



## 2024 SGA Awards Finalists: Community Service

### Entry: Southern Star Cares

Your Company: Southern Star

#### *Linking people, ideas and information:*

Southern Star Cares provided several opportunities to connect people, ideas, and information.

The ideas, concepts, and goals of forming the non-profit organization required extensive collaboration efforts to establish Southern Star Cares. Team members connected with local community leaders who had previously launched their own non-profit entities who provided advice and counsel to aid in the program's success.

The board of directors, focus groups, and team member contributors had the opportunity to learn about each applicant organization and how they serve important needs in the Daviess County, Kentucky area. Some of those team members visited the organizations' facilities to see their work firsthand.

Lastly, Southern Star Cares' mission is to connect the resources of team members to broaden charitable outreach by donating to diverse organizations across Southern Star's footprint.

Southern Star is proud to offer our team new ways of supporting communities through the formation of Southern Star Cares.

#### *Name of Your Project / Initiative*

Southern Star Cares

#### *The solution*

Southern Star Cares is a non-profit organization formed in 2022 by Southern Star team members with a goal of funding local charities to complete community-based projects.

Approximately 10 individual board members were strategically chosen to provide diverse experiences and perspectives. Each member applied their skills to launch the non-profit from its infancy stages to an established organization.

Since this initiative was started from the ground up, the Southern Star Cares Board Members, comprised of team members, contacted other established non-profit organizations that have similar goals and desired outcomes. Representatives from the outside agencies presented to the board to offer counsel and guidance to ensure Southern Star Cares' initial work was successful. The group also enlisted a local accounting firm to help convey the fiduciary duties of reviewing grant applicants' financial information.

The team also identified a need for a third-party software to manage the complexity of intaking grant applications, encrypting sensitive and private information, communicating with applicants as their submissions were reviewed, facilitating the board and focus groups' reviews, tracking award dollars, and analyzing the organization's progress year-to-year. The team chose to deploy Blackbaud's Grants Connect software and worked closely with the vendor to customize the program for its needs.

The nonprofit's funds are generated by team member contributions. All money raised by Southern Star Cares goes directly to grant recipients, with no administrative fees or deductions. During their inaugural fundraiser in 2023, approximately 150 team members generated more than \$100,000, surpassing the team's \$80,000 goal. Considering approximately 250 team members eligible to pledge, Southern Star Cares marked this accomplishment as an impressive feat.

#### *Results of your project / initiative.*

In 2023, Southern Star Cares held its first application period and grant award program, with funds distributed in early 2024. Any charitable non-profit organization located in Daviess County, Kentucky, was eligible to apply for grant funding.

Internal and external communications were utilized to encourage pledges and attract grant applicants. Southern Star generously offered incentives for team member pledges including gift cards and paid time off. Externally, a social media campaign on Facebook was launched several weeks before the grant application period began to garner applicant interest. Additionally, many Southern Star team members serve and volunteer for local non-profit organizations and utilized word-of-mouth promotion to generate buzz among the philanthropic community.

More than 65 organizations applied for grants. Grant recipients were chosen based on their applications, a review by the Southern Star Cares Board of Directors, an evaluation from Southern Star team member focus groups, and a vote from Southern Star team member donors who contributed to the Southern Star Cares fundraising campaign.

During the selection process, focus groups chose grant finalists. The finalists had the opportunity to present directly to Southern Star donors to illustrate the needs of their organizations. It also opened the door for donors to ask questions and find other ways to serve those entities.

Following the team member vote, six organizations received funding from Southern Star Cares.

In December 2023, Southern Star Cares proudly awarded grants totaling approximately \$115,000 to the following organizations, with funds disbursed in 2024:

H.L. Neblett Community Center – \$10,000

Serving at-risk children by providing activities for social, education, physical, economical, and emotional growth.

Western Kentucky Regional Blood Center – \$8,800

Blood donation center serving several western Kentucky hospitals across 12 counties.

Owensboro Area Shelter Information and Services (OASIS) – \$19,921

Women's shelter providing domestic violence prevention programs and substance treatment.

Goodfellows Club of Owensboro – \$20,000

Serving less fortunate children since 1916 by providing clothing, shoes, coats, dental care, and holiday gifts.

My Sister's Keeper – \$27,000

A newly opened 20-bed women and children's emergency homeless shelter.

Wendell Foster Campus for Developmental Disabilities – \$29,000

A community-based organization providing residential living, outpatient therapies, day services, transportation, family support, and other services to those affected by disabilities.

Southern Star Cares will continue serving the Owensboro community, and its most recent fundraiser totaled more than \$120,000 of team member pledges, which will be awarded to local non-profit organizations in 2025.

Southern Star Cares is currently evaluating expanding its reach to serve other locations in Southern Star's business footprint. This initiative exemplifies Southern Star's desire to serve local communities and positions the natural gas industry in a positive light as individuals who care and are ready to give back.



# Entry: Atlanta Gas Light Partners with Goodr

Your Company: Southern Company Gas (Atlanta Gas Light)

*Linking people, ideas and information:*

In 2021, Atlanta Gas Light, through the Atlanta Gas Light Foundation, sought to help address the hunger crisis by forging a partnership with Goodr, an Atlanta-based leading food distribution and recovery organization using technology and logistics to fight hunger and food waste.

This partnership is helping elevate the positive impact that corporations can make in the communities in which they serve. With positive coverage through traditional media and social media, and amplification by the City of Atlanta, Atlanta Public Schools and Goodr, this has been a great example of bringing philanthropic partnerships together to improve the lives of those in need.

