

Q&A with Jack Cobb: Urban League of the Central Carolinas

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Charlotte office managing partner Jack Cobb is the vice-chair of the [Urban League of the Central Carolinas](#) (ULCC), a multi-service, non-profit agency that promotes financial stability and racial inclusion through education, training, and placement. Organized in 1978, ULCC is an affiliate of the national Urban League and a United Way participating agency.

In the following Q&A, Mr. Cobb explains his role as vice-chair, the inspiration for his involvement, and the future of the ULCC.

What is the mission of the ULCC?

At its core, ULCC provides their clients with tangible training and job placement assistance to help the underemployed or unemployed get a better job or return to the workforce. They have a nationally renowned HVAC certification program and cutting-edge fiber optics/broadband training program, as well as GED and computer skills courses. More recently, they've moved toward a Continuum of Opportunity Model that includes financial literacy training and free banking services.

One of the really interesting facts about the ULCC is that every \$1 spent on training a person results in \$16 in increased income during that person's first year after completing the program. Put another way, an investment of \$1,000 to train a ULCC client on HVAC systems provides the client with a \$16,000 increase in their annual income. ULCC is proud to have an 85% job placement rate for adults coming out of its program.

What is your role in the ULCC and how long have you been involved?

About three years ago, I got to know ULCC CEO Patrick Graham during our time together participating in a community leadership program focused on addressing issues of race and gender financial inequity in Charlotte. Patrick asked me to join the ULCC Board of Directors and I later became its vice-chair. In this role, I sit on the

Executive Committee, which helps the CEO set the organization's overall strategy and objectives, and I also chair the Audit Committee and am a member of the Marketing Committee.

What are the ULCC's primary goals, challenges, future plans?

Right now we're working to expand the services provided under ULCC's Continuum of Opportunity Model. One really cool thing is that ULCC has set up a non-profit bank in partnership with a local community bank that provides free banking services to communities that are traditionally under- or un-banked. When they start receiving their paychecks, ULCC clients that have completed job training and placement need to be able to set up a checking account and learn how to budget and save. ULCC now provides a bank located in the lobby of its building that provides free financial counseling and has even begun offering micro-lending to small businesses in the communities it serves.

As another example, ULCC has been able to provide additional job opportunities in solar energy to their clients who have completed training in fiber optics/broadband since these two fields require the same skill set. ULCC is now providing a steady stream of workers skilled in building and maintaining solar panel farms in response to the push by North Carolina's local utility to increase the amount of solar energy on its grid.

The Continuum of Opportunity Model also has resulted in an Entrepreneurs Academy that teaches ULCC clients how to develop a small business.

What inspired you to get involved in ULCC?

Ultimately, it was the idea that if you 'teach a man to fish' you will 'feed him for life'. ULCC provides an on-ramp to a productive economic life for people who have had trouble succeeding in the workplace in the past or are emerging from difficult life situations. This is so important in a community like Charlotte that is increasingly diverse and has had its ups and downs during the financial crisis. ULCC helps people in a way that is sustainable and lasting.

In what ways has Winston contributed to ULCC's mission and goals?

The firm has been very supportive of ULCC, providing pro bono legal counsel and sponsoring various events. When the ULCC merged with another non-profit, Winston handled the legal formation of the merged entity, including revised bylaws and governance documents. We also provided pro bono IP counseling when ULCC's CEO came up with the idea to rebrand the term "At Risk" Youth and we were able to secure a trademark for the new term "AT OPPORTUNITY" Youth. In addition, the firm was a sponsor of ULCC's 2015 Whitney M. Young, Jr. Awards Gala held March 28, which benefits programs and services such as HVAC certification, Jacob's Ladder Job Readiness, TECH-Best, and Fiber Optics/Broadband.



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