

CHICAGO COMMONS

# Empowering. Building. Thriving.

ANNUAL REPORT 2021



SINCE 1894

CHICAGO  
COMMONS<sup>SM</sup>

helping families **GO** further

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# Dear Friends & Supporters,

The last two years have tested all of us in myriad ways, many of which we could never have predicted. While 2021 brought hope with the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, families are still experiencing ongoing challenges due to the pandemic. In times like these, resiliency matters, and our team has shown resiliency in the innovative ways they have continued to support and empower the children, families, and seniors in our care.

As we navigate changes brought on by the pandemic, we also celebrate a new and promising landscape for early childhood education and family services. Chicago Commons was awarded a five-year, \$115 million grant from the Office of Head Start. These funds allow us and our Delegate Partners—Gads Hill, Onward Neighborhood House, Eyes on the Future, and Learn Together Grow Together—to expand and enhance our early childhood education offerings. We are hard at work to make sure that the 1,700 children funded through this grant and other resources have access to high-quality, affordable early learning opportunities.

Across our programs, we forged partnerships with health clinics, advocacy groups, and city and state leaders to ensure equitable opportunities for vaccination – especially for older adults and their caregivers. Our Early Education team launched the 13 Book Project to ensure that our children have at least 13 books at home, which is proven to have a measurable impact on early learning outcomes.

In our Family Hub, we expanded the Respira wellness program, leveraging technology to provide breathing exercises, meditation, and yoga to help children, teachers, and parents at our four centers cope with stress and trauma.

This past year, we said farewell to our retiring board chairperson, Willard S. Evans, Jr., and welcomed Steven Sparks, a board member since 2011, to the role. We were also able to grow our infrastructure by recruiting new leadership to help us tackle tomorrow's challenges and guide us toward serving more families. We welcomed Chief Financial Officer Dana Thomas, Chief Human Resources Officer Dr. Erica Collins, Chief Strategy Officer Nyla Diab, and Vice President - Family Hub Dr. Vikki Rompala.

COVID-19 magnified the inequities that exist in communities and further elevates the reason why Chicago Commons must continue to play a role in leveling the playing field: to ensure equitable access to opportunities generation after generation. We are excited about what the future holds for us and to continue working, with your support, to empower, build, and thrive.

**Thank you for your commitment to our vision.**



**Edgar Ramirez**  
President & CEO



**Steven Sparks**  
Board Chair

# Celebrating Progress

Guided by the pillars of our Strategic Plan for fiscal years 2020 to 2023, Chicago Commons is seeing bold intentions transform into sustainable progress towards educational success, economic security, health, and well-being for children and families. Despite obstacles posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, we are following through on our plan to invest in our programs, people, and future growth.

In August 2021, Chicago Commons achieved a milestone of our Strategic Plan: expanding our early childhood education and family services through a significant increase in Head Start funding, and taking on a new role as the lead agency of four Delegate Partners. A five-year, \$23 million per-year grant propels us forward in accomplishing our goals to:

- **Enhance** our staffing and extend our multi generational service model
- **Attain** wage parity and professional development for our staff
- **Enhance** technology, communications, and data systems
- **Improve** facilities and supplies to provide a safe environment for all



## MISSION STATEMENT

**To empower** individuals, families, and communities to overcome poverty and systemic barriers, embrace opportunities, and thrive across generations.

## VISION STATEMENT

**We envision a future** where all children, families, and seniors have equitable opportunities for success, generation after generation.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- 1 Remain a leader in high-quality **Early Childhood Education**, while expanding Chicago Commons' programming, increasing mixed-income classrooms, and exploring private-pay centers.
- 2 Become known as a premier multi-generation provider by expanding and enhancing the **Family Hub**.
- 3 Expand **Senior Services** to reach a broader segment of the Chicago metropolitan region's aging market through both subsidized and private-pay models.



