

GOD'S ANGELS

Singers, artists & ballplayers
who never forgot the people

WEIGHED AND HONORED
BY MICHAEL

A FINAL WORD

Before you read a single name in this book, let me tell you why it exists. I did not set out to crown celebrities. I set out to find the ones whose work speaks when they are silent — the singers, the artists, the ballplayers, the ones feeding children and lifting neighborhoods, most of them without cameras in the room. Every person in these pages was weighed. Not by fame. Not by followers. By character. By wisdom. By truth. By experience. By the life they actually live. By the culture they build. And by their service to the world. Seventy-two names. Seventy-two lives that prove heaven still has representatives on the earth — sixty-four walking among us, and eight gone, still with us. Their work speaks for itself. I just wrote it down.

— Michael

THE HONORED

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TWO LA PRINCESSES

Los Angeles raised them.
They never left it behind.

Lauren London

Los Angeles actress (ATL, This Christmas, Games People Play);
keeper of a legacy.

On March 31, 2019, Lauren London's world broke open. Nipsey Hussle — the father of her son Kross — was murdered outside his Marathon store on Slauson Avenue in South Los Angeles. The grief was hers first, and the whole city's second. She could have withdrawn from the world. Instead she transmuted her anguish into purpose: the marathon continues.

Her service is presence. At Foot Locker's Crenshaw store she sat eye-level with some twenty teen mothers from TheRareOproject — young women striving to build better lives for their children and themselves — guiding them through meditation, résumé coaching, and her talk, "Making a Seat for Yourself at the Table," teaching them that slowing down and loving themselves is itself an act of courage. She poured the same tenderness into Life Camp's girls, sharing the small daily rituals that carry her through grief, then bringing Queen Afua backstage for a healing circle — girls who arrived at odds with one another left as sisters, and the Rites of Passage program was born that night.

She stood with the family at the dedication of Nipsey Hussle Square at Crenshaw and Slauson, and she accepted his 2019 BET Humanitarian Award for the work he gave South Los Angeles. Los Angeles raised her — and she has never left it behind.

Jhené Aiko

Los Angeles R&B singer, songwriter, and healer; founder of gotoheal.com.

In 2012, Jhené Aiko lost her brother Miyagi to cancer, and she poured her grief into her art: the album *TRIP*, a short film, a book of poetry. But mourning was not enough. Healing had to become something she could place in other people's hands.

On Christmas 2017 she gifted her family the *WAYS* Foundation — “Why Aren’t You Smiling,” Miyagi’s own words from his hospital bed, the phrase he used to bring light to everyone around him. Its first act: visiting five-year-old Lily Olive of Eagle Rock, California, who was battling leukemia, with a surprise \$15,000 to cover her medical bills. In 2019 she built Team Yagi San within the American Cancer Society’s Get #YOUUnited campaign — designing shirts whose sales fund the fight against breast cancer, alongside DJ Khaled and French Montana.

Then the Los Angeles wildfires took her own family home — “burned to the ground,” she wrote, “starting from scratch.” And she turned around and served the firefighters: through her wellness brand *Jhenetics*, with the L.A. Fire Department Foundation and *Manly Handz*, she brought free massages and CBD relief directly to the fire lines. Her platform states it plainly — gotoheal.com is “the home base for ALL things healing, protective, and restorative.” That is not branding. That is her life.

THE FIRST LGND

To be first on this wall, you have already passed
and left a beautiful legacy.

Michael Jackson

Singer, dancer, songwriter; the King of Pop.

Michael Jackson was born in Gary, Indiana, the eighth of ten children, and by the age of six he was already the lead voice of the Jackson 5 — a child carrying a grown man's soul in his throat. What followed has no parallel: *Thriller* remains the best-selling album in the history of recorded music, and his moonwalk across the Motown 25 stage in 1983 redrew the boundary of what a performer could be.

He gave like the world was watching — because it was. He co-wrote “We Are the World,” which raised tens of millions for famine relief; he funded hospitals, orphanages, and burn centers; he quietly paid for funerals, medical bills, and second chances his whole life, most of it without cameras in the room. His Neverland Ranch opened its gates to sick children and underprivileged families by the thousands.

To be the first LGND on this wall, you have already passed and left a beautiful legacy. Michael Jackson left the biggest one of all. His sound was angelic before we had the word for it — and the whole world is still dancing to it.

REMEMBER THE FALLEN

Gone, but the sound remains.

Bob Marley

Jamaican singer and songwriter; prophet of one love.

Robert Nesta Marley was born in Nine Mile, Jamaica, and carried the island's suffering and its sunshine in the same voice. With the Wailers he took reggae from the Kingston yards to every corner of the earth — and with it a message the powerful never wanted sung: one love, one heart, stand up for your rights.

In 1978, two years after gunmen stormed his home and shot him days before a peace concert, he walked onto the One Love Peace Concert stage in Kingston and joined the hands of Jamaica's two warring political leaders above his head. He preached unity with his body, not just his lyrics.

He died in 1981 at thirty-six, but the community never let him go — because he never let the community go. His music still preaches peace in every language on earth.

Whitney Houston

Singer and actress; the Voice.

Whitney Houston was born in Newark, New Jersey, into gospel royalty — her mother Cissy, her cousin Dionne Warwick, her godmother Aretha Franklin — and she took that inheritance further than any voice of her generation. Her debut album remains the best-selling debut by a woman in music history, and her rendition of “I Will Always Love You” is the best-selling single by a woman of all time.

She sang the national anthem at Super Bowl XXV in a way that stopped a nation mid-breath, and she carried that same gift into film — *The Bodyguard*, *Waiting to Exhale*, *The Preacher’s Wife* — opening doors a Black woman had never walked through in Hollywood.

The Voice is what they called her, because there was only one. Heaven called its choir home in 2012. The community loved her, and love like that does not die.

Prince

Singer, songwriter, multi-instrumentalist; a genius in purple.

Prince Rogers Nelson was born in Minneapolis and played nearly every instrument on his debut album at nineteen — guitar, bass, drums, keys — because the sound in his head could not wait for a band. What came out of that head rewrote pop, funk, rock, and soul at once: *Purple Rain*, 1999, *Sign o' the Times*.

He fought the industry for the rights of artists when nobody else would — writing “slave” on his cheek, changing his name to an unpronounceable symbol, and giving his masters back their meaning before independence was fashionable. He did it so the next artist would not have to.

He played everything and gave everything. He funded schools, quietly paid people’s mortgages, and asked for no credit. A genius in purple, gone in 2016 — and the sound remains.

Aretha Franklin

Singer and pianist; the Queen of Soul.

Aretha Franklin was born in Memphis and raised in Detroit, singing gospel in her father's church before she was ten years old. When she sat at the piano and opened her mouth, the room understood: this was the voice every other voice would be measured against. "Respect" became an anthem for a movement; "(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman" became scripture.

She sang at the funeral of Martin Luther King Jr. and at the inauguration of Barack Obama — the first and the fulfillment, bookends of a freedom she helped sing into being. Eighteen Grammy Awards, the first woman inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

The Queen of Soul. She demanded respect and she earned it twice over. Gone in 2018 — respect, forever.

THE SINGERS & ARTISTS

Thirty-three voices who turned their gift
into bread for their people.

Common

Chicago rapper, actor & author

For three decades, Common has carried Chicago in his voice — from *Resurrection* to *Like Water for Chocolate* and beyond — building one of hip-hop's most respected bodies of conscious music: an Academy, Emmy, and Grammy winner who never let his city slip from his conscience. What moved him was never the craft alone, but the conviction that a kid from the South Side could speak for the whole neighborhood and be heard around the world.

That conviction became infrastructure. In 2007 he founded the Common Ground Foundation to serve Chicago youth through education and mentorship, enrolling some 2,100 students through its entrepreneurship partnership. In 2014 he co-founded the Chicago Youth Jobs Collaborative with the Chicago Urban League and Donda's House — a thousand year-round jobs for young people sixteen to twenty-four, growing by a thousand a year for four years, sustained in part by his annual AAHH! FEST in Hyde Park.

His creed was never charity as theater. Jobs, not handouts. Mentorship, not photo ops. Two decades of standing with under-resourced Black youth in Chicago, letting the work speak for itself.

Killer Mike

Atlanta rapper & economic builder

Killer Mike came up in Atlanta with a banker's discipline inside a rapper's fire — a Grammy-winning voice of Run the Jewels who has preached Black economic empowerment since childhood, back when he kept his money at Citizens Trust. His politics were never abstractions; they were about who owns what on your own block.

