

# Making a bigger impact every Vear

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## Letter from the Chairman



TOTAL PROJECTS

**200** 

ASCEND VOLUNTEERS

3,721

HOURS VOLUNTEERED

13,783

#### **Empowering People to Help Others**

ne of the things I love most about being involved with our foundation is seeing the passion of Ascend employees for helping others. Ascend Cares is a window into the hearts of our people, and it clearly reveals we have remarkable volunteers motivated by goodness and generosity.

From fighting hunger and providing housing to funding educations and more, you will find many stories of this generosity in this report. Some are major projects by a large team that impact hundreds of children, families or veterans. Others are the work of a single individual serving as a mentor or organizer through a Community Impact Grant of their own design. All represent our employees' passions for making a difference in the lives of others.

I often use the phrase "dollars for doers" because I believe it perfectly captures the spirit of Ascend Cares. Our organization is about much more than just writing a check and presenting a donation. It's about actively doing the good work and being the helping hands. It's about empowering people to help others through causes they are passionate about and supporting each other along the way.

Nine years ago, Ascend Cares began with a collection of donations to help fellow employees at our Decatur site as they recovered from tragic storms. This year, with our first Global Day of Caring, we made an international impact in communities around the world.

Your gifts and labor make this possible. I celebrate your efforts, and I am honored more than ever to work together with you.

Jom Boggs

Tom Boggs
Chairman of Ascend Cares

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## Children, Health and Safety

From decorating for monthly birthday parties for abused or abandoned children to making care packages for children fighting life-threatening illnesses, Ascend Cares projects have made a difference in the lives of children across our communities. Volunteers also share their talents to help keep kids safe and help mentor them on their future career paths.

#### **Decatur Police Department**

Decatu

Ascend Cares sponsored the Decatur Police
Department's Summer Explorer Group to provide
local high school students with experience toward
their future careers. Students received safety
training from Ascend's senior safety technician, and
then helped Priceville Fire Chief extinguish a fire.



Preparing for a baby is exciting and worrisome for new parents, especially if you don't have the necessary items. Volunteers at Chocolate Bayou filled 75 diaper bags with baby supplies. The bags were given to expectant moms at the Women & Children's Health Center in Alvin, a part of the Stephen F. Austin Community Health Network.





#### Woodfields Elementary

Greenwood

Ascend Cares volunteers from Greenwood worked with students from Woodfields Elementary to make their own drums. Giving Tree Music, the company that provided the materials, taught the students how to drum as a way to bring them together through music and strengthen the community.

#### Special Olympics

Housto

Ascend Cares Houston volunteers and their families were busy preparing event stations and cheering on the athletes at the 2019 Spring Games for the Special Olympics Texas - Greater Houston Area.



#### Reimagine

Reimagine

At Reimagine Spring, Ascend Cares volunteers and local organizations welcomed more than 2,000 people from Escambia County. The event, fully-funded by Ascend Cares and organized by Reimagine, provided free food, clothing, haircuts, baby supplies and health screenings.

#### Kidz Harbor and The Birthday Joy Program

Chocolate Bayou

When children are removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect, Kidz Harbor is a safe and secure place for them to stay. Each month, Ascend Cares Chocolate Bayou partners with The Birthday Joy Program to throw a party to make these children feel extra special on their birthdays.



#### Foley Fire Department

Fo

Ascend Cares Foley and the Foley Fire Department promoted fire safety at the community "Let it Snow" event. Ascend Cares gave out 250 smoke detectors and fire fighters offered battery checks and installations to residents while kids played in a simulated winter wonderland.

#### **Ronald McDonald House Charities**

Ronald McDonald House Charities

Tilburg and Chocolate Bayou

Ronald McDonald House Charities gives families a place to stay together while a child fights a life-threatening illness. Ascend Cares volunteers in Tilburg and Chocolate Bayou pitched in to make things a little easier. Tilburg made care packages for the kids and their families, while Chocolate Bayou hosted dinner and games for families staying at the Ronald McDonald House of Galveston.