# A Bold New Future



**“Chicago Commons is uniquely qualified based on quality ratings, commitment to serving high need communities, and their reputation as an early childhood education innovation leader. Chicago Commons has more than a century of service to families and this critical Head Start funding will help build the foundation for lifelong success by supporting early education and family well-being.”**

**—U.S. SENATOR DICK DURBIN (D-IL)**

**“During my time as a U.S. Senator, I have made it a priority to ensure Illinois families have access to high quality early education resources and the critical federal investments that make them possible. Chicago Commons’ application aligns with the core goals and objectives of Head Start.”**

**—U.S. SENATOR TAMMY DUCKWORTH (D-IL)**

In August 2021, Chicago Commons grew its leadership role in the city’s early education and family services through a significant increase in Head Start funding. By winning a \$115 million Head Start grant—the second-highest allotment of Head Start slots in Chicagoland—Chicago Commons and its Delegate Partners have the opportunity to bring a bold new service model to children in 15 Chicago neighborhoods.

The five-year, \$23 million-per-year grant was awarded to Chicago Commons and its Delegate Partners—Eyes on the Future, Gads Hill Center, Learn Together Grow Together, and Onward Neighborhood House—by the U.S. Administration for Children & Families. As the lead grant-funded agency, we are providing administrative support, teacher training, and coordinated family services through a collaborative approach.

Chicago Commons now serves 1,700 children through Head Start funding and other resources. With the scale and sustainability of the grant, Chicago Commons is raising the bar of quality in how early childhood education is developed and administered. The grant also addresses inequities within Chicago’s learning communities that were revealed and magnified by COVID-19.

This funding means that students in Head Start programs will learn in dynamic environments shaped by social justice principles and parent-teacher feedback. With their children in safe spaces and building knowledge for life-long success, parents will be able to confidently pursue their personal, academic, and career goals. Chicago Commons’ plans for the grant also include more investments in the educators who bring all these improvements to life.

# A Trusted Partner in Public Health



**7** Town hall-style events held, including 2 in Spanish



**850** Views of Facebook Live "This is Our Shot" educational event



**250+** People vaccinated



**2** In-person vaccination clinics held for older adults and home care aides



**100,000** Weekly listeners to the WVON live radio broadcast



**600** Fact sheets distributed

As a cornerstone in Chicago's most under-resourced neighborhoods, Chicago Commons is a trusted public health partner to families, including undocumented immigrant families, in the communities we serve.

These are communities that have been deeply affected by COVID-19 through the loss of loved ones, job loss, educational setbacks, emotional trauma, and more. Language barriers, limited internet access, distrust of traditional healthcare settings, and fears around documentation make it harder for some to access reliable vaccination information. To address these challenges, Chicago Commons provided our communities with reliable information from trusted sources through town hall meetings, door-to-door outreach, pop-up vaccine information booths, social media campaigns, and flyer distribution.

## Thanks to our funders who made this work possible

- Bank of America
- Caerus Foundation
- BlueCross BlueShield of Illinois
- Illinois Department of Public Health
- Kaminski Family Impact Fund

## Healthcare and Advocacy partners

- American Association of Retired Persons
- Chicago Department of Public Health
- Erie Health Centers
- Esperanza
- Friend Health
- Illinois Department on Aging
- Illinois Department of Public Health
- Latino Policy Forum
- Oak Street Health
- Sage Collective
- Service Employees International Union

# Activating Children's Inherent Potential

At Chicago Commons, we believe in and nurture children's intrinsic abilities. Using the Reggio Emilia approach, we empower children to author their own learning process through self-directed, experiential learning in an environment that emphasizes respect, responsibility, and parent engagement.

In a city where only one out of four children is sufficiently ready to enter kindergarten, students in our centers routinely meet or exceed widely-held expectations across various educational domains. We do this by providing exceptional programs that have been recognized as ExceleRate Illinois GOLD Circle of Quality. Through our four centers and six Community Partners, we reached 760 children in fiscal year 2021—reflecting enrollment capacity restrictions due to the pandemic.