So he built ownership at home. In 2020 he co-founded Greenwood Bank with Andrew Young and Ryan Glover, a digital bank for Black and Latinx communities named for the Greenwood district of Black Wall Street — more than 600,000 people joined the waitlist at launch. Since 2011 he has owned SWAG barbershops in Atlanta: Black-owned shops that double as neighborhood gathering places, employing barbers from the community.

He keeps his commitments where his childhood was. Not a check mailed from a distance, but institutions rooted at home — a bank, barbershops, livelihoods — so the dollars circulate among the people who raised him.

John Legend

Singer, songwriter & producer

John Legend rose on love songs — “Ordinary People,” “All of Me” — and a voice that filled arenas. But he refused to let his platform end at the stage door. For over a decade he has aimed his fame at one of America’s deepest wounds: mass incarceration.

In 2014 he launched the FREEAMERICA campaign to end it — walking into prisons, touring cell blocks, joining Color of Change to fight cash bail, standing behind reform-minded prosecutors willing to change the system from within. In 2018 he launched Unlocked Futures with Bank of America and New Profit: \$50,000 grants paired with training and mentorship for formerly incarcerated people building lawful lives with their second chance — capital and counsel for people the economy had written off.

He names systemic racism in the justice system plainly, and matches his words with mentorship and policy. A decade of labor for the people this country locks away and forgets.

Alicia Keys

Singer, songwriter & pianist

Since *Songs in A Minor* in 2001, Alicia Keys has been one of R&B's defining voices — sixteen Grammys, a global stage. But her longest-running work draws no spotlight: children with HIV/AIDS in places the cameras rarely visit.

In 2003 she co-founded Keep a Child Alive with Leigh Blake to carry HIV/AIDS treatment to children and families in Africa and India — when the stigma around AIDS still ran fierce and speaking up carried a cost. Twenty-three years on, the organization has served more than 250,000 children and families, moving roughly \$5 million a year into clinics across Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, South Africa, and India, sustained by its annual Black Ball fundraiser.

In 2018 she co-founded She Is The Music to open doors for women in an industry that too often keeps them shut. Two decades of choosing the unglamorous fight — the sick child, the closed door — and refusing to walk away from it.

Kirk Franklin

Gospel singer, songwriter & producer

Kirk Franklin became the defining figure of contemporary gospel — “Stomp,” “I Smile,” sixteen Grammys — by building choirs that sounded like joy breaking through. But the stage was never the whole story. For years he has served as an ambassador for Compassion International, binding his music directly to children in poverty across the world.

When COVID-19 struck, his “Strong God” video raised funds for Compassion’s disaster relief, and he gave the proceeds of his “Lean On Me” re-release with the Compassion Youth Choir to the same cause. In 2010 he organized “Are You Listening,” gathering more than twenty gospel artists for Haiti earthquake relief. And he has carried worship behind prison walls with God Behind Bars in South Florida, singing for men the world wrote off.

He speaks openly of accountability and second chances — not as a slogan, but as a road he has walked. Decades of showing up for the poor, the imprisoned, and the grieving, mostly beyond the cameras’ reach.

David Banner

Mississippi rapper, producer & actor

David Banner came out of Mississippi with socially conscious Southern hip-hop and the nerve to say it to power's face — he has testified before Congress on hip-hop and social responsibility. When Hurricane Katrina drowned the Gulf Coast in 2005, he didn't just write a check. He went home.

He founded Heal the Hood Inc. and raised \$500,000 for survivors across Mississippi, Alabama, and New Orleans, then devoted roughly a year of his life to getting relief into people's hands. The Mississippi Black Caucus honored him; he received the Lisa "Left Eye" Lopes Humanitarian Award in 2006. But he didn't stop when the cameras left: his annual Heal the Hood Christmas project clothed and gifted Jackson families year after year; in 2015 he gave his Banner Studios recording studio to the Boys and Girls Clubs of Central Mississippi, the first of six planned; he has given tens of thousands in minority college scholarships and volunteered with Stewpot Ministries in Jackson.

Twenty years of Mississippi giving, hands-on — from a man who never forgot where the water rose.

Tyler Perry

Actor, filmmaker & studio owner

Tyler Perry was once homeless himself — sleeping in his car while chasing a stage career nobody believed in. He remembers exactly what the bottom feels like. So when he built Tyler Perry Studios in Atlanta into one of the largest Black-owned studios in America, he built it as a refuge too: the campus has sheltered domestic-abuse survivors and disaster-displaced families.

In 2023 and 2024 he donated \$750,000 to cover back property taxes for some 300 low-income senior homeowners near the studio — some reports put his total for elderly homeowners as high as \$2.75 million — keeping elders in the homes they spent lifetimes paying for. He fought an FDA-lab “smokestack” planned for a Black Atlanta neighborhood, calling out environmental racism by name, and during COVID he paid grocery bills for thousands of seniors and cleared layaway balances for struggling families.

A man who once slept in his car now keeps roofs over other people’s heads. That is not charity. That is memory, turned into mercy.

Chance the Rapper

Chicago rapper & independent artist

Chance the Rapper became a Grammy-winning star without surrendering his independence, and he stayed rooted in Chicago by choice. His loyalty was never just lyrical — when the city's public schools were being starved of arts funding, he decided the kids would not wait for a system that had already failed them to save them.

In 2016 he co-founded SocialWorks, and its New Chance Fund raised \$2.2 million for Chicago Public Schools by September 2017 — \$100,000 grants to each of twenty schools over three years for arts education, awarded by need and principal commitment. He seeded it with \$1 million of his own money, later matched by the Chicago Bulls. The work continues through open mics, arts funding, and mental-health programming for Chicago youth.

He aimed at principals and programming, not just supplies — building something that outlasts a news cycle. A decade of betting on Chicago's kids, with his own money first.

Ricky Martin

Puerto Rican pop icon & UNICEF ambassador

“Livin’ la Vida Loca” made Ricky Martin a global pop phenomenon, and he has served as a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador since 2003. But his deepest fight is one most pop stars never touch: the trafficking of children.

In 2000 he founded the Ricky Martin Foundation, and its flagship program People for Children (2004) has waged a two-decade war on child trafficking — awareness campaigns in Spanish and English with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, campaigns with the IOM and IDB across Colombia and Ecuador, and anti-trafficking hotlines that have received more than 14,800 calls. In 2005 the U.S. State Department named him a “Hero in Ending Modern-Day Slavery” in its TIP Report, and he has testified before the U.S. House on human rights.

He personally helped build more than 200 Habitat for Humanity homes after the 2004 tsunami, stood against the bombing of Vieques, advocated for Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria, and funds musical instruments for the island’s public schools. Twenty-five years of refusing to look away from exploited children.

Marc Anthony

Nuyorican salsa & pop singer

Marc Anthony — born to Puerto Rican parents, raised between two worlds — became one of the best-selling Latin artists of all time. But his most enduring construction project is not a tour. It is orphanages.

In January 2012 he co-founded the Maestro Cares Foundation with Henry Cárdenas to build orphanages and schools across Latin America: the Orfanato Niños de Cristo in La Romana, Dominican Republic, home to forty boys; the Escuelas Palo Verde in Guatemala, serving more than 700 students and 4,500 families from pre-K through middle school; projects in Puerto Rico, Colombia, El Salvador's Casa de Gozo, and a Barranquilla orphanage for 200 children — sustained by fourteen years of galas and construction.

After Hurricane Maria he co-funded Play Ball Again, directing \$346,000 toward restoring some two dozen baseball fields in Puerto Rico alongside Good Bunny and UNICEF USA. In 2026 he organized “Unidos por Los Nuestros,” a benefit for Colombia and Venezuela earthquake relief. Orphaned and abandoned children — year after year, country after country.

Lin-Manuel Miranda

Playwright, composer & actor

Lin-Manuel Miranda — raised by Puerto Rican parents, creator of *Hamilton* and *In the Heights* — became a global theater figure. When Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico in 2017, he didn't mourn from Manhattan. He went home to work.

He created the Flamboyán Arts Fund: his 2019 *Hamilton* run in San Juan raised \$15 million, and the fund now totals \$22 million supporting 110 arts organizations and 900 artists across the island — an endowment-style covenant with Puerto Rican artistic life, not a one-time relief drop. In September 2025 he pledged another \$10 million alongside his family and the Flamboyán Foundation. His 2017 single “Almost Like Praying” sent its proceeds to the Hispanic Federation’s UNIDOS fund for island relief.

