

## Super Bowl scores big with local charities

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By Thom Marshall / Houston Chronicle

Local charities benefited by at least \$16 million because Super Bowl XXXVIII came to town in January, said the head of the Houston Host Committee.

"I know there's more money than \$16 million that went to charity, but this, at least, I can quantify," Chairman Chuck Watson said Tuesday. The largest share of the good-works dollars - \$11 million - went to help pay for two NFL Youth Education Town centers. The host committee gave \$1 million, the National Football League gave \$2 million, and County Commissioners El Franco Lee and Sylvia Garcia each kicked in \$1 million of county funds for the centers to be located in their precincts, according to host committee figures. The commissioners also committed \$6 million for 10 years of maintenance and operation. Both centers are in the designing stages, but Lee said the big check from the NFL arrived some time ago.

"It is more than a pledge, it is real money in the bank," he said.

"The NFL doesn't play around."

He said building the centers involves Harris County partnerships with the Houston Independent School District, the city of Houston, and the Boys and Girls Club, and the plan already was taking shape when the Super Bowl came to town.

"The NFL was impressed with what we were proposing and with what we had been doing," Lee said.

Watson said one of the "major visions" of the host committee was to use the Super Bowl "to generate a lot of charity dollars for Houston." "One, because it's the right thing to do," he said. "And two, because we've been so hard hit in the last couple of years and we really needed a boost, and this provided a credible opportunity to provide that boost for a lot of our charitable organizations."

Money-raising events included the Taste of the NFL, which raised \$800,000 for the End Hunger Network, and the NFL Alumni Golf Tournament, which raised \$200,000 for the youth centers. Watson said not all the money raised for charity at committee-sanctioned events could be totaled because event sponsors were not required to provide a final accounting.

"The NFL has never done that," Watson said. "We were better at it than the NFL was, but we still didn't do as much as I would have liked."

Among the local charities that benefited are the Texas Music Project, Habitat for Humanity, Rebuilding Together, the Chinese Community Center, the Nellie B. Connally Breast Cancer Center, Athletes in Action, YMCA and Best Buddies.

In late July, the host committee had met its financial commitments and had more than \$400,000 left to divide among 16 charities, topped by the United Way, that received \$100,000. Other recipients included the Chinese Community Center, Fifth Ward Enrichment Program, Martin Luther King Center, Ripley House and the Salvation Army.