

Profiles of Giving

The simple, beautiful definition of “philanthropy” is showing goodwill to fellow members of the human race. Whether through monetary donations, grassroots organizations, or time and compassion, here are just a few local folks doing what they can to help where they can.

Building a Better Future

A CULTURE OF GENEROSITY IS AT THE HEART OF ONE OF THE BIGGEST RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPERS IN THE AREA

by SKYE SHERMAN

As one of the largest new-home builders and commercial developers in Florida, GL Homes has a nearly 50-year legacy of constructing quality single-family residences in large-scale, master-planned communities. Across the state, more than 85,000 people are residing in GL Homes developments—including starter houses, luxury residences, and active 55-and-up communities. In Port St. Lucie, the company is in the midst of the Riverland project, a 4,000-acre community with nearly 12,000 residential units planned, plus amenities that include a 14-acre Sports & Racquet Club, an Arts & Culture Center, a lively Town Center with commercial and retail

space, softball fields, dog parks, and more. Right now, they are building out Valencia Cay, the first of many active adult 55-plus residential communities within Riverland, featuring affordable luxury homes with swimming pools and amenities such as a 34,000-square-foot Clubhouse that will serve as the social hub of the Valencia Cay community.

But despite the billions of dollars GL Homes has invested in developing South Florida, the employees take predominant pride in their on-the-ground personal impact, a company culture that starts right at the top.

The “GL” stands for “good luck,” that bit of magic that ignites hard work and transforms it into success. It’s a value passed

down to GL President Misha Ezratti by his father, founder Itzhak, and procured through the refining fire of suffering. Ezratti, whose family emigrated to the United States from Israel, lost nearly 40 of his Greek forefathers to German concentration camps—a sordid history he prefers not to focus on but that underlies the company’s culture of generosity.



GL Homes President Misha Ezratti



From top: Riverland in Port St. Lucie is one of GL Homes' latest projects, a 4,000-acre community with more than 12,000 residential units planned; inside one of the new Valencia Cay at Riverland homes.

Community Relations Sarah Alsofrom, who leads GL Homes' charitable arm (glhomesphilanthropy.com), philanthropy has been a central strand of the company DNA since its 1976 inception. "This company makes a difference in the communities where we live and work," says Alsofrom, who came to GL Homes from the Hanley Center Foundation in 2015. "Every day, I wake up with purpose and meaning—to be able to help others who may not be as fortunate. Our company embraces a culture of caring, and that's what it's all about."

"It's not something I talk about very often, but when a family that's thriving and successful gets decimated, I think people start to look at the world a different way and realize that some things are in your control and some things are out of your control," Ezratti shares. "When you're in this world and you're lucky enough to be alive, you have to contribute; you have to try to make lives better for others. There's a lot of darkness and a lot of problems in the world, and you're not going to solve them all, but we try to be as active as we can. Stop and give your time, give your money, give your resources, give your connections—whatever you can in order to try to make your little slice of the world a better place."

In light of that mission, and under the guidance of Director of

Alsofrom, whose father founded the local 211 Helpline in 1971, also served for two years as Leadership Florida's regional chair for Palm Beach, Martin, St. Lucie, Indian River, and Okeechobee Counties. Her career background is in the corporate, government, and nonprofit worlds, with stints at WPTV Channel 5, Gunster law firm, and the State Attorney's Office of Palm Beach County.

GL supports charities making a marked positive impact—organizations that innovate, collaborate, and advocate for their beneficiaries—with a special emphasis on efforts to break the cycle of homelessness. "As a home builder, we feel that providing shelter, food, and the basic necessities is very much aligned with what we believe in," Ezratti says. In total, GL donates to more than 150 charities statewide, including Port St. Lucie Botanical Gardens and Place of Hope on the Treasure Coast.

But monetary contributions are only one aspect of their benevolence. They also give tangibly—such as when they purchased and outfitted a van for the Boys & Girls Clubs of St. Lucie County, which has been used during the pandemic to deliver food from Belle Glade farmers to club members in need of hunger relief across the Treasure Coast. Executives and employees also work side-by-side on community outreach projects. For example, they've bonded over stuffing backpacks with school supplies for the Boys & Girls Clubs of St. Lucie County and serving meals at the Lewis Center in West Palm Beach. Says Ezratti: "Whenever we present an opportunity to volunteer time or resources to our team, it's always oversubscribed."



Clockwise from top left: Sarah Alsofrom runs the company's philanthropic arm; GL Homes volunteers deliver food to locals in need with Feeding South Florida; company outreach projects include delivering backpacks with school supplies to kids at the Boys & Girls Clubs of St. Lucie County; GL Homes President Misha Ezratti worked with U.S. HUD Secretary Ben Carson (pictured with wife, Candy) on the Home at Tamarind affordable housing project in West Palm Beach.

GL Homes also helps the community through its own in-house initiatives like Good Night's Sleep, which provides furnishings and creature comforts to people who are transitioning out of homelessness.

The Summer of Service initiative coordinates a dynamic roster of company-wide volunteer opportunities. And No Reservations Needed hosts meals and events for formerly homeless individuals. The company has even created a virtual career library for students who are interested in learning the ins and outs of potential future jobs in construction.

That's not to say the monetary contributions are insignificant: When the pandemic hit, for example, threatening food and shelter security for thousands, GL Homes partnered with Feeding South Florida and donated \$40,000 to fund approximately 300,000 meals for locals in need. Alsofrom notes that the company also recently partnered with Treasure Coast Food Bank (FSL's sister organization) and has donated \$10,000 to TCFB's Senior Mobile Pantry, which provides weekly community distribution of fresh produce, whole grains, and meat to senior citizens.

"Another recent project I'm very proud of is the Home at Tamarind, an affordable housing project we constructed in



collaboration with Gulfstream Goodwill and the City of West Palm Beach," shares Ezratti. "We built beautiful units for developmentally disabled adults who otherwise would have been homeless. Sarah and I recently went there and met one of the first residents to move in. You could see the look of joy on his face, which was only overshadowed by the look of joy on our faces—under our masks, of course," he says.

At its heart, GL Homes operates under the auspice that whatever positive output you submit to the world, you'll see returned in spades. "That's how I was raised," Ezratti says. "We believe in a philosophy that you get what you give." ♦