance studio and the Community Music Center, community-based organizations like The Base, and local businesses that are or will become key employers and channels for wealth building, like Jazz Urbane Café. If you haven't been to the former Dudley Square in a while, come see a renaissance in the works.

Nubian Square is home to thriving small businesses like Pure Green, the brand-new Franklin Cummings Tech campus, and the revitalized Bruce C. Bolling Municipal Building.



Photo: Olivia Moon



Photo: MikeMejia / Mayors Office



Photo: Olivia Moon

## MANY FACES OF NUBIAN SQUARE



## JAZZ URBANE CAFÉ: Anchoring the Neighborhood



Photo: Olivia Moon

The Jazz Urbane Café is a new hub for music, arts, food, and culture opening soon in Boston's Nubian Square. The brainchild of Boston-educated jazz great Bill Banfield, the project has been many years in the making, but as Banfield told GBH's *Culture Show* recently, its deliberate and steady development makes sense given that he expects it to be here for the next hundred years and more.

Banfield has partnered with Turahn Dorsey, now president and CEO of the Eastern Bank Foundation, to drive the complex business behind developing this important multipurpose gathering space. In 2023, the Boston Foundation, through its Business Equity Fund, invested \$205,000 as a loan-loss reserve. TBF joins MassDevelopment, M&T Bank, and the City of Boston as leading partners supporting the venue as part

of wider cultural and economic development efforts in the area.

The project anticipates creating 26 full-time jobs. It will bring well known artists to Boston and serve as a place for our own talented music students and artists to perform in a neighborhood setting.

TBF Vice President and Chief Program Officer Orlando Watkins says, "The Boston Foundation is proud to be able to stand in support of the new café as part of our ongoing work to connect the arts, business, cultural, education, housing, and community resources that together can form the core of a vibrant and accessible community. Using impact investing, grantmaking, and our other resources, we are excited to partner with our donors to help power Jazz Urbane as part of the next era for Boston's urban core."

In a stylish space located inside the Bruce C. Bolling Building, it will serve as an economic and cultural anchor for Nubian Square, burnishing the neighborhood's position as the historic heart of Black culture in Boston. Jazz Urbane's dynamism will generate foot traffic and added economic activity for surrounding small businesses, restaurants, retailers, and service providers in the adjoining commercial district.

This investment aligns with TBF's recent focus on developing all angles of community wealth in Roxbury and particularly Nubian Square, with several investments and initiatives supporting a renaissance powered by Black entrepreneurs, community focused institutions, cultural preservation and community pride.

## REFRAMING EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS IN ROXBURY

Greater Nubian Square is rich with schools, higher education partners, community organizations, businesses, and civic institutions—yet a common narrative says its students aren't succeeding.

The Boston Foundation wanted to learn how the area's existing assets might align to give young people better access to localized, meaningful, and expansive opportunities supporting their interests, aspirations, and future. We knew partnering with and listening to community members would be essential.

Over the past year, TBF pursued a discovery journey focused on education-to-career pathways specific to greater Nubian Square, learning from youth, educators, parents, community organizations, business owners, funders, and local leaders deeply connected to the community. We spoke with more than 125 people one-on-one and in focus groups. One message resonated throughout: In a community so rich in resources, solutions must start by changing mistaken impressions. Conversations highlighted Nubian Square's defining values, strengths, and practices: extraordinary civic leaders, entrepreneurs, education pioneers, and schools that have long served as anchors for learning and community. Past policies that shaped neighborhoods—like redlining, urban renewal, and insufficient investment—often ignored such strengths, entrenching negative perceptions instead.

Connecting the people developing education and career opportunities with those



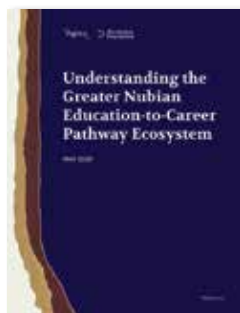
Photo: Heong Ly

Participants at a Nubian Square Partners Town Hall at the Boston Foundation.

living the local experience, including young people, yields insights that drive more relevant, effective, and innovative solutions. Expanding educational partnerships to include neighborhood organizations and local businesses lets us build on the community, culture, and relationships that have long underpinned Roxbury's strength.

Our qualitative findings and related data were captured in *Understanding the Greater Nubian Education-to-Career Pathway Ecosystem*. The report reorients our understanding of where, what, and how successful career pipelines exist. It reframes challenges that have too often been viewed as community shortcomings by highlighting the systems and conditions that have produced them.

Motivated by this learning journey, along with making early local investments, TBF launched the Greater Nubian Square Task Force in July. Through 10 meetings over six months, the Task Force—with reps from higher education, community-based organizations, the small business sector, parents, and youth—will further inform our strategy for pathways to postsecondary success in Nubian Square.



