

Auto dealers donate \$200K to local groups

The Baytown Chamber of Commerce had its October Business Exchange Thursday, but it was the charity of Roger and Kim Elswick that stole the show.

The Elswick Automotive owners announced donations of just under \$200,000 to benefit community charities, along with funding that will go toward feeding families for a week. Roger Elswick said the business had taken a hit early in the pandemic but has recovered in recent months, allowing the opportunity to give back.

“It’s a new thing,” he said. My wife and I have felt that throughout all that has gone on in the pandemic, a lot of people have been struggling, and we have been blessed, and we wanted to help. We picked the organizations that could benefit from the donation that has been most affected or provided services for the community.”

The Rotary Club received a \$4,500 donation after the cancellation of its main fundraiser, the Annual Shrimp and Catfish Festival. Missouri Street Church of Christ received \$10,000 for its food pantry. Also receiving \$10,000 was Project Blue and the Pregnancy Resource Center. Bridge Over Troubled Waters received \$17,500, while the Lee College Foundation was given \$30,000 to supplement CARES Act funding that allowed for education assistance.

An estimated \$115,000 will go toward feeding families of four for a week. Food will be dispersed on dates in October, November and December. In announcing the donations, Kim Elswick said the couple had been fortunate their business had not been affected.

“We feel we’ve been called by God to give back in every way we can,” she said. “We’re extremely blessed to be part of this community and are thankful for the support that allows us to expand and return that blessing, at least in part, to the Baytown area.”

Among those on hand to accept for the Missouri Church of Christ was Kim Martin, an elder with the congregation who is active in its food ministry. He said 150 people are fed each week through its pantry. Martin said they have to ask people their income as part of its services, and a lot of people have answered \$0.

“We tell them our hearts are with you,” Martin said. “This will help so much.”

Project Blue, founded by Mary Zaruba Pinney in memory of her brother Marcus, is operated by Mark Pinney and Dr. Jim Zaruba after her untimely passing. Proceeds go toward helping police officers who face serious illness or injuries outside of their duties. It has donated over \$280,000 to officers and hosts the Jailbreak Run.

The Pregnancy Resource Center offers realistic alternatives to abortion. It had to cancel its golf tournament fundraiser due to the pandemic. Bridge Over Troubled Waters assists victims of domestic violence, which has increased since stay-at-home mandates were enacted.

Lee College will be able to use its donation to help students impacted by the pandemic. Dr. Lynda Villanueva, president of the college, gave credit to board members for taking steps to innovate in response to the pandemic. She said the donation will allow more students to pursue their academic endeavors.

The Elswicks have enlisted help from others to fulfill its goal of feeding Baytown families. The plan is to feed 1,250 families, with 250 on Oct. 17, 400 on Nov. 21,

and 600 on Dec. 19. Faith Family Church has been recruited for its expertise in food dispersal. Kroger will bag the food and transport to the church, while Wismer Distributing will offer usage of a refrigerated truck. The Kiwanis Club is also helping, selling 300 cases of apples at a discounted rate and supplying volunteers to bag them during distribution of food.

Elswick Automotive, which is building a new facility, Community Honda off the I-10 East access road between Garth Road and East Main, has remained active in support of the community prior to announcement of the donations. Most recently it made a donation to the Baytown Chamber Capital Campaign helping provide to the realization of construction of a new building. It has also helped under the radar, donating air scrubbers to the ventilation system of Baytown Little Theater, which allowed it to reopen.

"We are just very blessed, and we give all to the glory of God," Roger Elswick said.