



Martha Bienvenu Brown

Iberia Parish

Nominated by: Marjorie Pierson

Community Foundation of Acadiana

Martha Bienvenu Brown has long believed in the power of philanthropy to build stronger, more vibrant communities. She has been a dedicated donor to non-profit organizations in her native south Louisiana and beyond, supporting institutions and initiatives in education, the humanities, hunger relief, healthcare, and religion. She is delighted to collaborate with the Community Foundation of Acadiana, which helps her to realize her annual and long-term philanthropic goals.

Martha grew up in St. Martinville, Louisiana, where she learned from her father's example the importance of sharing resources within the community, particularly with those less fortunate. While he died when she was just 17, Martha also inherited her father's interest in business and banking. She attended Newcomb College in New Orleans and, in 1953, married New Iberia native Gordon Sandoz Brown. Martha and Gordon settled in New Iberia, raised four children, and, with Gordon's father and brothers, built a fledgling hot sauce company into a multinational food manufacturing company. Martha wasn't officially on the Bruce Foods Corporation payroll but played an integral support role behind the scenes to help the company expand across America and into international markets. Many successful business deals were closed at dinners in the family home, where her warm hospitality and excellent interpersonal skills were often called into play.

Outside the family business, Martha began studying the investment strategies of legends Peter Lynch and Warren Buffett. She was an early and ardent investor in IberiaBank (now First Horizon Bank), was invited to join its advisory board, and served as a member for 20 years. Martha also began supporting a growing range of non-profit organizations as a donor, board member, and fundraiser.

An ardent supporter of elementary, secondary, and university education, Martha has been a decades-long donor to both the Episcopal School of Acadiana and the Epiphany Day School, where she has also served as a board member and fundraiser. She supports Tulane University's Newcomb Fund in honor of her and her husband's alma mater. At age 80, Martha and her dance partner Cecil Broussard performed joyfully in Catholic High School's "Dancing with the Stars" fundraiser.

Within the humanities, Martha has been a dedicated donor to many worthy organizations in south Louisiana. Among these are the Shadows on the Teche/National Trust for Historic Preservation, which honored Martha in 2015 for her decades of support; the Bayou Teche Museum, the Iberia Parish Cultural Resources Association, the Iberia Performing Arts League and the Paul & Lulu Hilliard Art Museum.

In support of hunger relief efforts, Martha has been a proud donor to Solomon House, the United Way of Acadiana, the Salvation Army, and the Iberia Parish Homeless Shelter. Within the healthcare sector, she has also been a long-term supporter of the American Red Cross, the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, the Shriner's Hospital for Children, and the Wounded Warrior Project.

Martha takes great pride in her family history in the Episcopal Church of the Epiphany. Her family has worshiped at Epiphany for generations, and as a lifelong member of the church, she has played many roles there. She is a constant presence in the congregation, has served on its vestry, and donates generously to support both church operations and the historic preservation of its 165-year-old building. Martha's daughter, Annie Brown Etheredge, is rector of the church. Martha also helped raise funds for the church by co-authoring, with her daughter Marjorie Brown Pierson, a coffee table book about the history of the Church titled "Celebrate!" All proceeds from sales of the book are being donated to Epiphany.

Martha is proud to support all of these worthy causes, along with others not listed here. She has inspired her three daughters, Jeannine, Marjorie, and Annie, to give generously to worthy causes in their own communities. They, in turn, are incredibly proud of their mother's lifelong passion for giving and the thoughtful philanthropic legacy she has built in Iberia Parish and beyond.