More than \$32 million committed to Puerto Rico’s recovery, aimed at the artists and culture-bearers who keep a people’s soul alive after the storm. Eight years on, he is still pledging.

Bad Bunny

Puerto Rican reggaetón & trap superstar

Bad Bunny — Benito Martínez Ocasio — rose from bagging groceries in Vega Baja to become one of the most-streamed artists on earth, and he has never stopped centering Puerto Rico in everything he does. His politics are outspoken, but his service is hands-on and personal.

Through his Fundación Good Bunny he runs “Un Verano Contigo,” a free summer program that reached its fourth year in 2026: 270 Puerto Rican youth spending three weeks immersed in arts, music, sports, and mentorship at the Universidad del Sagrado Corazón — free, on the island, for the island’s kids. He also partnered in the Play Ball Again effort restoring baseball fields across Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria.

Four consecutive summers and still growing. Not a gala, not a hashtag — three weeks a year when hundreds of kids receive instruments, coaches, mentorship, and someone who believes the island’s future is worth investing in.

Daddy Yankee (Ramón Luis Ayala Rodríguez)

Reggaetón pioneer, the "King of Reggaeton" ("Gasolina"); retired December 2023 to devote his life to Christian faith.

He pioneered reggaetón and carried it from Puerto Rico to every corner of the planet — “Gasolina” crowned him the King of Reggaeton, a global icon with nothing left to prove. Then, in December 2023, at the absolute peak, he walked off the stage of the Coliseo de Puerto Rico. Not for a bigger deal. He retired to surrender his life to Jesus Christ — “Daddy Yankee in Christ” — and in 2026 he stands as a faith speaker, preaching instead of performing.

But long before the farewell, he showed where his heart lived. When Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico in 2017, he gave \$100,000 to the Food Bank of Puerto Rico — food for some 9,000 families. A decade earlier he served as spokesperson for “Yo Limpio a Puerto Rico,” a recycling campaign that placed 16 recycling centers across the island, and he staged the 2008 youth concert “Vota o quédate callado” to draw young people into civic life.

When his people were hungry, he fed them. When the island lay buried in debris, he helped clean it. That is the record that endures.

Luis Fonsi

Puerto Rican pop singer

“Despacito” made Luis Fonsi one of the most recognized Latin voices in the world — but that global smash came after decades of grinding in Latin pop, album after album, tour after tour, earning every inch of the platform he now stands on. When Hurricanes Irma and Maria tore through Puerto Rico in 2017, he turned that platform toward the kids left in the wreckage.

He founded The Luis Fonsi Foundation to give children and teenagers in disadvantaged neighborhoods the tools to improve their daily lives — still operating in 2026, still showing up. In 2021 he was recognized as an Ally “Hometown Hero,” carrying a \$50,000 donation to the cause.

It is a smaller, younger foundation than his peers’ — the track record is still being written, and he makes no grand claims about it. But the direction is unmistakable: a veteran star who looked at his island’s poorest children after the storm and claimed them as his responsibility, for the long haul.

Roy Brown

Puerto Rican nueva trova folk singer

Roy Brown has been singing Puerto Rico's conscience since 1960. His 1969 album *Yo Protesto* became scripture for the island's student movement, and his songs have marched alongside every struggle since — the fight to stop the bombing of Vieques, the defense of student rights, the long ache for dignity and self-determination. He never chased celebrity. He chose the troubadour's post.

For more than sixty years he has bound his music to the people's movements, appearing where the microphones were few and the stakes were high. In February 2026 — still at it in his eighties — he joined painter Antonio Martorell in creating fundraising artwork for Francisco Zamora's People Foundation, supporting emerging artists and a vision of dignified retirement for Puerto Rico's aging musicians.

No foundation, no published financials — only a lifetime of being there. Sixty-six years of singing with the people instead of above them, still raising money for the generation coming up.

Juan Luis Guerra

Dominican singer, composer & bandleader

Juan Luis Guerra carried merengue and bachata to the world — Bachata Rosa in 1990, three Grammys and twenty-four Latin Grammys — and became the Dominican Republic's most beloved musical ambassador. An open evangelical Christian, he decided long ago what he was born for, and turned down political overtures to stay with it.

In 1991 he founded the Fundación Juan Luis Guerra, and for thirty-five years it has done quiet medical aid for disadvantaged Dominicans: loans to children's hospitals and churches for construction, addiction-recovery services, financial aid for surgeries, help for orphans and abandoned children. A CUNY academic monograph credited the foundation with helping save hundreds of poor Dominicans who lacked medical care. He received the 2005 Billboard Spirit of Hope Award — and kept the work deliberately low-profile, almost never publicized.

Thirty-five years of healing the sick poor — on purpose, in secret. The awards gather dust. The surgeries save lives.

Amara La Negra

Afro-Dominican singer, actress & media personality

Amara La Negra — Dana Danelys De los Santos — became one of the most visible dark-skinned Afro-Latina entertainers in mainstream Latin media, and she has paid a professional price for refusing to stay quiet about what that cost her. In an industry built on whitening, she named colorism and anti-Blackness aloud.

Her service is advocacy rather than institutions: she serves as an ambassador for the Latino Commission on AIDS, headlining its Cielo Benefit Gala; she has performed benefit concerts for the American Cancer Society; and she labors in women's empowerment and education causes. She runs no foundation and publishes no beneficiary counts — this is a voice lent to the voiceless, not a gala circuit.

In Latin entertainment, simply standing on screen as an unapologetic dark-skinned Black woman is itself a service to every girl told she is too Black to be seen. She chose truth over comfort, and she keeps choosing it.

Prince Royce

Bronx-born bachata & pop star

Prince Royce — Geoffrey Royce Rojas, born in the Bronx to Dominican parents — became one of the defining Latin crossover voices of the 2010s, carrying bachata to arenas worldwide. He has aimed his success back at the kids growing up the way he did.

In 2016 he teamed with the Sprint Foundation’s 1Million Project for a holiday benefit funding free devices and high-speed internet for low-income students — striking at the “Homework Gap” in a country where more than five million households lack access. In 2018 he partnered with the National Institutes of Health to raise cardiovascular-health awareness in Hispanic communities, where the disparities run deep. He has answered disaster relief calls for Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, and works with the Playing for Change Foundation bringing music education to underserved youth.

A decade of causes — the digital divide, heart health, disaster relief, music in poor children’s hands. The Bronx kid who made it, wiring the ladder back down behind him.

Romeo Santos

Bronx-born bachata star, "King of Bachata"

Romeo Santos — Anthony Santos, born in the Bronx, former Aventura frontman — earned the title “King of Bachata” and filled stadiums across the Americas. In 2026 he did something braver than any stage: on national television he revealed that his own son is autistic, turning a private family journey into a public mission.

On August 11, 2026, he launched the Los Santos Foundation, a registered nonprofit for autistic children and their families — seeded with his own money, with planned grants, school partnerships, family resource centers, and resource hubs for families navigating autism services, among the most underserved communities in the hemisphere.

The foundation is brand-new; there is no track record yet, only a father’s promise made in public. But the act itself — a global superstar disclosing his son’s diagnosis to destigmatize it for millions of families carrying the same weight — is service already. Watch this one grow.

Shakira (Shakira Isabel Mebarak Ripoll)

Barranquilla-born global pop superstar; one of the best-selling Latin artists in history.

She conquered the world's stages, but she never left Colombia behind. In 1997, while her star was still rising, Shakira founded Fundación Pies Descalzos — the Barefoot Foundation — and has spent nearly three decades building schools for the children the system forgot: 19 schools built or intervened across Colombia, more than 224,000 children and youth reached, 12,000 teachers trained, 300 public schools supported, 38,000 families lifted.

The work never stopped growing. Her 19th school opened in Cartagena in May 2024 — a \$3.8 million campus for 960 children, with a community center. In Uribia, La Guajira, her ethno-educational school serves more than 1,300 students, including Wayúu Indigenous children and Venezuelan migrant children. When earthquakes shattered schools in Chocó in 2026, she helped raise \$1.25 million to rebuild them. She co-founded ALAS for early childhood across Latin America and serves as a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador.

Nearly thirty years, nineteen schools, hundreds of thousands of lives. The verdict that matters is written in classrooms.