## OUR CHILDREN



# 760

**Children served**  
(with pandemic restrictions in place)



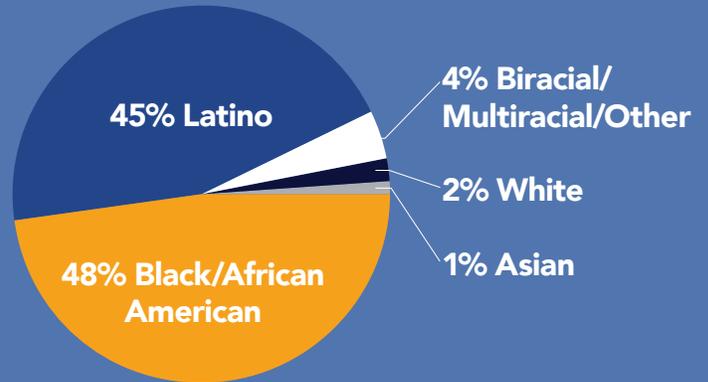
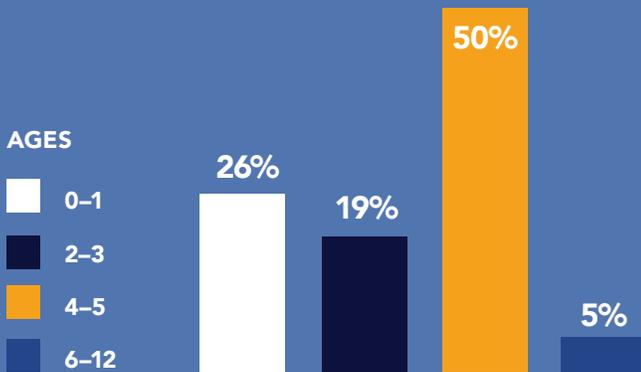
# \$15,050

**Average income of a family  
at our centers**



# 95%

**Children from single  
parent households**



## CHILD OUTCOMES

During the pandemic, Chicago Commons engaged children and families in new ways – through Zoom learning and family activities, the ReadyRosie family engagement platform, and virtual observations.

### 2019-2020 PRE-K CLASS SCORES\*

Chicago Commons achieved CLASS ratings from the Office of Head Start that **were higher than the national average in all three domains.**

#### Emotional Support



#### Classroom Organization



#### Instructional Support



Chicago Commons National Average

The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) is designed to assess, on a scale of 1 to 7, the effectiveness of supports children receive and the quality of teacher-child interactions across areas, including instructional formats, teacher sensitivity, and language modeling.

\*Most recent complete assessment year.

## OUR LOCATIONS (as of August 1, 2021)

### CHICAGO COMMONS CENTERS

Humboldt Park (2)  
Lower West Side  
New City

### CHICAGO COMMONS COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Austin  
Calumet Heights  
Little Village  
Rogers Park  
Washington Heights  
Lower West Side

### DELEGATE PARTNERS

Rogers Park  
Washington Heights  
West Englewood  
Gage Park  
North Lawndale  
Chicago Lawn  
Brighton Park  
Belmont Cragin

### DELEGATE COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Ashburn (2)  
Austin (2)  
Gage Park  
Morgan Park  
West Englewood

# Early Education Lifts Up Communities

*Knowing her daughter is thriving, Shontae Johnson pursues a new career path.*



This past fall, when 5-year-old Serenity started kindergarten, she was fully prepared. Serenity and her mom, Shontae, had both thrived at Chicago Commons' Nia Family Center, where Serenity attended since she was just six weeks old. Knowing that her daughter was well cared for at Nia Center, and with the help of Chicago Commons' extended hours and wraparound supports, Shontae was able to return to college to become a dental hygienist. Now, they are both on a pathway to success.

Chicago Commons' early education programs help children build a foundation for learning at a critical time in their development. Children Serenity's age have an incredible capacity for absorbing new information. Shontae told the Chicago Tribune, "My daughter is very observant, she's a fast learner, and she wants to be the teacher's helper all of the time."

One of the pillars of Chicago Commons' program is the acclaimed Reggio Emilia approach, which encourages curiosity like Serenity's and motivates children to learn through exploring their interests, interactions with others, and their environment.