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## Education

A great education can help kids find their passions. In 2019, the foundation supported education through funding, tutoring, school supply donations and enriching activities outside the classroom.

#### **Alvin Outdoor Learning Center**

#### Chocolate Bayou

The center, a hands-on outdoor facility, teaches students about growing fruits and vegetables and eating healthy. Ascend Cares Chocolate Bayou spent a day building raised bed gardens, hanging birdhouses and doing basic upkeep throughout the property.

#### Stuff the Bus

#### Greenwood

Ascend Cares volunteers and families from Greenwood donated more than 75 backpacks full of school supplies to Stuff the Bus, allowing students from local communities to start the year with everything they need to learn.

#### **Yellowstone Academy**

#### Houston

Ascend Cares Houston volunteers visit Yellowstone Academy every month for tutoring, mentoring and a lot of fun. They also lead the kids in volunteer activities to benefit others, such as sending medical kits to other children in areas hit by natural disasters and stuffed animals to kids whose parents are deployed.







#### **Carver Park Summer Feeding Program**

#### Pensacola

Some children depend on school lunches as a primary source of nutrition. When school lets out for summer, those meals go away. To help, Ascend Cares Pensacola provided hot lunches for children at Carver Park for the Summer Feeding Program.

#### **West Decatur Elementary**

#### Decatur

With funding from Ascend Cares
Decatur, the school purchased supplies
for students to create hands-on science
activities such as planting an outdoor
garden. As the vegetables grow, students
will learn about soil, seeds and the needs
of plants.





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## Housing

Not everyone has a place to call home. Whether it's giving shoes to the homeless or building beds for children who sleep on the floor, Ascend Cares finds ways to help give a small sense of normalcy to those faced with difficult living conditions.



#### Pensacola

With the dangerously high temperatures in Pensacola, senior citizens needed extra help to stay cool in their homes. Ascend Cares Pensacola donated air conditioners, fans and cash to the Annual Council on Aging Senior Chill Out to keep local seniors safe during the summer.



#### Beacon

#### Houston

For people who are homeless, it's uncertain where their next bath or meal will come from. Working with the Beacon, Ascend Cares volunteers handed out backpacks filled with hygiene and food items along with shoes to the Houston homeless community.

#### Sleep in Heavenly Peace

#### Decati

Hundreds of children in the Hartselle area sleep on the floor because they do not have beds. Ascend Cares volunteers from our Decatur site partnered with Sleep in Heavenly Peace to build 200 beds in one day for local families.



#### Builders Without Borders

#### Chocolate Bayou

Builders Without Borders provides housing, education and medical services to people in southeast Texas. As a way to increase the number of volunteers and community outreach, Ascend Cares Chocolate Bayou framed a bunkhouse for the group's volunteers to stay in during their mission trips.

#### Sunshine Home

#### Shanghai

Shanghai volunteers made new friends at the Sunshine Home, a center for people with mental disabilities. The individuals living at the Sunshine Home build a family bond as they receive special education and life skills. Ascend Cares volunteers visited and played games.









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## Hunger

Do you know when you are going to eat again? Millions of people in the world don't. Organizations look to community partners to provide funds, volunteer hours and food donations to feed those in need. Ascend Cares supported local food pantries by contributing hundreds of pounds of food and serving hundreds of meals at soup kitchens.

#### **Pearland Neighborhood Center**

Chocolate Bayou

Ascend Cares volunteers from Chocolate Bayou spent time sorting and stocking the food pantry at the Pearland Neighborhood Center. They also provided lawn maintenance for the property.

#### **Ecumenical Ministries**

Foley

Ascend Cares Foley held a food drive where volunteers and local residents donated items to benefit Ecumenical Ministries of Baldwin County, a nondenominational social service agency.

#### **Greenwood Soup Kitchen**

Greenwood

The Greenwood leadership team served 114 hot meals to hungry individuals at a local soup kitchen.