Juanes

Medellín rock & pop star

Juanes — Juan Esteban Aristizábal of Medellín — became one of Colombia's most globally recognized voices, a multi-Latin-Grammy winner. He could have sung love songs forever. Instead he took on the thing maiming his country's children: landmines.

In 2006 he founded Fundación Mi Sangre for landmine victims — a Univision benefit raised more than \$350,000 for prosthetics, wheelchairs, and rehabilitation, and his address to the European Parliament that same year yielded €2.5 million to demine Colombia and rehabilitate victims. The foundation has since grown into youth peacebuilding in conflict zones, working with the World Bank and the U.S. Institute of Peace. His Paz Sin Fronteras concerts — the 2008 Colombia-Venezuela border show, the 2009 Havana concert before hundreds of thousands — wielded music as an instrument of peace. In 2026 he co-launched Marea Viva for Chocó earthquake rebuilding, pledging \$3.2 million, and back in 2012 he and Juan Luis Guerra gave \$150,000 to Hurricane Sandy victims.

Twenty years: from prosthetics to peace accords, the guitar has never left the people's service.

Carlos Vives

Santa Marta vallenato & pop legend

Carlos Vives took vallenato — the accordion-driven soul of Colombia’s Caribbean coast — and carried it to the world, pioneering its modern fusion. But his heart never left Santa Marta, the fishing city that raised him.

In 2015 he founded Fundación Tras La Perla for sustainable social and cultural development in Santa Marta and the Ciénaga Grande: La Casa de los Pescaitos, a children’s center; the Casa de la Danza, where youth learn the dances of their ancestors; environmental and health education; livelihood tools for the fishing communities the tourist brochures ignore. He earned a Premios Juventud “Agent of Change” award, partners with Children International’s Santa Marta community center and youth orchestra, and joined the 2026 Marea Viva Chocó relief effort.

A decade of place-based devotion — not dropping in, but building up. The vallenato legend who decided his hometown’s fishing families deserved the same future he got, and set out to make it real.

Maluma

Medellín reggaetón & pop star

Maluma — Juan Luis Londoño Arias of Medellín — became a global reggaetón chart-topper, with the fashion and film crossover to match. In 2016, with his family, he founded El Arte de los Sueños — The Art of Dreams — for the kids the boom left behind.

The foundation gives vulnerable adolescents in Medellín arts training in graphic arts, dance, singing, percussion, and composition — more than 170 students supported with education and psychosocial care, because talent means little without healing. During COVID-19 he supplied Medellín hospitals with provisions; he collaborates with the Playing for Change Foundation; and in 2020 he received the Billboard Latin Music Spirit of Hope Award, dedicating it to dreamers everywhere.

The foundation is modest beside his wealth — he would be the first to say it should be bigger. But 170 kids with instruments, mentors, and counselors is 170 futures rewritten. Ten years in, still building.

Karol G

Medellín reggaetón star

Karol G — Carolina Giraldo Navarro of Medellín — fought her way to the top of a genre that wasn't built for women and became one of the most powerful figures in global Latin music, headlining stadiums. She is spending that power on women the world overlooks.

In 2022 she founded the Con Cora Foundation, led by executive director Valentina Bueno: soccer teams for children of single mothers in underprivileged neighborhoods; higher-education programs for teenage mothers with the Juanfe Foundation; “Becas Con Cora,” bringing legal, psychological, social, and educational support to formerly incarcerated women with Fundación Acción Interna; “Casa Con Cora” safe spaces; and the #MujerSegura anti-gender-violence campaign, which reached more than 10,000 people across seven cities in 2024. Her 2026 Con Cora Tour across more than twenty U.S. and Canadian cities supports Latina immigrant women, with ticket and record revenue flowing straight into the foundation. In August 2026 she mobilized Con Cora for Colombia's earthquake victims, and she earned the 2023 Billboard Spirit of Hope Award.

Four years, five programs, thousands of women. She scaled the industry's walls — and started pulling other women over them.

Goyo

Afro-Colombian singer & ChocQuibTown co-founder

Goyo — Gloria Martínez, born in Condoto, Chocó, in 1982 — co-founded ChocQuibTown and carried Afro-Colombian music to Latin Grammy glory, becoming a defining voice for a people long pushed to the margins of Colombia's story. She has never let the industry sand down who she is or where she comes from.

Her service is advocacy and quiet giving rather than institutions: decades of labor for Afro-Colombian visibility in music and media; co-founding the Conciencia Collective in 2020, a united front of Afro-Latin artists answering racism; mentoring Afro-Latina girls; supporting education and creativity foundations across Colombia. Every year-end she gives a large share of her income directly to children in El Chocó — no gala, no press release, only money going home. She joined the 2026 Marea Viva Chocó earthquake relief effort.

There are no published beneficiary counts, because she doesn't perform her giving. A daughter of Chocó who became a star and kept sending the money — and the message — back home.

Maná

Mexican rock band

Maná — Fher Olvera, Alejandro González, Sergio Vallín, Juan Calleros — became one of the best-selling Latin rock acts in history, and nearly every album since the early 1990s has carried a song for the earth or the dispossessed. Their activism is not a side project. It is the setlist.

In 1996 they launched the Selva Negra — the Black Jungle — Ecological Foundation, and for nearly thirty years it has done the unglamorous work of restoration: eight million sea turtles hatched and released, more than 800,000 trees planted, half a million plants raised in its communal greenhouse. They have worked with the Inter-American Development Bank to preserve Mexico's forests and raise climate awareness, advanced environmental education, and stood for dignified living for immigrant communities across the U.S., Mexico, and Latin America — giving from recent U.S. tours to migrant-support organizations. Fher Olvera serves as the foundation's president.

Thirty years, millions of turtles and trees, and barely a headline abroad. The rare megastars whose longest-running hit is a forest.

Carlos Santana

Mexican-born guitar legend

Carlos Santana has played guitar since the 1960s — Woodstock, the Hall of Fame in 1998, a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in January 2026 — and at seventy-nine he is still touring. For twenty-eight of those years he has quietly moved millions of dollars toward children nobody applauds for.

In 1998 he and his wife founded the Milagro Foundation, making grants to community organizations serving underserved children in education, health, and the arts — funded in part by concert ticket and merchandise proceeds, so every show feeds the mission. As of January 2026 the foundation has granted \$10,147,729 to 464 agencies across thirty-seven U.S. states and twenty countries. Earlier he backed Artists for a New South Africa through the AIDS crisis; his Santana Scholars program lifts first-generation college students with 10,000 Degrees; and he has supported Project Avary — children of incarcerated parents — since 2001.

Ten million dollars, 464 agencies, zero victory laps. The guitar legend whose encore is a classroom.

Pitbull

Cuban-American rapper & entrepreneur

Pitbull — Armando Christian Pérez of Miami — understood that the zip code you're born in shouldn't decide whether you learn to read well. So he started building schools instead of merely singing about the struggle — turning his success into seats in classrooms.

In 2012 he founded SLAM! — Sports Leadership Arts Management — the first tuition-free public charter school in Miami. It now serves some 10,000 students across fourteen schools in Florida, Nevada, Georgia, Texas, and Arizona, and in 2022 it became the first of thirty-eight school systems worldwide named a “System of Distinction” by Cognia. His newer SELF 1st Foundation works to bridge the opportunity gap for minority and underserved students, opening college and vocational pathways where none existed before.

Ten thousand kids in free, high-quality schools — most of them low-income, most of them kids of color. Not a donation. A school system, built to last. Mr. Worldwide built classrooms.

Ricardo Arjona

Guatemalan singer-songwriter

Ricardo Arjona started as a rural schoolteacher in Guatemala before his socially observant songs — of migration, poverty, inequality — made him a Grammy-winning star. He never stopped being a teacher. He only gained a larger classroom, and a louder one.

In 2005 he founded Fundación Adentro, officially launched in 2008, to bring musical and singing education to impoverished Guatemalan children — and it has built two real schools, recognized in U.S. House Resolution 674 in October 2019. After the 2018 Fuego volcano eruption buried whole villages, the foundation helped relocated families into new permanent housing. He has said the goal “isn’t becoming an important foundation internationally, but to help [a] child reach their dreams” — and the foundation stays deliberately modest and low-profile.

Two schools, new homes for volcano survivors, and a founder who measures success one child at a time. The teacher from Guatemala never left the chalkboard behind.

Gloria Estefan

Cuban-born pop icon

Gloria Estefan — seven Grammys, Kennedy Center Honors, the voice of the Miami Sound Machine — knows exactly what paralysis steals. In 1990 a tour-bus crash left her temporarily paralyzed, and she fought her way back to the stage. She decided no one should have to wage that battle without science on their side.

