



Atif Bostic

UpLift Solutions Making Strides

By Saudia Durrant

The plan for Uplift Solutions began in 2003 when Jeff Brown, President/CEO of Brown's Superstores, attended a state level meeting with other grocery operators and non-profit organizations to address the food desert crisis in Pennsylvania. While most developers found it important to just focus on making profit and building near guaranteed revenue, Brown wanted to solve the issue of food deserts and failing businesses in Black and Brown neighborhoods. Brown began working with then State Representative Dwight Evans to create the Fresh Food Financing Initiative. With the state's assistance of grant funding and millions acquired from private investments, the possibility of developing new supermarkets across Pennsylvania became more of a reality.

Brown's success attracted the highest of officials, including former President Barack Obama, who invited Brown ShopRite' President/CEO, Jeff Brown

and now Congressman Evans to the White House, in acknowledgment of their Initiative. Over the last few years, Uplift Solutions has expanded significantly in revenue and staff, and has managed new fundamental programs, which tackle poverty, unemployment and incarcerations.

We sat down with Executive Director, Atif Bostic, to discuss the tremendous impact this organization has made.

According to him, Uplift Solutions is a national nonprofit working to provide underserved communities with affordable access to proper nutrition, water, healthcare, jobs, public benefits, capital and education. It's comprised of over a dozen experts who specialize in finance, community development, marketing, health and wellness. Under the guidelines of four essential programs, Uplift Solutions works to ensure the survival of food-related projects and businesses that seek to end food deserts across the country.



ShopRite of Newark, NJ

Food deserts are impoverished areas that lack grocery stores with offerings of fresh fruits, vegetables, and other healthy whole foods.

Bostic oversees these programs which include the sustainable food solutions, health solutions, finance solutions, and workforce solutions. “Our *food solutions* area focuses on developing new supermarkets. We also work with supermarket operators to donate food that would normally get thrown away.”

According to BusinessInsider.com, roughly 80 billion pounds of food gets tossed out each year, despite 62% of the country living in food-insecure households. With this component, Uplift Solutions brings food that is no longer saleable but still perfectly edible to be served at soup kitchens, food pantries and shelters.

The *health solutions* program focuses on creating access to healthcare, nutrition, education, and public benefits. “We work with supermarkets and developers to create space within those environments, and then we find healthcare provider partners to occupy those spaces and deliver services.”

Typically, not a key conversation piece in terms of preserving communities, supermarket preservation is often overlooked. When a supermarket is failing, Uplift Solutions comes in and helps them restructure their debt, reorganize their businesses, and re-merchandize their stores.

“One of our biggest projects is in Flint.

Regardless of where you go there, it's a food desert. We're working to solve that.”

By creating more sustainable businesses, communities are no longer faced with the threat of food deserts nor reduced to continuing the subsequent cycle of poor health, poverty and dependency on government assistance. Bostic and his team of experts also work with local dieticians to help with nutrition education and to shift individuals from eating processed foods to healthier, more organic foods.

With Republicans' proposed threat of “tightening” work requirements for public assistance, \$192 billion would be sliced off the budget over the course of ten years.

“The third program is *finance solutions* where we create access to capital by working with developers and operators. We have a community development financial institution where we make loans to healthcare providers, and operators, [as well as] make equity investments and grants,” Bostic said.

The fourth component is *workforce solutions* which recognizes the necessity, in a displaced community, of establishing financial literacy, and is launching a workforce development training program for citizens reentering society.

“I'm not a subscriber to the term “second chance,” what I look at is really creating opportunities.

It's not about a second chance, it's about creating an opportunity to help people go forward; that's really the premise of this program,” according to Bostic.

“We're focusing on returning citizens because we have a fundamental belief that incarceration actually leads to poverty. It's deliberate. Our model is to work with individuals to reprogram them, put them in a different environment, and give them the opportunity to advance.

Uplift Solutions is having a huge impact on so many lives and is continuing its expansion across the country. Bostic asserts, “One of our biggest projects is in Flint, MI. Regardless of where you go there, it's a food desert. We're working to solve that.”

Uplift is currently running 19 projects in 13 states including Louisiana, Massachusetts, Iowa, and Michigan. With over 6,500 food deserts across the nation, there is a lot of work ahead. Uplift Solutions is there as a model and inspiration.



ShopRite of Howard Park Grocery Store, Baltimore

UpLift Solutions opens Workforce Solutions at Enon Tabernacle Baptist Church.



Atif Bostic, Sandy Brown and Jeff Brown



Mr. Paul Brauer, Dr. Owens, Mr. Brown, Ms. kimberly Lloyd, Mr. Bostic, Wayne Trotman, and Mrs Sandy Brown



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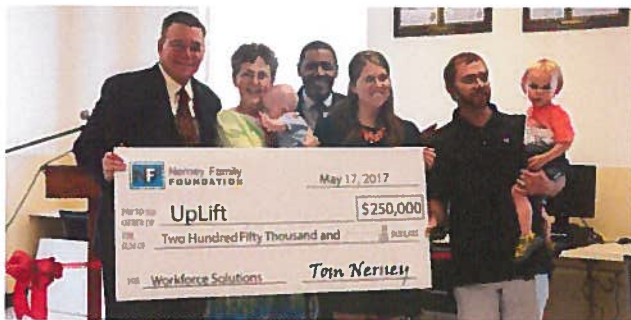
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