#### PensaCan

Pensacola

Ascend Cares volunteers from Pensacola competed in PensaCan to build structures out of food items. The Ascend Cares team created a beach scene depicting U.S. Navy Blue Angels made out of Kool-Aid packets. All the food was donated to Manna, an organization that fights hunger in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties.

# PensaCan

#### Loaves & Fishes

Houston

Many homeless people in the Houston area rely on Loaves & Fishes for a hot and healthy meal. Ascend Cares volunteers pitch in every month to prep and serve food. Other activities included a blanket drive and a donation to Magnificat Houses, the organization that operates the soup kitchen.



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## **Military**

With a significant number of employees being veterans, Ascend Cares focuses on many military projects.



Houston

Ascend Cares Houston partnered with Operation Gratitude to stuff more than 100 cuddly bears for the Battalion Buddy Program. The toys help bring comfort to the children of deployed service members.

#### **Wreaths Across America**

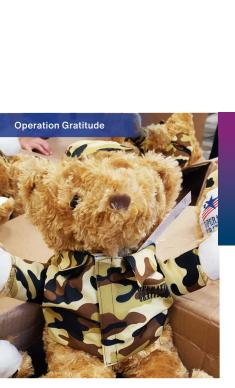
Houston

Ascend Cares honored fallen vets on Memorial Day by placing flags at the Houston National Cemetery on the headstones of those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

#### Fisher House and Trees for Houston

#### Housto

Ascend Cares Houston and Trees for Houston helped beautify the grounds at the VA Fisher House in Houston by planting 23 trees. The facility is free to families of veterans being treated for long-term illnesses.



#### **Wreaths Across America**

ensacola 🏻

For Christmas, Ascend Cares volunteers in Pensacola placed wreaths at Barrancas National Cemetery to honor those who served to protect our freedom.

#### The Warrior's Refuge

Chocolate Bayou

Ascend Cares Chocolate Bayou helped sponsor the grand opening of The Warrior's Refuge in West Columbia by providing silent auction items. The Warrior's Refuge helps homeless veterans with shelter, counseling and employment resources. Ascend Cares volunteers cooked and served food that was purchased by those at the opening to raise funds for the organization.









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## Day of Caring

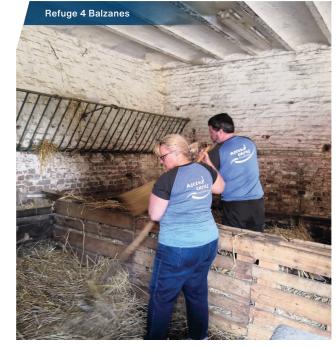
From Shanghai to South Carolina, Ascend employees and their families came together to make a difference in the lives of more than 12,000 community members in the first Ascend Cares Global Day of Caring.



#### Refuge 4 Balzanes

Belgium

Ascend Cares volunteers in Belgium helped out at the Refuge 4 Balzanes, a place for abused animals. Volunteers cleaned stalls for the animals that are recovering at the center.





#### **Galveston Street Ministry**

Chocolate Bayou

Ascend Cares worked with the Galveston Street Ministry to provide food to those in need. Volunteers packed 250 lunches and gave them to the homeless people living in the community.

#### YMCA

Chocolate Bayou

It can be difficult for a child to learn if they don't have what they need for school. Ascend Cares Chocolate Bayou donated 1,000 backpacks filled with school supplies to the YMCA. The backpacks were given to local children in preparation for the new school year.





#### Little Free Libraries

Decatu

Many children don't have books to read at home. Little Free Libraries makes books available to children throughout the community. Ascend Cares volunteers and family members built and decorated five little libraries, and donated 375 books.

#### Miracle League

Greenwoo

As Miracle League's field began to buckle, children using wheelchairs, walkers or crutches weren't able to play baseball. Ascend Cares volunteers dug up the existing tiles to prepare for Miracle League's new special rubberized field.

#### **Oriental Charity**

Shanghai

Ascend Cares volunteers in the Shanghai office teamed up with the Oriental Charity to host a pottery workshop for children with disabilities.