Her foundation has made spinal cord injury research its life's work: a \$1 million gift in 2006 to The Miami Project to Cure Paralysis established its human clinical trials program, and she has personally raised and given more than \$42 million to The Miami Project across the decades. She chaired the capital campaign that raised \$40 million for the Lois Pope LIFE Center, which opened in 2000 as the project's home, and she serves on the board of The Buoniconti Fund. The 2011 Billboard Spirit of Hope Award recognized what the numbers already said.

Forty-two million dollars toward a cure, from a woman who knows the wheelchair's view. She turned her own suffering into everyone's hope.

Gustavo Dudamel

Venezuelan conductor & violinist

Gustavo Dudamel grew up inside Venezuela's El Sistema — the revolutionary program that placed violins in the hands of poor children — and it made him the most celebrated conductor of his generation: the LA Philharmonic's Music and Artistic Director from 2009 to 2026, taking the New York Philharmonic's podium that September. He never forgot what the music was for.

He championed YOLA, the Youth Orchestra Los Angeles — El Sistema's American heir for low-income youth. And on August 23, 2026, he turned his farewell Hollywood Bowl concert into "A Concert for Venezuela" after twin earthquakes devastated the country's north that June — every donation flowing to his Earthquake Recovery fund through the UN Development Programme and a CAF El Sistema fund for affected students, families, staff, and facilities. The LA Phil gave \$50,000; Dudamel and his musicians performed uncompensated.

The maestro could have played a farewell. He played a fundraiser instead — unpaid, for the children of the system that raised him.

Rubén Blades

Panamanian singer-songwriter & actor

Rubén Blades — the “poet of salsa”: “Pedro Navaja,” “Plástico,” twelve-plus Grammys — has spent fifty years proving a dance song can also be a deposition. His pen has indicted dictators, corrupt officials, and indifference itself, in rhythms you cannot help moving to.

He has set the career aside for the cause more than once: founding the center-left Movimiento Papa Egoró for his 1994 Panamanian presidential run, then serving as Panama’s Minister of Tourism from 2004 to 2009 — a working cabinet post, not a ceremonial title. His charitable work worldwide earned the 2011 Harry Chapin Humanitarian Award from ASCAP and WhyHunger. In recent years he has fought for immigrant justice through the 2019 “No Te Calles” project with Making Movies, written open letters against corruption from Ayotzinapa onward, and lent an original song to the climate film *Black Butterflies*.

Fifty years of salsa as social testimony — a star who took a government salary to serve instead of a stage on which to shine.

Gilberto Gil

Brazilian tropicalista legend

Gilberto Gil co-founded Tropicalismo with Caetano Veloso in the 1960s and was exiled by Brazil's dictatorship for the crime of singing freely. He came home — and instead of bitterness, he brought a vision: culture as a right, not a luxury.

As a Salvador councilman he founded the Onda Azul — Blue Wave — Foundation (1989), which he still presides over, for social and environmental projects. As Brazil's Minister of Culture from 2003 to 2008 he built what outlasted him: Cultura Viva and the Pontos de Cultura, a nationwide network of grassroots cultural centers placing livelihood and dignity in the hands of favela, Indigenous, and quilombola communities. Earlier, as Salvador's cultural secretary, he created the Boca de Brasa traveling stage for local artists. At eighty-four — farewell tour in 2025 and 2026 — he headlined Instituto Terra's Refloresta reforestation campaign and serves as an ambassador for the Hear the World Foundation.

Exiled for a song; returned to write policy. Sixty years of ensuring Brazil's poorest get to make culture, not merely consume it.

PART II

THE BALLPLAYERS

Twenty-nine ballplayers who never forgot
where they came from.

Curtis Granderson

Outfielder, 16 MLB seasons; 3x All-Star; 2016 Roberto Clemente Award; 2021 Heisman Humanitarian Award

Sixteen seasons carried Curtis Granderson through Detroit, the Bronx, and Queens — but the work he counts as his own began long before the last out. In 2007, still in uniform, he founded the Curtis Granderson Foundation in Detroit to develop young people; in 2013 he launched Grand Giving, an annual campaign against food insecurity that has since delivered more than 35 million meals and raised over \$3.7 million for Chicago food banks.

In 2016 he built the Chicago Baseball and Educational Academy at the University of Illinois Chicago, and he serves as president of The Players Alliance, the collective of Black players investing in the game and the neighborhoods around it. The honors arrived on schedule — the 2016 Roberto Clemente Award, the 2021 Heisman Humanitarian Award — but they trail the work, as honors should. He did not wait for retirement to begin, and he has not stopped since. The meals, the academy, the mentored young people: that is the record, and it stands taller than any stat line.

Albert Pujols

First baseman; 3x MVP; 703 home runs; retired 2022

The Pujols Family Foundation runs on three words — "Faith, Family and Others" — and since 2005 its founder has lived them in exactly that order. Its two pillars rose out of his own life: programs for families of children with Down syndrome in five American cities, born of his daughter Isabella; and medical mission teams carrying doctors, dentists, optometrists, and pharmacy care into seven bateys of the Dominican Republic, beside a youth baseball league built on mentorship and the Pa'Lante women's trade program.

Pujols has never been quiet about his Christian faith, and he has never let the spotlight rest on himself — it was never the point. Two decades on, the bateys still receive their clinics, the families still receive their support, and the mission statement has not changed a syllable, because neither has he. Long after the 703rd home run landed, what endures is a father who converted his family's blessings into medicine for strangers.

Mariano Rivera

Yankees closer; all-time saves leader with 652; unanimous Hall of Fame, 2019

The greatest closer the game has known has spent more years giving than he ever spent saving games. The Mariano Rivera Foundation, founded with his wife Clara in 1998, directs more than \$500,000 a year toward the education of underprivileged children in the United States and Panama through church-based institutions. In Panama it raised an elementary school and, in 2024, opened the Rivera Baseball Stadium and High-Performance Training Center in Puerto Caimito.

In New Rochelle, New York, the couple purchased a 107-year-old church for a single dollar in 2011, invested three million in its renewal, and opened it in 2014 as Refugio de Esperanza, where Clara serves as pastor — now adding a Learning Center for STEM and vocational training. A devout man, Rivera received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2019, in part for this very philanthropy. He never forgot where he came from, and he made certain the road home stayed open behind him.

David Ortiz

Red Sox designated hitter; 3x World Series champion; Hall of Fame 2022

Big Papi's heart was always larger than his swing. The David Ortiz Children's Fund pays for pediatric cardiac surgeries for children of the Dominican Republic and New England whose families cannot afford them, coordinating American and Dominican cardiac surgeons on multi-day missions to save young lives.

In 2021 he donated the Dominican Republic's first pediatric hemodynamics room to CEDIMAT, valued at more than a million dollars, while the annual Boston Heart Classic golf fundraiser and the Children's Fund Gala — held with MassGeneral Hospital for Children and the World Pediatric Project — keep the work funded year after year. When the lights grew bright, he never left the island behind; he carried it with him into every clubhouse. For the children whose hearts he helped mend, the legend is not measured in home runs. It is measured in heartbeats. From the Dominican sandlots to Fenway Park, he never forgot that a child's heart has no use for box scores — it only needs someone willing to fight for it.

Cal Ripken Jr.

Orioles shortstop; 2,632 consecutive games; Hall of Fame 2007

"It was never about baseball," Ripken says. "Baseball was just a way to get in front of these kids." The Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation, founded in 2001 and named for his father, serves at-risk youth through sports and mentoring: 126 Youth Development Parks across 27 states, 830 STEM Centers, more than 742,900 young people reached, and over \$113 million invested as of its 25th anniversary in 2026.

The Iron Man's endurance, it turns out, was about more than a streak — it was rehearsal for a quarter century of showing up for children the world overlooks. He took the discipline his father drilled into him and rebuilt it as fields and classrooms. The consecutive-games record will stand forever; the children will outlast it. Twenty-five years, 126 parks, 830 STEM centers: the streak that matters is counted in mornings he showed up. He took his father's name and made it mean something to kids who never saw him play.