But the benefits of the program span generations, beyond children. "We want children who come into our programs to feel that they are in a safe, warm, homey, and loving environment where they can learn. We want our parents to know that their child will be okay,"

**“My daughter is very observant, she’s a fast learner, and she wants to be the teacher’s helper all of the time.”**

**—SHONTAE JOHNSON, PARENT**

said Kristin Pettice, Senior Director of Programs. "For parents and families, we also ask, 'What do parents need to succeed—a job, health services, financial assistance, or planning?' Our Family Hub provides key services in those areas."

These supports help individuals overcome systemic challenges that have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Chicago Commons' holistic programs made it easier for Shontae to go back to college, a key step towards building a long-term career and stability for her family.

Shontae and Serenity's journey shows how early childhood education can spur growth not just for individual children, but for families and entire communities.

# Providing Wrap- Around Support Across Generations

Through its Family Hub program, Chicago Commons addresses the multifaceted needs of families with young children and families caring for older adults. The Family Hub offers health and wellness, employment services, and financial wellness through workshops and one-on-one coaching.

The Family Hub's holistic, multigenerational approach improves economic mobility and family well-being. For families with young children, research indicates that integrating services across generations does more for children's long-term well-being than serving parents or children in isolation. For seniors and their caregivers, our programs improve quality of life by addressing economic, physical, and emotional health and wellness.





## PARENT PARTICIPATION

**74%**

Participated in Family Hub services

**95%**

Completed at least one service referral



## EMPLOYMENT

**117**

Individuals coached

**86%**

Referral engagement rate



## FINANCIAL CAPABILITY

**219**

Individuals coached

**80%**

Of participants reduced debt



## HEALTH AND WELLNESS

**254**

Individuals served one-on-one

**70%**

Of workshop participants reported eating healthier



## PATHWAYS FOR PARENTS

Pathways for Parents gives parents with young children the opportunity to launch a career as an early childhood educator. Starting with two college courses at one of our centers, Chicago Commons enables parents to overcome barriers to success by providing coaching, tutoring, and help with transportation, meals, and childcare.

Pathways is supported in part by funding from the Robert R. McCormick Foundation and Polk Bros. Foundation. Through a partnership with City Colleges of Chicago, courses are fully subsidized.

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**72%** Completed their first year of the program.

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**90%** Report that Chicago Commons supports have been critical to their success.

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**60%** Report making connections within their cohort that helped them succeed.

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# Breathing Together, Coping Together

*Through the Respira program, children, their teachers, and their families use mindfulness techniques to navigate difficult times.*



During the COVID-19 pandemic, our communities had to switch abruptly to online learning with limited resources. This might seem like an “adult issue,” but it can also affect the lives and minds of children.

Recognizing that stressors for parents and children are intertwined, Chicago Commons implemented the Respira program. Respira (Spanish for “breathe”) brings mindfulness practices to early childhood classrooms, believing that, with proper guidance, communities can learn to emotionally navigate these issues together—from class, home, or anywhere else.

Respira utilizes breathing exercises, meditation techniques, and yoga to combat stress and promote emotional stability. In response, children become better at handling frustration, act out less, and stay more focused in class.

The Respira project created healing-centered learning environments in 23 classrooms across four centers. Twice a week, mindfulness coaches Dr. Elisha Hall and Benita Taylor provided 30-minute Zoom classes to children ages two to five and two groups of school-age children. Beginning with one-minute meditation sessions, by the sixth week children were meditating for up to 10 minutes.

Teachers’ experiences were overwhelmingly positive. “I thought the program went really well. I liked how most of the children in my class actually participated and they looked forward to going to yoga and meditation twice a week,” said one teacher.

Another teacher said that during circle time, while singing songs like “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes,” she has noticed students’ vocabulary skills have improved. “I’ll ask them, ‘Touch your

diaphragm.’ And they’ll all point to the diaphragm, they know where that is.”

Educators also say the benefits have followed them into their private lives. “I would like to continue taking these [classes] without the children...When I did them, I felt I had energy and I felt more relaxed,” said one teacher. Another educator lauded the practices for helping her son. They “relax him and relax me, then we can focus on homework,” she said.