## UNHIDDEN FIGURES: A Passion Project

Getting today's narratives right about our strengths and challenges is crucial (see p. 8). Keeping historical narratives in sight is no less essential for our understanding of where we have been and where we can still go.

Benaree Pratt Wiley is a firm believer in keeping the truths of history accessible, especially for young people. Inspired by a 2014 dinner party conversation—wouldn't it be great if every kid in America could see the movie *Selma*?—Wiley and her late husband Flash Wiley contributed and raised money to establish the Hidden History Fund at the Boston Foundation. Grants from this fund enable nonprofits or schools to give young people free access to accurate and compelling presentations of history and social justice issues; they covered ticket costs for more than 11,000 Boston area students to see the films *Selma* and *Hidden Figures*.



Now a more local piece of history has been shared with students in Roslindale. Last year, the Boston School Committee merged the John D. Philbrick and the Charles Sumner elementary schools, renaming the new school the

Sarah Roberts Elementary School.

TBF's Senior Director of Donor Engagement and Partnership Loren Van Allen learned of the renaming and, knowing Wiley's interests, shared the story and the opportunity to disseminate more hidden history.

A \$10,000 Hidden History Fund grant provided a copy of the illustrated book *The First Step* to each student at the school. The subtitle, *How One Girl Put Segregation on Trial*, might suggest a 20th century account, but Sarah was a five-year-old Boston student in 1847. She walked to her neighborhood school but was told she had to attend the school for Black children in Beacon Hill. That school was overcrowded and in disrepair, and she had to walk past five other schools to get to it. The Roberts family fought for the equal education Sarah deserved.

continued on p. 10



*The First Step*, by Susan E. Goodman, ill. by E. B. Lewis

Bloomsbury Publishing, January 5, 2016

Photo of Bennie Wiley: Black Enterprise



## Unhidden Figures continued

*Roberts v. City of Boston* was the first case challenging our legal system to outlaw segregated schools. It was also the first time an African American lawyer—Robert Morris—argued before a state supreme court. (His co-counsel was the school's former namesake, abolitionist Charles Sumner.) Although their suit was not immediately successful, it laid the groundwork for legislation 10 years later that finally outlawed public

school segregation in Massachusetts in a significant win for the equal schools movement.

Wiley says, "It was an educational experience for me as well to learn who Sarah Roberts was and how she sparked a whole national movement," adding, "History is being erased every day. We have to be creative to counter that."

*Read a full interview with Benaree Wiley about the Hidden History Fund on [tbfb.org/wileyinterview](https://tbfb.org/wileyinterview).*

## FOSTERING COLLABORATION

**B**oston Foundation staff members and topic specialists are often key players in the establishment of citywide and statewide coalitions. Cooperation among organizations brings the power of numbers as well as diversity and breadth of expertise to issues that demand our attention and offer opportunities to advance equity in our region. A recent example:



**The Early Childhood Exchange (ECX)** was established earlier this year to help bridge the gap between research and policy-making by providing state and local leaders with actionable insights to inform early childhood policy, implementation, and funding decisions across Massachusetts. ECX is a partnership among the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy, Strategies for Children, and the Massachusetts Early Childhood Policy Research Collaborative supported through a novel collaboration of funders, including the Boston Foundation, The Commonwealth Children's Fund, Eastern Bank Foundation, and the Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation. It is creating new ways to connect research, policy, and practice, helping state and local leaders better understand what is working, where challenges remain, and how to make the most of public investments in early childhood. Learn more at <https://maecexchange.org>.

## From Board of Directors Chair Dwight Poler

**W**ith deep appreciation, we salute outgoing President and CEO Lee Pelton. His dedicated work with the Boston Foundation Board and staff, community leaders, elected officials, the media, and partner organizations has made a marked impact on Greater Boston and a lasting contribution to the strength of the Foundation.

We are fortunate to seek a new CEO now from a position of growth, influence, and promise. Our core values as a community foundation remain steadfast and forward-looking. We have great ambition to further establish TBF as the region's premier philanthropic partner, supporting and amplifying donors to realize lasting impact in a thriving and equitable Greater Boston. We have engaged a search firm to assist in our recruitment of the ideal leader to guide the Boston Foundation to even greater outcomes. These experts are listening actively to donors and community, alongside the Board and staff, to understand specifically the qualities needed to enable the Foundation's best work and face the challenges and opportunities—both known and new—that lie ahead. We are excited about the chapter ahead, and look forward to your part in it.

Lee's essay in this newsletter captures the profound thoughtfulness and ambition he brought to his charge at TBF. We know the Foundation, city, and region will continue to benefit from his civic engagement and we will uphold his legacy through TBF's ongoing quest to improve lives and strengthen communities.

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