Clayton Kershaw

Dodgers ace; 3x Cy Young; 3,000 strikeouts; 2012 Clemente Award

A Christian mission trip to Zambia with his wife Ellen sent the Kershaws home changed, and in 2011 they started Kershaw's Challenge. It has raised more than \$23 million since. The foundation built Hope's Home, an orphanage in Lusaka that opened in November 2012 — funded in part by \$100-per-strikeout pledges and his book "Arise" — and partnered with CURE International to fund 170 children's surgeries and equip a Lusaka hospital.

The work now runs from Arise Africa to Mercy Street in Dallas to the Peacock Foundation in Los Angeles, and Kershaw — openly guided by his faith — received the 2012 Roberto Clemente and Branch Rickey Awards. Every strikeout became a promise kept to a child an ocean away. That is what dominance looks like when it is aimed at mercy. He cites Colossians 3:23 — whatever you do, work at it with all your heart — and an orphanage in Lusaka plus 170 funded surgeries is the verse made visible. The partners span continents now; the method never changed: see a need, show up, stay.

Adam Wainwright

Cardinals pitcher; 2006 World Series champion; Hutch Award winner

What began as a fantasy football fundraiser with his brother became one of baseball's great engines of mercy. Big League Impact, co-founded in 2013, has raised more than \$11 million, with over 120 MLB players and 130 charities behind it. The results are concrete and far from the cameras: three water systems in Honduras serving some 15,000 people — in the village of Coyoles Aldea, waterborne illness was eliminated for 1,500 souls — a water station in Haiti serving 6,500, more than \$40,000 after the May 2025 Forest Park tornadoes, and support for Consider the Lily, a home for trafficked girls in Manila.

Openly Christian, Wainwright has said he wants to be remembered as a servant. The wins on the mound were genuine. The wells will outlive them all. That more than 120 big leaguers have joined the cause tells you what his peers think of him. A fantasy football league became clean water for entire villages — that is what happens when a servant gets an idea and refuses to let it stay small.

Nelson Cruz

7x All-Star slugger (464 home runs); 2021 Roberto Clemente Award winner.

He comes from Las Matas de Santa Cruz, a remote Dominican town that historically did not even have running water — and he never forgot it. Through his Boomstick23 Foundation, Nelson Cruz gave his hometown what it never had: a fire engine with 80 firefighter uniforms, an ambulance, a new police station, and an education and technical center with computers.

Each year, volunteer dentists and optometrists treat some 1,200 people there; the elderly and disabled receive wheelchairs and crutches; during COVID he carried food and financial support to about 1,200 families. Beyond his town, he joined a \$400,000 MLB and Players Trust donation for Dominican medical equipment and food, and his Healing Venezuela initiative nourishes 2,000 newborns a year.

He worked quietly for years before anyone thought to honor him — then came the 2020 Ali Sports Humanitarian Award and the 2021 Clemente. He stumbled once, served his suspension, owned it outright, and answered with a lifetime of giving.

Carlos Delgado

First baseman; 473 home runs; 2006 Roberto Clemente Award

Delgado has always let conscience lead, whatever the price. In 2004 he refused to stand for "God Bless America" to protest the Iraq War, holding his ground through heavy criticism — the same moral spine that built Extra Bases in 2000, his foundation for children's health and education in Puerto Rico.

The work is specific and tender: after-school programs; surgeries and specialized medical equipment for poor children — including a cochlear implant for a deaf boy in Aguadilla — and a first-of-its-kind telemedicine link between Mass General's pediatric ICU and a community hospital in Aguadilla. After Hurricane Maria, he channeled playoff shares into rebuilding a baseball field for a home for abused children in Mayagüez and gave \$100,000 to Vieques, leading clinics there himself. He never divided the ballplayer from the citizen. Puerto Rico's children know the difference. He was willing to be booed for his conscience in 2004 and willing to go unnoticed for his charity after — both demanded the same courage, and he never ran short of it.

Andrew McCutchen

Outfielder; 2013 NL MVP; 2015 Roberto Clemente Award

McCutchen says the Clemente Award means more to him than his MVP — and he has lived accordingly. In 2010 he founded "Cutch's Crew" to mentor inner-city and at-risk youth in Pittsburgh, running clinics at PNC Park, and his giving flows through Make-A-Wish, Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, the Homeless Children's Education Fund, Light of Life Rescue Mission, and Habitat for Humanity.

In 2015 he auctioned his signature dreadlocks for Pirates Charities; in 2024 he and his wife Maria served 2,000 Thanksgiving meals through Yinzgiving with more than 180 volunteers. Open about his Christian faith, he has stayed rooted in the city that raised him as a player. The MVP trophy sits on a shelf. The young people he mentors carry everything else. Pittsburgh watched him grow from a prospect into a cornerstone, and he repaid the city in the only currency that matters: his time, with its kids, year after year.

Aaron Judge

Yankees captain and outfielder; 3x AL MVP

Adopted as a baby, Judge speaks often of his adoptive parents' influence — and the Aaron Judge ALL RISE Foundation, founded in 2018 with his mother Patty, is built in their image: it exists to inspire children and youth to become responsible citizens. Its Mini-Grant Program runs three times a year, supporting more than 27 community organizations — from NYC Autism Charter Schools to the Tourette Association to Bridge2College and faith-based groups — alongside youth leadership conferences serving more than 118 students and free baseball ProCamps in California and the Bronx.

A 2024 All-Star charity gala raised some \$800,000, and he received the 2023 Roberto Clemente Award. He carries himself as a scandal-free family man in the hardest spotlight in sports. The name on the back of the jersey is famous; the work is done for kids who may never wear one. In that unforgiving spotlight he has kept his life clean and his giving steady — the rare superstar whose private life matches the public message, season after season.

Mookie Betts

Dodgers outfielder; 2018 AL MVP; 2025 Clemente Award

The 50/50 Foundation, founded with his wife Brianna in 2021, commits to at least 50 acts of kindness every year — across mental and emotional health, nutrition, financial literacy, and fitness — in Los Angeles and Nashville. The giving is hands-on and local: "50 Feeds LA" saw Betts contribute more than \$300,000 over three holiday seasons, including 1,500 Thanksgiving meals at the Algin Sutton Recreation Center.

At UCLA Children's Hospital, the "Betts on Us Fund" aids families of pediatric patients; "Team Mookie" AAU funds six youth basketball teams in Nashville; and in 2025 he came to the aid of an Altadena family that lost its home in the Eaton Fire. For him, kindness is a discipline with a quota. Fifty acts a year, every year, for people he will mostly never meet again — a promise most would break by March, which he guards like a batting average. Los Angeles and Nashville both claim him, and both have the receipts.

Freddie Freeman

Dodgers first baseman; 2024 World Series MVP

When his son Maximus was diagnosed with Guillain-Barré syndrome in August 2024, Freeman turned a father's fear into fuel. He donated \$1 million to the CHOC Foundation, treated CHOC staff to a Dodgers game under the #MaxStrong banner, and directed his 2026 Celebrity Wheel of Fortune winnings — \$36,000 — to CHOC.

The generosity did not stop at the hospital doors: \$300,000 to the LA Fire Department Foundation, Pasadena Fire Department, and Salvation Army for wildfire relief; a \$300,000-plus clubhouse for his alma mater, El Modena High School; and a December 2025 SickKids Toronto fundraiser with Ryan Reynolds, matched to \$1 million. He plays for Team Canada in honor of his parents, both born in Ontario. Adversity showed him what matters, and he has spent every season since proving he learned it. A father's worst months became a community's blessing — the alchemy of a man who decided his pain would have a purpose, then funded that purpose himself.

Anthony Rizzo

First baseman; 2016 World Series champion; 2017 Clemente Award

Diagnosed with Hodgkin lymphoma at eighteen, Rizzo survived cancer and resolved that no family should face it alone. A diagnosis at that age either breaks a young man or builds him — Rizzo let it build him into someone who refuses to look away from the next kid in that hallway. The Anthony Rizzo Family Foundation, founded in 2012, funds cancer research and family support and has donated more than \$11 million since inception.

The annual "Walk-Off for Cancer" 5K in Parkland, Florida raises over \$1.2 million; a \$250,000 gift created the foundation's hematology-oncology waiting room at Sylvester's in Miami, with \$650,000 total to Sylvester and \$1 million to Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital. Even approaching retirement, in 2025 he trained for the Chicago Marathon to keep the funds coming. Fourteen years in, the foundation stands among baseball's most durable engines of mercy — proof that the worst thing that ever happened to him became the best thing that ever happened to thousands of families.

