

## LEADERSHIP PROFILE

Executive Director

**Watkins Christian Foundation**

Atlanta, GA

---

*“...empowering Christian-oriented organizations to impact primarily the lives of youths and others through Christ, while maintaining financial growth of principal assets to ensure sustainability.”*

**--Watkins Christian Foundation, 2019**

---

## BACKGROUND

The family behind one of Atlanta’s storied private companies, [Watkins Associated Industries](#), has long supported faith-based nonprofits and causes through the family’s private foundation, Watkins Christian Foundation. Like the family that created it, Watkins Christian Foundation has intentionally kept a low profile, rarely calling attention to itself or to its grantmaking; in fact, the foundation does not even have a public website.

Nevertheless, year after year Watkins Christian Foundation (WCF) has been quietly impacting thousands of lives across the Southeast and beyond through responsive grantmaking to a variety of faith-based missions, especially those



1

---

<sup>1</sup> Bill “BW” Watkins and his produce truck back in the day. Other images are from the websites of a few recent grantees

serving the region's youth. In the last ten years alone, WCF's grants have totaled \$28 million.

Watkins Christian Foundation ("WCF") was established in 1982, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the family's original business, a one-truck produce transport company started by Bill "BW" Watkins in 1932. That company grew into a multigenerational private business still controlled by the Watkins family. Both the corporate entity and the family foundation are headquartered in Atlanta.

Following a strategic review in early 2019, the foundation's board of directors concluded the time had come to appoint a full-time Executive Director with day-to-day responsibility for the foundation's operations. Three factors combined to make the decision a timely one:

1. The growth in both scale and geography of the foundation's grantmaking, with the attendant opportunity for greater impact;
2. The realization that the foundation's grants and its grantees would benefit from better, more consistent communications regarding expectations and outcomes; and
3. The opportunity for successive generations to participate in, learn from and contribute to the family's deep-seated commitment to faith-based philanthropy.



Accordingly, the foundation's board authorized the present search for a full-time Executive Director, the foundation's first, with the experience in grantmaking, operations and faith-based philanthropy to help ensure Watkins Christian Foundation remains an effective strategic asset for the mission and causes it supports.

The foundation has assets of about \$72 million,<sup>2</sup> and 2018 grants totaled just under \$3 million. From inception, the corpus has been built through annual contributions from WAI profits, a commitment treasured and respected through four generations of the extended family. Under terms of a trust established by BW Watkins, the foundation expects its corpus will more than double within the next five years.

---

<sup>2</sup> As of June 30, 2019 (unaudited)

The foundation's investment management is provided by [Crawford Investment Counsel](#).<sup>3</sup> Grant administration and back-office functions are provided by [Foundation Source](#),<sup>4</sup> with WAI staff providing additional local support as needed.

The foundation is governed by an unpaid board that reflects the multi-generational family heritage and ownership of the corporate enterprise. The chair of the board of Watkins Associated Industries, George Watkins, is also chair of the foundation board. The four-person search committee is chaired by Mike Watkins, currently president of the foundation and previously president of WAI.

## THE OPPORTUNITY

In one sense, Watkins Christian Foundation is a 36-year-old start-up. Its pattern of support for Christian-based nonprofits, especially those serving youth and at-risk populations across the Southeast, is well established, but the foundation's strategy and the execution of its grants has been decidedly informal. The portfolio of grantees has tended to change relatively little from year to year; over three-quarters of its grants each year are to previous grantees.



The foundation has not typically required post-grant reports from its grantees, and thus feedback on a specific grant's impact or of a grantee's overall effectiveness has been mainly informal and anecdotal. While the foundation does not wish to make its processes unnecessarily burdensome, the opportunity inherent in better, more frequent communications with grantees is one the board would like to like to pursue.

Similarly, WCF is fully comfortable with its approach of responsive philanthropy, responding to needs identified by potential grantees. In addition, however, there is interest in exploring how a complementary approach of strategic or targeted philanthropy might contribute to the foundation's impact.

The board does not seek a complete reversal of current practices; in fact, the flexibility to support compelling causes and captivating leaders is one of the

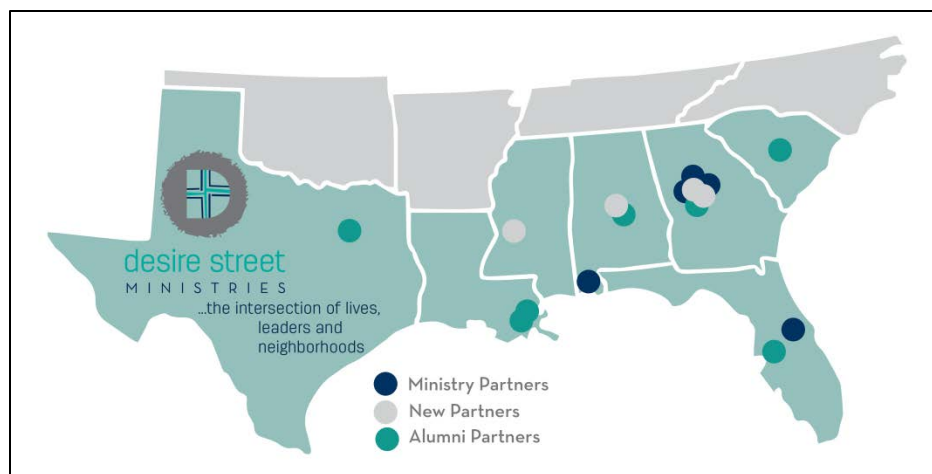
---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.crawfordinvestment.com/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.foundationsource.com/>

joys of family philanthropy. Rather, the board senses the overall effort could be even more impactful with a bit more discipline in its processes and a bit more clarity in its expectations of grantees. As all parties get comfortable with the new leader and the new approach, further enhancements are inevitable.