#### Forgotten Harvest

Detroi

Ascend Cares volunteered at Forgotten Harvest where they bundled thousands of asparagus. Forgotten Harvest rescues food that will be thrown away and redistributes to those in need. The asparagus repacked by Ascend Cares was given to local communities in Detroit.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS HELPED

12,000+





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## Community **Impact Grants**

Our employees support local organizations with hands-on volunteering, projects and events. The Ascend Cares Community Impact Grants Program provides funding that allows employees to make a bigger difference in their communities.

TOTAL **PROJECTS** 

AWARDED \$106,000





#### Seating for volunteers to take a break

When volunteers step up to help, it's nice a large window. He was also able to to have a pleasant place where they can also sit down.

When Colin Retterer, 16, was formulating Impact Grant. He says the money enabled his Eagle Scout Service Project last summer, he decided to approach the Montgomery County Food Bank, where he and his family have volunteered since Hurricane Harvey in 2017. Colin is the son of Peter Retterer, who works in the Houston office.

The staff steered him toward a decrepit room with a few scattered tables. Colin decided to construct an attractive counter and 10 stools to make the area more inviting for volunteers on break. The new furniture is situated so they can look at the work area through

purchase a charging tower for devices.

Colin received a \$2,000-Community him to use quality materials and tools to produce a quality end product.

A few months after the project was completed, the food bank contacted Colin to report that his area is now the preferred spot for people to congregate. The food bank said an area like this had been a vision for the organization and was excited that Colin made it happen.

"It's transformed the character of the room," Colin says. "Volunteers can relax, talk and build a community within the food bank."

#### Walking across Germany for children

Imagine trudging 455 miles through soft sand, along busy streets and over hilly terrain on sometimes-scorching days all with a grumpy dog in tow.

It doesn't sound like many people's ideal summer vacation.

But that's exactly how Frank Volg. an Ascend sales representative in Germany, spent last August - all for a good cause. He walked the length of the country to benefit A Heart for Children. The well-known European charity promotes a variety of initiatives to protect young people.



"At first I thought it was a crazy idea, but then I realized, 'This can be done,'" Frank savs.

His 30-day trek began at a lighthouse on the island of Sylt in the north and ended at Zugspitze, Germany's highest point, on the southern border with Austria.

Along the way he detoured, by train or bus, to visit his regular customers, nine in all. They would offer him a cup of coffee: he'd talk about his walk and make his pitch. He raised 5,000 euros, which Ascend Cares matched through its Community Impact Grants Program.

The program supports the volunteer efforts of many individual employees in their communities each year. The foundation awarded \$106,000 to 38 projects in 2019.

Elsi, Frank's 3-year-old St. Bernard mix and travel companion, had to carry her own food, 5.5 pounds to start. But because she was so obviously annoyed -"She hated that pack!" - Frank reduced her load to 2.5 pounds. He massaged both his feet and her paws with cream each night to avoid blisters.

Frank says his favorite part of the trip was meeting people he wouldn't normally meet. After hearing his story, they would often contribute. Frank also negotiated with hotels and hostels to donate the requisite pet fee to A Heart for Children.

Frank says the charity wasn't the only beneficiary of his trip.

"Today, when I speak with people, one of the first questions is not 'What is the price of this polymer?' but 'How is your dog?' I now have a personal relationship with the customer, which is very helpful for Ascend."





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## Community Service Scholarships

When working toward a certification or degree, you need the support of your family and friends, and funding to ease the cost of school. Ascend Cares invests in Ascend employees and their students' education with the Community Service Scholarships Program. When applying for a scholarship, each student is required to share their hands-on volunteer experience. With financial help from the foundation, Ascend Cares scholarship recipients continue to give back to their communities through volunteering and their careers.



Shelby Willett at her college graduation at the University of Mobile in Alabama.



#### Fulfilling the passion of becoming a teacher

When she was 10 years old, Shelby Willett already knew not only that she wanted to be a teacher but she also knew which university she wanted to attend.