Shohei Ohtani

Dodgers two-way superstar; 4x unanimous MVP

The most famous ballplayer on earth gives as though no one is watching. In November 2023 he donated 60,000 youth baseball gloves to all 20,000 elementary schools in Japan; pledged \$1 million with the Dodgers for Noto Peninsula earthquake relief; gave \$500,000 to Los Angeles wildfire relief; and in November 2025 launched the Shohei Ohtani Family Foundation for children's activity and animal rescue missions.

The quiet pattern runs back years: his 2021 Home Run Derby earnings, about \$150,000, went to some thirty Angels support staff — the clubhouse workers whose names never reach the broadcast — and he backed Japan's Mask Project in 2020. Famously humble in lifestyle and allergic to self-promotion, he treats generosity as a private duty, and he has become a living bridge between Japan and America, carrying both cultures with equal grace. Sixty thousand gloves, twenty thousand schools, and not a single press conference about it. The talent comes once a century. The character is rarer still.

Juan Soto

Mets outfielder; 2019 World Series champion

At his January 2025 Mets introduction, fresh off a \$765 million deal, his first thought was not the money. "I gotta try to help a lot of people," he said, "and around my country." He was already living it: in 2021 he donated some \$200,000 in All-Star and Home Run Derby earnings to sponsor Dominican athletes for the Tokyo Olympics; he spends his Decembers delivering baseball gear to families across the Dominican Republic; and in November 2025 he visited the Mets Academy in Boca Chica for an Amazin' Mets Foundation event, bringing new equipment for hundreds of kids.

He is also a contributor to Charity: Water. The contract made headlines around the world. The sentence that mattered was the one about his people. His foundation is still forming, but the pattern is set: the bigger the stage, the bigger the giving. December after December, the gear goes out across the DR, and children who have nothing unwrap something.

Francisco Lindor

Mets shortstop; 4x All-Star

He idolizes Roberto Clemente and carries the same Puerto Rican heritage onto the same kind of mission. The Lindor Family Foundation, run with his wife Katia, serves children and families in Puerto Rico, and the Francisco Lindor Scholarship Fund helps underprivileged kids attend Montverde Academy.

After Hurricane Maria devastated the island in 2017, he gave to relief and rebuilding; in New York he runs annual back-to-school backpack distributions in Queens and youth baseball equipment drives in underserved neighborhoods — making sure kids who look like he once did get the same start. He plays with joy and gives with intention, and the through-line is Clemente's old creed: the gift belongs to the people. To watch Lindor is to watch the lineage continue — the smile, the flash, and underneath them the same promise Roberto made to Puerto Rico's children a generation ago, kept every single year — a promise carried forward, season after season, and honored in full.

Julio Rodríguez

Mariners center fielder; 2022 AL Rookie of the Year

He has not forgotten Loma de Cabrera, the Dominican hometown of 20,000 near the Haitian border where he grew up. Through his No Limit Foundation, his first full year of giving in 2025 brought meals and toys to more than 5,000 children there; in January 2026 he personally invested \$1.3 million to renovate the hometown sports complex — the Dominican Republic's first public astroturf field — unveiled alongside fellow stars.

He also rebuilt the town's city center, donated buses for hospital transport, gave a 2023 ambulance, funded free vision screenings, and held a basketball clinic with NBA players, while his mother oversees medical missions to the town. A 2026 Mariners Clemente nominee, he stands at the beginning of his career and already at the center of his town's future. Stardom took him to Seattle. It never took him from home. He did not wait until he was established to give like a veteran; he started while still becoming one, and his hometown felt it first.

Yadier Molina

Cardinals catcher; 2x World Series champion; 2018 Clemente Award

Forty-eight hours after his season ended in 2017, Molina was on the ground in Puerto Rico with seven industrial crates of supplies, and he spent the following weeks in dawn-to-midnight, hands-on hurricane relief. That is who he is. Fundación4, founded with his wife Wanda in 2010, serves the island's underprivileged children affected by poverty, abuse, and cancer: it funded the Hogar Mis Primeros Pasos safe house for battered children in Dorado, an anesthesia machine for the pediatric oncology ward at Bayamon Children's Hospital, pediatric-cancer support in Ponce, field refurbishments, and youth scholarships — plus grocery vouchers and more than \$800,000 raised after Maria.

A Christian who has spoken at Busch Stadium Christian Family Day, he treats service as a calling, not a brand. Behind the plate he commanded a pitching staff; off the field he commands relief lines. Eighteen years of Fundación4, and the crates keep coming — because for him, Puerto Rico is not a cause. It is home.

Carlos Correa

Twins shortstop; 2017 World Series champion.

When Hurricane Maria flattened Puerto Rico in 2017, Carlos Correa didn't post about it — he sent a charter plane loaded with supplies. Then he skipped the Astros' 2018 White House visit. Not as a protest, he said, but because the day off was perfect for arranging the next relief shipment: "It was not politics... just that the day off was perfect to be able to provide some help."

Through the Carlos Correa Family Foundation he funds education, healthcare, and youth baseball across the island. After Hurricane Harvey, he and Houston Children's Charity put mattresses, frames, and linens into the homes of 500 kids. In 2019 he gave \$10,000 to the family of Deputy Sandeep Dhaliwal, the Sikh officer murdered in Houston — the same officer who had volunteered in Puerto Rico after Maria. Openly Christian, he names Yadier Molina as his example for service. He made a mistake in 2017, stood up in 2020, apologized publicly, and took accountability like a man — then kept showing up for his people.

Salvador Pérez

Royals catcher and captain; 2015 World Series champion; 2024
Clemente Award

Raised alone by his mother Yilda in Venezuela, Salvy never forgot what it is to need. Every year, with his mother beside him, he distributes food and kitchen supplies to some 2,000 houses near Valencia — more than 10,000 families across a decade. He runs his own youth baseball league for 220 kids, with free gear, professional coaches, and education and anti-drug talks; he has paid for 30 cleft-lip surgeries for children; and he gives more than 1,500 toys to children's hospitals.

In Kansas City he is a charter \$1 million donor to the KC Urban Youth Academy and supports Braden's Hope for childhood cancer and Sarah's Soldiers against ALS, plus a thousand-plus toys to hospitals each year. His creed is simple: "One day every month try to make some kid happy... I think that's going to change the world." He has kept that appointment for a decade. A decade of monthly happiness, delivered house by house — that is not charity. That is a ministry, run with his mother at his side.

Xander Bogaerts

Padres shortstop; 2x World Series champion; Aruba's own

From a small island came a big heart that never left it. The Dare to Dream Foundation, founded with his mother Sandra Brown in 2013, gives equipment, uniforms, and transportation to poor kids in Aruba Little League — extended to tutoring grants — with a board of social workers, teachers, and coaches reviewing family applications. That same year, the Lago Heights ballpark was renovated and renamed Xander Bogaerts Ballpark.

When COVID collapsed Aruba's tourism economy in 2020, his "Happy to Give Back" campaign funded food packages for some 2,190 families a month — the elderly, children, the jobless. He kept a low profile doing Red Sox Foundation work in Boston, too. Small-island roots, he proves, can hold an entire neighborhood. Aruba gave him a field; he gave it back a future. Two World Series rings, and the trophy he polishes most is a renovated Little League park carrying his name — returned to the kids, not kept for himself.

Kenley Jansen

Relief pitcher; 3x All-Star; devout Christian

When his own son was hospitalized, Jansen learned what families in children's hospitals endure — and built Kenley's Locker so other families would not endure it alone. The Kenley Jansen Foundation, run with his wife Gianni as vice president, supports families with seriously and chronically ill children; its signature lockers, stocked with iPads, Nintendo Switches, and games in Jansen's theme, stand in children's hospitals in Los Angeles and at the Curaçao Medical Center.

Back home in Curaçao he coaches youth baseball, gives financial aid to families, funded a hometown field, and runs sports camps with equipment — and during COVID he delivered 350 meals to frontline workers at the medical center. A 2019 Dodgers Clemente nominee, he turned a father's fear into a ministry. The cutter made him famous. The lockers made him family to strangers. A devout Christian, he treats every locker as a small sanctuary for a family enduring its worst week — because he has sat in that waiting room himself.

Pedro Martínez

Red Sox ace; 3x Cy Young; Hall of Fame 2015

He grew up in poverty in Manoguayabo, Dominican Republic, and he has spent 28 years making sure fewer children grow up the way he did. The Pedro Martinez Foundation, founded in 1998, has served more than 100,000 children through 60-plus services across 16 Dominican communities plus Boston, Lawrence, and the Bronx — some 50,000 youth a year.