One teacher reflected on the program’s overall mental health benefits. “I think it did help,” she said. “Sometimes they have a hard time talking. And some of them still do, but they’re trying to express themselves the best way they can.”

We are grateful for support from the Education Equity COVID Response Fund, housed at The Chicago Community Trust, and its generous donors that made the Respira project possible. The Respira project continues through ongoing consultation and support for building the practices into regular classroom schedules.

#### RESPIRA OUTCOMES

**71** Teachers trained to deliver Respira

**222** Children learned meditation

**100%** Of teachers increased their mindfulness practices

**42%** Of teachers sustained practices after Respira

# Promoting Independence, Dignity, and Respect

Chicago Commons' Senior Services help seniors and adults with disabilities maintain their independence and quality of life, allowing them to stay in their homes and preventing or delaying the need for institutional care.

As one of the largest nonprofit providers of senior care in Chicago, our Senior Services consist of Adult Day Service and Home Care programs. Home care aides provide assistance, friendship, and specialized care for loved ones who may be isolated, while the day services program provides therapeutic care in a community-based group setting along with recreational and social activities.



## ADULT DAY SERVICE

59

PARTICIPANTS

(with pandemic restrictions in place)

81%

LIVE ALONE

98%

BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN

71%

SAVINGS\*

\*Versus the average annual cost of a nursing home

## HOME CARE

1,085

PARTICIPANTS

525

HOME CARE AIDES

92% Live Alone

60% 75 and Older

92% Black/African American

67% Women

## CLIENT LOCATIONS

Chicago Commons' Adult Day Service and Home Care programs serve nearly 1,200 seniors combined throughout the greater Chicago area.

- Communities where Adult Day Service clients reside
- Communities served by the Home Care program



# An Equal Shot at Good Health

*Chicago Commons forged strategic partnerships to ensure equitable access to vaccinations for older adults, adults with disabilities, and their caregivers.*



Chicago Commons' Home Care and Adult Day Services programs forged strategic partnerships with health care institutions, advocacy groups, and city and state public health leaders to ensure equitable access to vaccinations for older adults, adults with disabilities, and their caregivers.

Notably, Chicago Commons partnered with Oak Street Health and three highly regarded federally qualified health care institutions—Erie Family Health, Esperanza, and Friend Health—to provide vaccine education and inoculation opportunities to our 1,700 older adults and caregivers. The shared geographies, demographics, and missions made this collaborative effort highly impactful.

Our educational campaign included a series of events which were held for Chicago Commons' employees, clients, and communities. In collaboration with our partners, we held town hall meetings, including a live radio event and social media broadcast, where doctors and other experts provided information and facts to our employees, clients, and the general public. One town hall, hosted by Sage Collective, included Rear Admiral (ret) James M. Galloway, MD, FACP, FACC, a medical doctor and public health physician.

Another town hall, "This is Our Shot," gave Senior Services staff and clients the chance to learn directly from medical and public health professionals. This panel discussion about the COVID-19 vaccine included experts on public health and older adult care from the Illinois Department of Public Health, Chicago

**“I had family members who were dying of COVID, who had not gotten the vaccine. I said to myself, ‘I need to get this shot in order to save me... I want to live – I want to be in the world to be around for my grandchildren and my children.’”**

**—ALICE E., CHICAGO COMMONS ADULT DAY SERVICES PARTICIPANT**

Department of Public Health, AARP Illinois, and the Illinois Department on Aging, as well as Adult Day Services participant Alice, who shared her reasons for getting the vaccine.

To continue to improve equitable access to COVID-19 vaccine appointments, Chicago Commons also teamed up with Oak Street Health to provide COVID-19 vaccines at a pop-up clinic in April 2021. Chicago Commons seniors, caregivers, and family members were able to get their first vaccinations at our 50th Street location. Many thanks to the Kaminski Family Impact Fund for sponsoring this pop-up clinic.