*Name of Your Project / Initiative*

Atlanta Gas Light partners with Goodr to fight hunger in Atlanta

*The solution*

Atlanta Gas Light is focused on helping the communities in which it serves through employee volunteerism, philanthropic donations and partnerships that improve the lives of Georgians. One of these areas of focus is feeding the hungry.

Sources estimate that roughly 1.1 million Georgians currently struggle with hunger. Of those, 360,000 are children. Hunger is known to affect not only a child's daily school performance, but also their health and psychosocial behavior.

In 2021, Atlanta Gas Light, through the Atlanta Gas Light Foundation, sought to help address the hunger crisis by forging a partnership with Goodr, an Atlanta-based leading food distribution and recovery organization using technology and logistics to fight hunger and food waste.

This partnership has led to the opening in 2023 of the Goodr Grocery Store at Jean Childs Young Middle School in southwest Atlanta – a first for the Atlanta Public School system. In addition, three specific events to distribute groceries have been held in Atlanta to offer families the opportunity to pick up food items.

Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens and Atlanta Gas Light President and CEO Pedro Cherry were among the dignitaries to participate in the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the grocery store at Jean Childs Young Middle School.

Bringing a grocery store directly to the middle school is just one step in the company's effort to help remove barriers and ensure that every child has access to fresh produce, pantry staples and essential items.

This partnership with Goodr aligns with one of Atlanta Gas Light's core values: to make our communities better because we're there and to ensure a stronger, more prosperous future for all.

*Results of your project / initiative.*

Through the first year of operation, the grocery store has already been a huge success, providing more than 12,000 meals and more than 5,000 pounds of food for the students and their families through high quality, nutritious groceries at no cost. During the school year, the store is expected to provide more than 32,000 meals.

More than 200 families participated in a free Pop-Up Grocery Market hosted by Goodr, Atlanta Gas Light, Atlanta Public Schools and the City of Atlanta in December 2022. Each family received a week's worth of groceries, which included meat and seafood, fresh produce, eggs, bread, dairy, shelf stable items and snacks.

Atlanta Gas Light employee volunteers have participated in each of these events, helping serve families and students.

The company is committed to being a citizen wherever we serve, through philanthropy and volunteerism, to create a positive impact for communities throughout Georgia.

The Goodr partnership has amplified that mission, both with external stakeholders and employees, while creating brand awareness for Atlanta Gas Light and its foundation to build momentum among the business community to join together in the fight against hunger.

[Supplement Attachment 1](#)

[Supplement Attachment 2](#)

# Entry: Fueling Bright Minds & Healthy Futures with Book Fairs & Learning Gardens

Your Company: Atmos Energy

*Linking people, ideas and information*

The initiative will reach an estimated 6,000 students and 450 teachers in eight different North Texas communities. The Literacy Project Scholastic Book Fairs and Learning Gardens provide students, teachers, parents, and volunteers the opportunity to engage, learn, and communicate across different generational and cultural perspectives. At the end of their book fair experience, we supply students with bags that contain information about how their family can redeem a free one-year subscription to Vooks, a streaming service that brings children's books to life. The bags also include information about our energy assistance programs and natural gas safety. Both projects can easily be replicated across Atmos Energy's six divisions in the future, in collaboration with other nonprofit partners, continuing the natural gas company's commitment to fuel safe and thriving communities.

*Name of Your Project / Initiative*

Fueling Bright Minds and Healthy Futures with Book Fairs and Learning Gardens

*The solution*

A key pillar of Atmos Energy's Fueling Safe and Thriving Communities initiative focuses on childhood literacy and hunger. We believe in making a difference in the lives of children by collaborating with local school districts and education foundations to offer nutritious meals and provide resources to help children read at grade level by third grade. To help fuel bright minds and healthy futures, our Mid-Tex Division has partnered with the North Texas Healthy Communities Foundation, a branch of Texas Health Resources, to pilot two projects over a two-year period (2023-2024) across the North Texas area.

For the first pilot, termed Literacy Project Scholastic Book Fairs, we are partnering with Scholastic to offer free book fairs in 10 schools that are unable to hold traditional book fairs due to high levels of low-income families. Approximately 500 students per school choose two free books, while teachers receive free resources for their classroom. Atmos Energy mascots, Rosie the Skunk and Gus the Gopher, make a special appearance, and our employees can volunteer to help run the book fairs.

For the second pilot, our employees are building Learning Gardens at six under resourced schools, where children do not have access to fresh fruit and vegetables. In some locations, the food grown is used for an in-school pantry for families. We provide each site with materials,

supplies, and fund an educator to help teachers with the curriculum and development of the garden.

*Results of your project / initiative.*

The Literacy Project Scholastic Book Fairs encourage the growth of reading skills through free books, reading supplements, student resources, and teaching materials. Students are also able to experience the excitement of a Scholastic book fair. A 2006 study showed that while in middle income neighborhoods the ratio of books per child in the home is 13 to one, in low-income neighborhoods, the ratio is one book for every 300 children (Neuman, Susan B. and David K. Dickinson, ed. Handbook of Early Literacy Research, Volume 2. New York, NY: 2006, p. 31.). The project's long-term impact is to contribute to improved educational outcomes, job attainment, and health and social outcomes for underserved students.

The Learning Gardens reinforce healthy eating habits via recipe cards, harvesting events, and taste-tests, promote movement through outdoor activities, and integrate STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) learning using a hands-on approach. Long-term effects of gardening during childhood include increased exposure to moderate exercise, positive social interactions that lead to healthy habits in adulthood, and increased scientific knowledge associated with higher test scores.

