



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **FRANKLIN PARK CONSERVATORY AND COLUMBUS URBAN LEAGUE REMEMBER ALEXIS JACOBS**

COLUMBUS, OH — Alexis Jacobs' love lives on in the substantial bequests she made following her death on June 3, and it will continue to live in the connections fostered by her generous spirit.

For Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens, Jacobs' unrestricted \$4 million bequest is "tremendously important," said Bruce Harkey, president and CEO. "As an individual gift, it's the largest one-time gift," Harkey said of Jacobs' gift to the Conservatory.

For the Columbus Urban League, another unrestricted \$4 million bequest is "a game-changer" that president and CEO Stephanie Hightower said left her breathless. "This is the largest gift ever in the history of the (Columbus) Urban League, corporate or individual. This is one of those, go home and get on your knees and say 'thank you' kind of gifts," Hightower said.

In gratitude and in fond memory of their mutual friend and benefactor, the two nonprofits are jointly celebrating Jacobs and her generosity.

Jacobs' trust didn't direct her beneficiaries to join hands, but Greg Levi, her Columbus Fair Auto Auction business partner, trustee and executor of her estate said, "It wouldn't surprise me of how important that would have been for her because of her wanting her friends to be friends with her friends." Levi said Jacobs' quiet philanthropy was based on her love for the people involved in the causes and organizations that she supported.

Remembering their common benefactor is prompting Hightower and Harkey to talk about programming their organizations offer that Jacobs especially favored and which they might partner to grow, such as workforce development efforts for underserved populations.

"This is how the gift keeps giving," Hightower said.

"It's the spirit of Alexis going forward," echoed Harkey.

It is especially important to the two organizations that Jacobs attached no strings to her gifts but deferred to the organizations' leaders, whom she knew and trusted.

Hightower said Jacobs understood that philanthropic redlining – the phenomenon of Black-led nonprofits getting proportionally fewer charitable dollars but more restrictions on their use, prevents capacity building, which impacts delivery of impactful services.

Jacobs' gift will allow the Urban League "to think bigger," Hightower said. It may look at creating an endowment in Jacobs' name. "We want to be strategic and intentional in our efforts to make sustainable progress for African Americans and other marginalized communities," she said.

Harkey said the Conservatory board will consider the most effective way to use the funds, perhaps in a combination of an educational endowment fund to support our Community Outreach and Education programs, capital support and growing reserves for financial sustainability.

"Unrestricted gifts like these can be transformational," said Douglas Kridler, president and CEO of The Columbus Foundation. "It is the ultimate expression of belief in an organization's mission and in its leadership. The community benefits of Alexis' philanthropy will be deep and long and should be celebrated by all. Gifts of this size and type are as precious as they are uncommon."

Hightower and Harkey each valued long friendships with Jacobs.

Hightower was vice president for institutional advancement for the Columbus College of Art & Design when she met Jacobs. They bonded as sports women – Hightower as a former track Olympian and Jacobs as an avid fisherwoman – and over a shared love of fashion. Hightower created the CCAD Fashion Show and tapped Jacobs as an inaugural model. When Hightower moved to the Urban League in 2011, Jacobs followed its workforce development efforts and began hiring justice-involved people from its workforce re-entry program.

Harkey met Jacobs soon after he was hired at the Conservatory and their friendship grew from shared interests in automobiles, with Harkey previously having worked for Honda in Marysville. Jacobs' financial support of the Conservatory began with her honoring her parents with memorial gifts, Harkey said. Then Jacobs began attending the Conservatory's annual spring fundraiser known popularly as Hat Day and formally as "Les Chapeaux dans le Jardin."

"Alexis loved a good party; she loved dressing up; she loved being with her friends and also to support the Conservatory and youth education," Harkey said.

"We always went to Hat Day. It was one of her favorite events. Myself, Janet Jackson, Angela Pace," Hightower said. "I knew of her love of the Conservatory as well, and I was aware that the Conservatory also received a generous gift. I thought Bruce was a perfect partner," she added.

Hightower and Harkey each remember Jacobs as a champion of their organizations' work, as exemplified by their mission statements:

The mission of the Columbus Urban League is to empower African Americans and disenfranchised groups through economic, educational and social progress.

Inspired by horticulture, Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens elevates quality of life and connects the community through educational, cultural and social experiences.

But mostly they remember her as a true friend who will be missed. Here's to you, Alexis.

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*Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens offers world-class horticulture, art and nature-based exhibitions, and educational programs for all ages. Situated on 40 acres on the eastern side of Franklin Park, the Conservatory features the historic 1895 John F. Wolfe Palm House; 83,000 square feet of glasshouses; botanical gardens including the Scotts Miracle-Gro Foundation Children's Garden; and meeting and event spaces. The Conservatory owns the largest collection of glass artwork by Dale Chihuly in a botanical garden and is home to internationally recognized light artist James Turrell's Light Raiment II, which illuminates the John F. Wolfe Palm House every evening from dusk until dawn.*