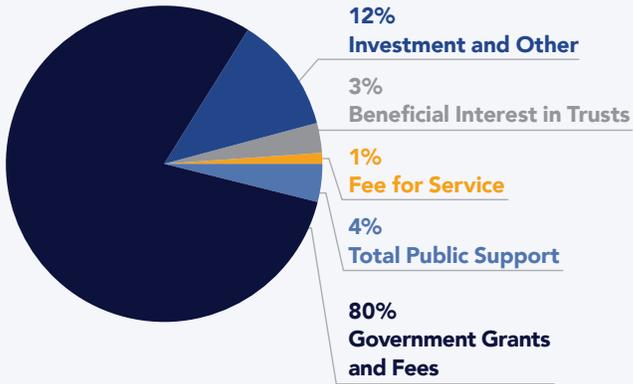
## FINANCIALS

Year Ended June 30, 2021

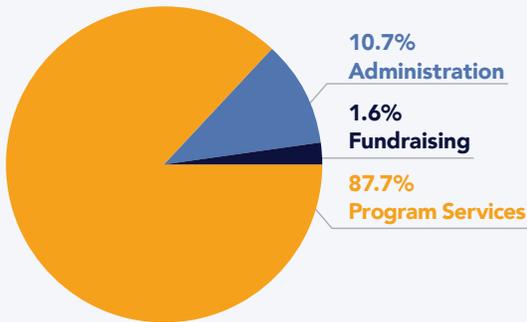
### Statement of Activities

	Without Donor Restrictions	With Donor Restrictions	Total FY21
<b>Operating Revenue</b>			
<b>Public Support and Revenue</b>			
Contributions	\$627,590	\$618,361	\$ 1,245,951
Special events, net of expenses of \$110,056 in 2021	223,048	27,727	250,775
Net assets released from restrictions	575,336	(575,336)	-
<b>Total Public Support</b>	<b>1,425,974</b>	<b>70,752</b>	<b>1,496,726</b>
Fees and grants from governmental agencies	28,255,269	-	28,255,269
Fee for service revenue	4,287,493	-	4,287,493
Client fees and other support	84,464	-	84,464
Investment income, net	9,506	-	9,506
Increase in beneficial interest in trusts	-	1,009,096	1,009,096
Other income	239,722	-	239,722
<b>Total Operating Revenue</b>	<b>34,302,428</b>	<b>1,079,848</b>	<b>35,382,276</b>
<b>Operating Expenses</b>			
<b>Program Services</b>			
Child Development	14,870,273	-	14,870,273
Senior Services	14,783,370	-	14,783,370
Family Hub	244,798	-	244,798
	<b>29,898,441</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>29,898,441</b>
<b>Supporting Services</b>			
Management and General	3,658,845	-	3,658,845
Fundraising	532,415	-	532,415
	<b>4,191,260</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>4,191,260</b>
<b>Total Operating Expenses</b>	<b>34,089,701</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>34,089,701</b>
			-
<b>Increase in Net Assets</b>	<b>212,728</b>	<b>1,079,848</b>	<b>1,292,576</b>
Net Assets Beginning of year	8,198,149	4,041,333	12,239,482
<b>Net Assets End of year</b>	<b>\$8,410,876</b>	<b>\$5,121,181</b>	<b>\$13,532,057</b>

## Revenue By Category



## Expenses By Category



## Statement of Financial Position

### Assets

Cash and cash equivalents	\$3,599,640
Accounts receivable, net	6,352,870
Other current assets	236,104
Contributions receivable	37,500
Investments	98,919
Property and equipment, net	3,992,482
Beneficial interest in trusts	4,461,258

**Total Assets** **\$18,778,773**

### Liabilities and Net Assets

#### Liabilities

Accounts payable	\$1,143,908
Accrued expenses	1,194,946
Notes payable	2,907,862
	<b>5,246,716</b>

#### Net Assets

Without donor restrictions	
Undesignated	8,170,876
Board-designated – Valliere Sustainability Fund	240,000
	<b>8,410,876</b>
With donor restrictions	
Time restrictions	124,899
Purpose restrictions	458,025
Perpetual in nature	4,538,257
	<b>5,121,181</b>

**Total Net Assets** **13,532,057**

**Total Liabilities and Net Assets** **\$18,778,773**

## DONORS & SUPPORTERS

We are thankful for every person, family, corporation, foundation, and public sector funder that supports Chicago Commons.

