



2020 Winner



## PROFILE OF A CHAMPION: A Living Legacy of Empowerment

In 1952, Herman J. Russell started his empire and built a real estate and construction company. Beyond the vision for a thriving, profitable business, Russell imagined a company that nurtured the soul of Atlanta by constructing relationships as strong as buildings and businesses that fostered a circle of empowerment for customers, communities and employees. This founding vision forms the DNA and values that drive the company today. Through intentional focus, investment and heart, H. J. Russell & Company's (Russell) buildings form the skyline of the city and their corporate generosity shapes a living legacy. For nearly 70 years, the leadership of Russell has embodied the values of a goBeyondProfit Champion, and it's this enduring commitment that their peers recognize and celebrate today.

### Overall Philosophy

Historically, Russell provided significant financial support for the civil rights movement and emotional support for its leaders. Additional funding went to the advancement of students and entrepreneurs with a specific focus on enhancing the living environments of some of the city's most vulnerable residents in the heart of Atlanta. The company has also proudly served as an unwitting incubator for others in the industry. This ongoing philosophy finds new vitality and innovation in the leadership of the current generations. Together the leadership--across the various subcompanies, Russell CARES and the Russell Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship--collaborates to advance dialogue, bring continuing solutions, and partner with community members and other leaders for lasting change.



## Cultivating Company Culture

### Goodwill and Heart Lived Out Through Russell CARES

The company values, called the Russell Way, guide its "giving" culture providing genuine commitment to associates and extending care to the communities where they live and work. Russell has always been generously active in their communities with sponsorships, donations and community service projects. Russell CARES, the firm's corporate social responsibility arm, manages their corporate giving, offering grants to local organizations for access to subsidized housing, education and strengthening the lives of young people. Thanks to Russell CARES, you'll find associates serving together at the Red Shield Shelter or Children's Healthcare of Atlanta - Hughes Spalding Hospital. In addition, signature programs bring the company's giving philosophy to life including Russell Rocks the Block (held in conjunction with their sister company, Concessions International, LLC) and the newly launched Russell Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (RCIE), a nonprofit established by the Russell Family as a tribute to their patriarch, Herman J. Russell.

*From the beginning, we've been beyond building structures, we've been about building communities where everyone has a place. Construction and development are in our bones, but giving back to the community is in our heart."*

Michael B. Russell, CEO,  
H. J. Russell & Company



*Giving is more than a corporate directive, it is part of the Russell DNA”*

**Paul Bryant, VP, External Affairs  
H. J. Russell & Company**

## Community Empowerment Combining Levity and Practicality

Long before the revitalization of Atlanta’s westside was trendy, H. J. Russell & Company played a vital role in the Castleberry Hill neighborhood. Today, this historic commitment lives on through the signature Russell Rocks the Block program. Imagine, if you will, a typical block party with a bounce house, live music and nourishing food creating an inviting gathering for community residents. Then, insert into this experience access to vital resources such as Morehouse School of Medicine’s free health screening, WorkSource Atlanta job readiness program, voter registration tables, a STEAM educational experience, and a youth sports organization activating the minds and bodies of the attending children. Russell CARES elevates this setting of celebration honoring the community into an empowering offering of crucial resources which may otherwise be out of reach for many families. Together, Russell’s CEO, president, and employees revel in community and learn side by side.



*“Investing in others nurtures our existence and gives one a keener sense of what a community truly needs.”*

**Michael B. Russell, CEO,  
H. J. Russell & Company**

## Deploying Company Resources Raising the Collective Prosperity of Atlanta

Decades ago, Russell opened their 42,000-square-foot headquarters in historic Castleberry Hill, a neighborhood of Atlanta known for a rich industrial past followed by decades of distress prior to a resurgence in the 1990s. Today, the freshly renovated former headquarters serves as home to the Russell Center for Innovation & Entrepreneurship. RCIE president and CEO Jay Bailey often shares the statistics that in the city of Atlanta a child born into poverty has a less than 4% chance of reaching the upper-middle class. And more than half of those born into poverty will remain in poverty their entire lives. Thirty seven percent of African American households have a net worth of zero, and Atlanta leads the country in economic immobility and income inequality. But the data is clear—the greatest equalizer of wealth disparity is business ownership.

For this purpose and to break the cycle, the Russell family committed intellectual and financial resources to create this new engine for entrepreneurship and economic opportunity. Launched in 2019, RCIE is the largest center of its kind in the country devoted to empowering African American entrepreneurs and small business owners. RCIE is part incubator, part accelerator, part innovation lab and part museum geared to change the narrative by telling the untold and under-told stories of African American entrepreneurs and business leaders of past and present, while offering access to space, resources, networks, mentorship, technical assistance and education. Ultimately, RCIE nurtures a prepared and capable pipeline of entrepreneurial leaders and sustainable businesses that will raise the collective prosperity of Atlanta.

## Leadership Perspective

**Michael B. Russell, CEO, H.J. Russell & Company**

When our company was founded, the bedrock of it was to improve the community through our work. There always had to be a bigger purpose than just to make money. We were one of the first major builders of affordable housing, and that was to ensure people had a decent place to live. From the beginning, we’ve been beyond building structures, we’ve been about building communities where everyone has a place.

Construction and development are in our bones, but giving back to the community is in our heart. I personally know to whom much is given, much is expected. As a leader, it’s important for me to show and encourage our employees to also give back to the communities in which they work and live. We have a sense of responsibility to offer not just monetary support to organizations and institutions that improve and positively impact the community, we have the responsibility to give of our time and talent as well. When you have fulfilled employees and partners in business, who are equally invested in the community, great things can happen and relationships are strengthened all the way around.

Without the community, there would be no company. Investing in others nurtures our existence and gives one a keener sense of what a community truly needs. By having a pulse on the needs of people as we run our businesses, we’re able to bring forth more strategic solutions and insightful considerations. By investing in getting to know ALL of the communities that make up your market, you can identify common threads and needs that span the entire city rather than just delivering to the marketplace what you think it needs.