In Manoguayabo it runs a Community and Health Center with classrooms, a cafeteria, sports courts, dental offices, and computer labs; a new library funded by a \$350,000 Red Sox Foundation grant serves more than 1,700 students, and a charter school for 1,700 children a day is planned. In 2025 alone: 20,813 backpacks distributed across the DR, and the "Hay Poder en Aprender" education program running since 2007. Proximity to the margins is not a slogan for him. It is a memory. Twenty-eight years, more than 100,000 children: the boy from Manoguayabo built the childhood he wished he had, then gave it away.

Derek Jeter

Yankees shortstop and captain; 5x World Series champion; Hall of Fame 2020

In his rookie season of 1996, Jeter started the Turn 2 Foundation with his father, Dr. Charles Jeter, a drug and alcohol counselor — and thirty years later it remains family-run, with his sister Sharlee as president. The mission is personal: motivate young people to turn away from drugs and alcohol toward healthy lifestyles.

The foundation has given back an estimated \$34 to \$48 million across New York, West Michigan, and South Florida, anchored by Jeter's Leaders, a four-year leadership-development program for high school students, the annual Derek Jeter Invitational gala since 2003, and renovated fields at his alma mater, Kalamazoo Central High School, with the Cal Ripken Sr. Foundation. He played his whole career under the brightest lights without a scandal to his name. The Captain's true streak is thirty years of showing up for kids. Thirty years, one family, tens of millions given: the most quietly consistent goodness in sports — and the most reliable.

CC Sabathia

Starting pitcher; 2007 Cy Young; Hall of Fame 2025

The big left-hander from Vallejo has never hidden his scars — he speaks openly about his 2015 alcoholism rehab and sustained recovery, and his memoir "Till the End" turns accountability into a lifeline for others. The PitCCh In Foundation, founded with his wife Amber in 2008, serves inner-city youth across the New York Tri-State and Northern California: All-Star Baseball Clinics in Vallejo and New York for kids ages 5 to 12, more than 36,000 supply-filled backpacks, over \$800,000 in field renovations, and in August 2026 a \$500,000 seed commitment launching an \$11 million redevelopment of Harlem's Brigadier General Charles Young Playground.

He serves as board vice president of The Players Alliance and as MLB Special Assistant to the Commissioner on diversity and social responsibility. He fell down in public and got up in public — and the kids he serves get to witness both. From Vallejo to the Bronx, he keeps building fields and handing out backpacks where kids like the one he was can become someone better.

Carlos Beltrán

9x All-Star; 2013 Roberto Clemente Award winner; Puerto Rican baseball icon.

Carlos Beltrán grew up poor in Manatí, Puerto Rico — and decided no child on the island would have to climb the way he did without a hand. In 2002, with his wife Jessica, he founded the Carlos Beltrán Foundation; in 2011 it opened the Carlos Beltrán Baseball Academy — a \$10 million school on 18 acres, \$4 million of it his own money — for 130 students, most from below-poverty households, with transportation provided island-wide.

The first class graduated in 2013. About eleven students have signed professional contracts — and the rest earned university scholarships, because the academy is education first, always. He also fought for and won Major League Baseball's requirement that every team employ Spanish translators for Latino players — the "Carlos Beltrán rule." He wore the mistake of 2017 openly and paid for it with a managerial job. Then he went back to building schools — and to the children waiting in them.

Joe Torre

Yankees manager 1996–2010; 4x World Series champion; Hall of Fame 2014

Torre grew up in a violent home, and he named his healing work for his mother. The Joe Torre Safe at Home Foundation, founded with his wife Ali in 2002, works to end the cycle of domestic violence through "Margaret's Place" — safe rooms in schools staffed by master's-level counselors, offering individual and group counseling, trauma curriculum, and peer leadership at 18 sites across California, New York, and Ohio, plus two international sites, on a \$5 million-plus annual operating budget.

He put his own childhood trauma on the record so other children would not have to carry theirs alone, and he partners with Minor League Baseball clubs to carry the message into ballparks nationwide. Twenty-four years of galas, counseling rooms, and quiet rescues. He won four rings as a manager; the safe rooms are the greater dynasty. He could have buried the memory of that violent house. Instead he built rooms where other children's memories grow lighter, one counseling session at a time.

Jorge Posada

Yankees catcher; 5x All-Star; 4x World Series champion

Ten days after his son Jorge Luis was born, the Posadas learned he had craniosynostosis — a condition affecting 1 in 2,000 babies — and the surgeries began. Out of a father's fear came the Jorge Posada Foundation in the fall of 2000: funding research, emotional support for families through a Mentors Program, and grants to cover families' initial surgery costs.

For 26 years, he and his wife Laura have stood with parents hearing the same terrifying diagnosis they once heard — joined by efforts like the Jorge Cabernet charity wine in 2008 and his memoir "The Beauty of Love" in 2010, earning Puerto Rico's Family Foundation Excellence Award. He caught some of the greatest pitchers who ever lived. His most important work has been catching families before they fall. Twenty-six years of standing in the gap between a terrifying diagnosis and a family's hope — that is a catcher's whole career, perfected off the field.

GONE, STILL WITH US

Three the world lost too soon.

Gone, and still with us.

Nipsey Hussle

Rapper · Builder of Crenshaw

Ermias Asghedom grew up in Hyde Park, South Los Angeles, and when the money came, he did not leave the neighborhood behind — he bought it back. In 2017 he opened the Marathon Clothing store on Crenshaw and Slauson, on the very plaza where he had been harassed as a boy, and turned it into proof that viable commerce and aspiration could stand where the mainstream economy had written the block off.

Beside it he built Vector90, a co-working space with STEM education for the young people of South Central, and launched the Too Big To Fail initiative to carry science and technology to youth of color. He hired local teenagers, wrote commercial leases instead of speeches, rebuilt basketball courts for kids with hoop dreams, invested in the beloved World on Wheels, and stood among the earliest champions of Destination Crenshaw — his Marathon team designing the project's logo as a gift.

On March 31, 2019, he was murdered outside his own store. He was thirty-three. A year later the industry gave him the Grammy his debut had been denied in life. But the honor that matters was already standing on Crenshaw: a store, a school, and a square that bears his name. The marathon continues.

Kobe Bryant

Ballplayer · Champion of Children

Twenty seasons. Five championships. One team, one city, one unbroken standard of excellence. But the number that defines Kobe Bryant is not on any stat sheet: across his twenty-year career he granted more than two hundred wishes through the Make-A-Wish Foundation — sitting face to face, for hours, with children fighting life-threatening illnesses, most of it done quietly, without cameras.

“Basketball is something that will come and eventually go,” he said. “The beauty in that is trying to use that time to inspire others.” He lived the sentence. He coached his daughter Gianna's youth team himself. He and Vanessa stood among the earliest supporters of the National Museum of African American History and Culture. He lent his name to Stand Up To Cancer, helped raise more than eighty million dollars for research, and built the Mamba & Mambacita Sports Foundation to carry youth sports forward. He remains the only athlete ever to win an Academy Award.

On January 26, 2020, he and Gianna were gone. What stayed is the standard: that greatness is measured not by what you win, but by who you lift on the way up.

Tupac Shakur

Rapper · Voice of the Voiceless

Tupac Shakur made his pen a pulpit. “Keep Ya Head Up” spoke tenderness to single mothers the industry ignored; “Brenda’s Got a Baby” forced America to look at the children it had abandoned. He named systemic racism, police brutality, and poverty plainly, and a generation of the unheard recognized their own story inside his verses. He was twenty-five years old.

On September 13, 1996, he was taken in Las Vegas, and the voice went silent — but the work refused to. His mother, Afeni Shakur, founded the Tupac Amaru Shakur Foundation in 1997 in Stone Mountain, Georgia: a living classroom where young people could study dance, drama, music, poetry, and visual art — the very disciplines that had raised her son. For years its Peace Fest concerts raised funds and lifted new voices, and its scholarships still open doors today.

He called himself the rose that grew from concrete. His mother spent the rest of her life making sure the concrete would never stop producing roses.

Their work speaks for itself.
I just wrote it down.

— **Michael**

Weighed against seven standards — character, wisdom, truth, experience, lifestyle, culture, and service to the world — and against a single rule: what disqualifies a person is what they themselves have done — adultery, abuse, and the like. Lawsuits, tax cases, and the finger-pointing of corrupt systems do not. Researched September 2026.