Though she had her heart set on the University of Mobile in Alabama, she was aware financial aid would be harder to score at the faith-based private college. Enter Ascend Cares. Shelby is the first student to receive a foundation scholarship every year she was in college, \$8,000 total. She is the daughter of Trent Willett, a lead mechanic at the company's Pensacola site.

Scholarship recipients are required to submit an essay about their hands-on volunteer experience. With years of volunteering in high school and college, it was easy for Shelby to write about the connections she has made through leading community events, mission trips, volunteer counseling, tornado recovery

and elder support. By sharing how she has helped her community, Shelby was able to receive consecutive scholarships.

Shelby says the scholarships enabled her to fulfill her passion - inspiring students just as her teachers inspired her.

She landed a job at Chickasaw Elementary a month before she graduated in December 2018. She now teaches fourth grade science.

"The teachers I had growing up had a real influence on me," she says. "My absolute favorite thing about fourth graders is they long for a relationship with other people. They want to make that connection with teachers."

Shelby says she is fortunate. "I have lots of friends who really struggle to finish school and begin their careers. I really appreciate Ascend Cares for the opportunity they gave me."

#### Giving back to the community

Shalini Lakshmi, like other hardworking students, spent many hours at the public library during her school years.

But she wasn't studying chemistry, calculus or computing. She shelved books, prepared for annual book sales and helped with activities for the Alvin Library's Summer Reading Program for children in the community.

Shalini started volunteering at the Alvin Library in eighth grade as a member of the National Junior Honor Society. She continues to do so today.

"It's an experience that has been with me as I've grown up," she says. Shalini graduates this year with an industrial engineering degree from the University of Houston. Over the past three years, she has received a total of \$8,000 from Ascend Cares. The foundation invests in employee dependents who are enrolled in college or vocational school and dedicated to community service.

In 2019, the foundation awarded 103 scholarships totaling \$169,750, which included five \$500 Community Impact Grants.

"It gave me a sense of security and enabled me to not take on the financial burden associated with higher education," says Shalini, the daughter of Giri Lakshmi, an employee at Ascend's Chocolate Bayou plant in Alvin.

Shalini also received a \$500-Community Impact Grant last year for submitting one of the six best application essays. So, she went shopping for goodies to fill 100 prize bags - a surprise for children who read at least 20 books during the summer.

"I bought books, school supplies, things like that, so they had something tangible because that's a pretty big achievement. I'm happy because \$500 may not seem like a lot of money, but we were able to have 10 things per bag. I was surprised how far it stretched."

"I am grateful to Ascend Cares for allowing me give back to a cause that is close to my heart. The kids were all extremely excited to receive their bags."

Shalini, a senior who interned at Ascend this past year, would like to continue to volunteer with libraries in the future.

"It's fulfilling to volunteer at a library because you get to interact with so many people in the community. It's rewarding because you can see yourself making a difference."



SCHOLARSHIPS

103

\$169,750

Ascend Cares Foundation

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## **Hardship Grants**

"When life hands you lemons, make lemonade." It may be an admirable sentiment, but navigating life's unexpected crises often requires more than a positive attitude.

It often requires money - to repair a wrecked car, to fix a hurricane-damaged home, to travel for top-notch medical care.

Which is how the Ascend Cares Hardship Committee can assist. Employees and contractors may apply for a financial shot in the arm after sudden difficulties. In 2019, the committee gave a total of \$71,000 to 24 employees and contractors.

"There is more need out there than you might imagine," says Lynda Green, senior pipelines manager at Ascend's Chocolate Bayou plant. She has been on the committee committee often hears of cases through informal since its inception and has seen how employees are sometimes embarrassed and therefore reluctant to ask for aid.

"When we sit down with an employee who has a need, they're dealing with an unexpected event that has created a financial hardship for them," Lynda says. "It's usually an emotional time, and it's uncomfortable to ask for help. But they know what they want to do: They want to get on their feet so they can help the next person who comes along.