### JANUARY 1, 2021 – DECEMBER 31, 2021

#### \$100,000 and above

Robert R. McCormick Foundation

#### \$99,999 - \$25,000

The Barker Welfare Foundation  
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois  
Caerus Foundation, Inc.  
The Chicago Community Trust  
Chicago Foundation for Women  
The Eli B. Williams and Harriet B. Williams Memorial Fund  
John Burns Construction Company  
The Kaminski Family Impact Fund  
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U.S. Bank

#### \$24,999 - \$10,000

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Henrietta Lange Burk Fund  
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Macy's  
MBC Public Adjusters  
The Northern Trust Company  
Meade Electric Company  
Russell and Josephine Kott Memorial Charitable Trust  
RW Collins Co.  
Steven and Michele Sparks

#### \$9,999 - \$5,000

AARP  
Joan Adler  
Admiral Heating & Ventilating, Inc.  
Assurance Agency  
Andrew and Elizabeth Bloomer  
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Emaroy June Benevolent Fund of JPMorgan Chase  
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Motorola Solutions  
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Provisio Partners  
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**\$4,999 - \$1,000**

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**\$499 - \$100**

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 Amazon Smile Foundation  
 Conner Besic  
 Jessica Bozek  
 Steven Bragdon  
 Umberto Brizuela  
 Angela Brownlow  
 Elizabeth Buchanana  
 Ann Bunch  
 Cesar Campa  
 Geordan Capes  
 Marcia Carlson  
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 Elsa Chessani-Chalen  
 Louis Chiappetta  
 CNA Insurance Foundation  
 Stephen and Jane Coley  
 Erica Collins  
 Nadia Coronado  
 Kimberly C. Cothran  
 Erica Cox  
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 Cristina De La Rosa  
 Evans Debeza  
 Ellen Emerson  
 Erie Family Health  
 Lisa Fabiani

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Alex Williams  
Joanne Yangas

## **TRIBUTE GIFTS**

Diana Hunt King *in memory of James Hill Jr.*  
Stephen and Jane Coley *in memory of Donald C. Lisle*  
Daniel and Tara Gregus *in honor of Donald Lisle*  
Marilyn Helmholz *in honor of Caroline Harney*  
Jamie Sauer *in honor of Joan G. Adler*

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SAVE THE DATE

## Chicago Commons Spring Luncheon

*Empowering. Building. Thriving.*

**Friday, April 29, 2022**

### Radisson Blu Chicago

221 N. Columbus Drive, Chicago, IL 60601

### Networking Reception

11:00 AM to 12:00 PM

### Program and Lunch

12:00 PM- 1:30 PM

For more information, please contact Cheryl Wisniewski at [cheryl@chicagocommons.org](mailto:cheryl@chicagocommons.org) or 708-705-4149.

Visit [www.chicagocommons.org/spring-luncheon](http://www.chicagocommons.org/spring-luncheon) for more details.

Sponsorship opportunities available!



## Evans-Blossom Golf Outing

We are excited to celebrate the 20th anniversary of this incredible event with a new name in honor of the combined 90 years of service between Will S. Evans, Jr. and George (Bud) Blossom!

**June 27, 2022**

### Shoreacres

1601 Shore Acres Road, Lake Bluff, IL 60044

### Registration and BBQ Lunch

11:00 AM – 12:30 PM

### Welcome

12:30 PM

### Shotgun Start

1:00 PM

### Cocktails and Dinner

6:00 PM

For more information, please contact Cheryl Wisniewski at [cheryl@chicagocommons.org](mailto:cheryl@chicagocommons.org) or 708-705-4149.

Visit [www.chicagocommons.org/Evans-Blossom](http://www.chicagocommons.org/Evans-Blossom) for more details.

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