The opportunity is ripe, therefore, for an Executive Director to introduce additional structure and intentionality to the foundation. That includes more proactive interactions with grantees and stepped up internal mechanisms for reporting and accountability—all without losing the personal touch among family members that has been such an integral part of the collective success.



No one on the foundation's board has been through such a transition before. There is inevitable nervousness in some quarters as to just how much change the foundation is ready to embrace, but the key players agree now is the time to begin. As one informed observer put it, "We deserve to have someone who can guide us in putting our money where it can do the most good."

The new Executive Director will step into a highly fluid environment, one in which framing realistic expectations for the newest member of the team may in fact be the first order of business. Unconstrained by existing staff or structure, the ED will need to develop some of both—at a pace and a cost acceptable to a board accustomed to an exceptionally lean operation.

The mandate is to help a well-intentioned family shape and implement a philanthropic strategy that reflects the family's Christian faith, honors its heritage, makes the best use of its philanthropic assets, and sustains the spirit of generous giving through future generations. The current leaders of both the foundation and the company are clear that the time is right for a more intentional approach to philanthropy, but the hard work of defining success and the path ahead has just begun.



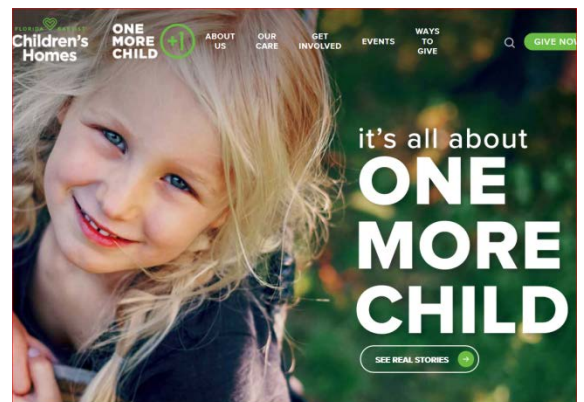
## THE RELATIONSHIPS

<b>The Executive Director will report to</b>	The Watkins Christian Foundation Board of Directors. Both the chair and the president of the foundation will be important points of contact, as will the CEO of Watkins Associated Industries
<b>Other critical relationships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members of the extended family</li> <li>• Peer leaders and staff in other foundations and philanthropic networks across WCF's footprint of service</li> <li>• Subject-matter experts in areas of special interest to WCF</li> <li>• Nonprofit leaders, especially those heading current and potential WCF grantees</li> </ul>

## THE CANDIDATE

The ideal candidate to become Executive Director of the Watkins Christian Foundation will be a committed Christian experienced in grantmaking, ideally within a family-oriented context. Working knowledge of best practices in nonprofit governance and leadership would be additive, as would deep relationships across the region's faith-based, philanthropic and nonprofit communities. Proven effectiveness working with families, especially those undergoing generational change, will be as important as specific grantmaking experience.

Among other assets of interest, the search committee will be attracted to individuals who embody many of the following experiences, values and characteristics:



- Someone rooted in a deep-seated Christian faith. The family and its grantmaking cross denominational lines, and thus dogma is not at issue, but the commitment to faith (and faith-based philanthropy) is genuine and pervasive, and it will be important for the Executive Director to share that commitment
- Success demonstrated at or near the top of a foundation of similar size, scope or focus

- An executive with demonstrated passion for WCF's work and the communities and people it serves
- A leader with the maturity to meet the board and family leaders where they are today, the perspective to envision WCF's possibilities, and the subtlety to bridge the two
- An experienced professional who respects the family's history and values; someone attuned to the joys and challenges of a multigenerational family enterprise
- An exceptional listener and communicator who invites confidence, assimilates diverse viewpoints and knows how to create consensus
- A servant leader adept at developing trust relationships across a wide spectrum of peers, stakeholders and grantees: a poised, considerate, authentic and reliable individual who takes pride in important work done well
- A colleague with a good sense of pace, knowing when to lead and when to listen
- A trusted advisor steeped in the need for discretion regarding family and foundation matters
- A friendly, outgoing person who gets along well with all kinds of people; someone who finds joy in the work and mixes well with a diverse group of colleagues
- An intelligent, reflective and mature professional not prone to drama or self-promotion
- A motivated self-starter willing to tackle the full array of activities common to a leanly staffed office; a working leader who balances big picture thinking with attention to detail
- The experience in life and philanthropy to be a natural mentor for the next generation.



---

**For potential consideration or to suggest a prospect, please email**  
**[WCF@BoardWalkConsulting.com](mailto:WCF@BoardWalkConsulting.com)**  
**or call Diane Westmore or Sam Pettway at**  
**404-BoardWalk (404-262-7392).**

---