"People prefer to be the ones helping rather than the ones receiving, and people understand that if they have a need at one particular time in their lives, there will be another time when they can help."

Lynda says the committee's message to struggling employees is simple: "We want to help you with a grant so you can focus on moving forward from here and on the emotional well-being of you and your family."

The application process is designed to be discreet, and employees may remain anonymous. While the channels, Lynda hopes to spread the word about Hardship Grants so more people apply directly.

"It's been a surprise to some of the people we have helped recently," she says about the effort.

Lynda makes a point to follow up with individuals who have gotten grants to find out how they are faring, both financially and emotionally.

"All have been extremely positive about the help," she says. "They are grateful to be in a better place."

## **About Ascend Cares**

#### Our focus

Ascend Cares serves community needs in the areas of children, health and safety, education, housing, hunger and military.

The Ascend Cares Foundation is about making a difference in the lives of others. It is led by Ascend employees and supports Ascend families in their times of need, provides inspiring opportunities for community engagement and facilitates community leadership. Ascend Cares is funded entirely by donations and a company match, and every dollar contributed supports the work of the foundation.

Ascend Cares was founded in 2011 after a tornado outbreak in northern Alabama affected Ascend team members and their families near the Decatur facility. Since then, Ascend employees have made a tremendous impact on families in need and their local communities.

#### **Programs**

#### Community Projects

The annual Day of Caring is a time for our employees and their families to come together to give back by participating in projects large and small in their communities. Additionally, employee-led Ascend Cares teams invest foundation dollars and volunteer hours throughout the year to support causes they are passionate about.

#### Hardship Grants

Employees and their families sometimes face unexpected financial burdens because of illness, natural disasters or other hardships. Ascend Cares offers direct and indirect financial assistance to team members facing these challenges.

#### Community Impact Grants

Ascend Cares is proud of the volunteer efforts of employees. The Community Impact Grants Program provides financial assistance to support the hands-on engagement of Ascend employees in their communities.

#### Community Service Scholarships

The Community Service Scholarships Program is a way for the foundation to invest in Ascend families and their students' educations. Scholarships are awarded to dependents attending college or vocational school who have demonstrated a dedication to community service.

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### By the Numbers

TOTAL PROJECTS

200 3,721 13,783

#### Children, Health & Safety

63 Projects 1,565 Volunteers 5.460 Hours

#### Education

68 Projects 1.227 Volunteers 4.224 Hours

#### Housing

15 Projects 227 Volunteers 869 Hours

#### Hunger

52 Projects 1.284 Volunteers 4.004 Hours

#### Military 25 Projects

451 Volunteers 2.287 Hours

**ASCEND VOLUNTEERS** 

#### Other

19 Projects 621 Volunteers 2.014 Hours

#### **Hardship Grants**

24 employees and contractors received financial hardship support.

> \* Please note volunteer hours are based upon multiple projects. Ascend Cares volunteers may have participated in activities for more than one focus area.

#### **2019 Volunteers** by Focus Area 24% Hunger → 4% Housina 23% Education **29**% 12% Other Children. Health & Safety

HOURS VOLUNTEERED

## Thank You

Because of you the Ascend Cares Foundation is able to make a difference in the lives of thousands of people. Your constant hands-on involvement and generous donations allow us to support team members through hardships and partner with local organizations to help those in our communities.

#### Board of Directors











Lynn Crear





Hal McCord

#### Hardship Committee Members





Matt Chapman



Donya Charles



**Brittany Cooper** Lisa Entrekin



Lynda Green

Site Community Team Leaders









Julie Jamar



Rachell Gold

Valerie Dansby

Sharhonda Owens





Riana Rijnen



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#### How to give

As a 501(c)(3) organization, Ascend Cares is funded through generous donations and company match. Contributions are tax deductible (federal tax ID #90-0709302).

Ascend employees can contribute through payroll deduction at any time. Anyone can make a donation at: ascendmaterials.com/ascendcares.

Employees can also contribute their time on projects through site team projects and Community Impact Grants.

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