

AN OPEN LETTER TO OUR COMMUNITY

We at Empire condemn the recent acts of racism and violence against George Floyd and so many other Black men and women before him. These are sad reminders of the deep-rooted racism we still have in our country, our workplaces and in our institutions. Black Lives Matter. We stand united and committed to dismantling racism in all forms.

It is very difficult for me, personally, to understand because I remember 12 years ago to the month when we welcomed then—Sen. Barack Obama to The Raleigh Times. Our streets were full of a diverse crowd from all walks to cheer him on after his primary win. At the time, we hoped we had put so many of these issues of hate behind us and we were moving beyond judging people by their race.

Over the past 25 years, we have built a diverse company that has always put the community first. While it has not always been easy, we have always believed that what's best for the community is what's best for our company and staff. We have worked hard to support those in need in our community—investing in eliminating food insecurity and homelessness and supporting child safety, equity and early childhood education. While I'm proud of what we've done, I realize we can do more. We had the belief that if we work and focus on certain issues, that other parties would take the lead on other issues. But I realize that there are certain issues that we all need to focus on every day until we change not only policy, laws, rules and regulations, but our collective attitudes toward our fellow citizens. It is unacceptable that members of the Black community cannot feel safe at home, driving in a car, or making a 911 call for help may lead to a dangerous or deadly outcome. This is the reality of our society, and that is why we all must work together to create change.

As I look back on this last week and try to comprehend all that has happened, I realize that there are still very few answers. Growing up in North Carolina in the 1960s, I saw civil rights issues brought to the forefront of our society, and I felt hope because laws and policies were changed. But changing those laws and policies was not enough. I've always been moved by Robert F. Kennedy's 1968 speech sharing the sad news that Martin Luther King, Jr. had been killed. He said that we can be filled with hate,

“... or we can make an effort, as Martin Luther King did, to understand and to comprehend and replace that violence, that stain of bloodshed that is spread across our land, with an effort to understand, compassion, and love.”

OUR PLEDGE

At Empire Properties and Empire Eats, we are going to make an effort to work towards social justice and collaborate to dismantle racism. As a start, we are committing to:

- Expanding our relationship with the North Carolina State Conference of the NAACP to better understand racism and contributing to their Legal Defense and Educational Fund. Recently I spoke with Rev. Dr. T. Anthony Spearman, President of the NC NAACP, and he encouraged us to read *How to Be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi, and *Runaway Inequality: An Activist's Guide to Economic Justice* by Les Leopold, so we can educate ourselves on the issues of racism to make changes in our community. We will be distributing copies of these books to our staff and, most importantly, having conversations about our collective experiences with these issues;
- Donating two days every month in our venue spaces for nonprofit groups who are advancing equity and social justice causes;
- Continuing to foster and grow our relationships with businesses that are Black and minority-owned while trying to find more of these businesses to partner with. More importantly, we will work on ways to help them find new customers and expand their business networks;
- Providing racial equity training for our entire company. We are committed to educating our staff with formal training with organizations who can help us understand and advance the message;
- Vote! It is how we solve problems in a democracy. Encourage everyone to replace the poor leadership that exists both locally and nationally. We will continue to support candidates who will fight for social justice and reform and to allow our citizens to have a voice in their community. And we will commit more time and resources to organizations that work to get the vote out.

I realize we need to listen and learn to understand how we can make things better but this is also a time for action. There is so much that needs to be done, All of us need to do our part, not just today, but next week, next month and next year. I encourage everyone who reads this to educate yourselves and have a conversation on how to solve these issues with your family, coworkers, friends, but most importantly, your children, so we are not burdening them and their children with the task of ending racism.

This is our pledge, and I look forward to working with anyone ready to help us find and implement solutions.

Greg Hatem

Founder, Empire Properties and Empire Eats



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