

Granting the Gift of Survival

Local Organization Raises Funds for Children's Swimming Lessons

By: Shaunda Johnson

A set of tenacious twins causing quite a buzz around the Baton Rouge area as they enhance lives through entertainment and empowerment.

Torrence and Thurman Thomas transformed from a band to a creative brand agency that can be bundled as a "band-brand," the band, ASKTHETHOMASBROS. The name is the same for the band and the creative brand agency. As a creative brand agency, the brothers help companies with branding and public relations. As a band, the brothers along with some talented others perform covers of songs along with original music.

The 24-year-olds are dual enrolled at LSU and Southern University as mass communication seniors and operate a multi-faceted entity of music, apparel and philanthropy. "Swimming and music have no relation whatsoever, but you know I was sitting in my backroom and I was talking to God and I was like, Man you know what? I want to do something to give back to someone, what can I do?" Torrence said. "Swimming lessons just kind of dropped in my spirit.... When I did the research I saw the need."

The brothers found that 70 percent of African-

American children lacked swimming skills and saw that as an opportunity to take action. Through the support of the Baton Rouge community and local media outlets, the twins were able to exceed their initial goal of funding 10 children



Thurman Thomas on the left and Torrence Thomas on the right. Photo credit: ASKTHETHOMASBROS.

and granted 70 children the gift of swimming during the program's first year. During the summer, the band-brand hosts a program called TankProof. Tankproof was their first philanthropic effort. They set out to enhance the lives of African-American children in the Baton Rouge community.

TankProof uses donations and profits from tank top and t-shirt sells to fund swimming lessons for African-American children at the local Baton Rouge health club, Crawfish Aquatics. This will be the third year for the program.

"What motivates me to

keep going is the goal in mind, but I think to really have significant success in anything – not to be good at something but to be great at something – it's got to be more than a goal, it's got to be a passion" Thurman said. "I believe this is my

purpose for being here."

The brothers are utilizing their talents for the good of their community. "We make sure that we are good Stuarts of what's been given to us and we make sure we handle it with care and with respect" Torrence said.

Hailing from Prairieville, La., the twins began down the musical path at the age of 17 after being taken off the soccer team as punishment for shoplifting when they were 16 years old. One day the twins' mother invited a family friend named Charles Alexander to teach them guitar to ease the twins' depression of sitting out of

soccer for the year. Since then, they have served as backing musicians for new acts from Baton Rouge and New Orleans. The band has played at notable venues and festivals such as the New Orleans House of Blues and Austin, TX SXSW music festival. With two of the members of the band being American Idol contestants, the brand recently chose to move from covering songs to original music. Their first single, "Glow in the Dark" featuring Neel & James Jackson can be purchased on iTunes.

ASKTHETHOMASBROS. continues to remain loyal to its philanthropic efforts and will continue the TankProof program for as long as they can with hopes of lowering the statistics. "Each year it gets bigger and bigger...Swimming is a life skill" Torrence said. For more information on how to contribute to the TankProof program visit www.attb.us.



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