

# C2K Ministries

## The Successful Idea of One Passionate Couple

By AIMEE ROBINETTE

Six years ago, an earnest couple packed up a 17-foot U-Haul filled with all their belongings and headed South. Armed with purpose, determination and an idea, Phil and Kym Schank landed in Mound Bayou, an independent black community founded in 1887 by former slaves.

The idea was C2k Ministries, an afterschool program for students, which originated from a thought.

"The thought had to do with what C2k stands for, and that is Cross to Kingdom. The whole basis of Christianity is based on the fact that the only way into God's Kingdom is by the cross," says Phil Schank. "This entire thought originated years ago and manifested itself over the years."

The couple made their way from Wisconsin, where they had spent their entire lives. The move was massive, yet

their assuredness that they were following God's calling made them press on.

"Mound Bayou was not an unfamiliar place, although it might seem odd for a white couple to move to an all African-American town," says Schank. "Twenty years ago, Kym started to volunteer in Mound Bayou because of her brother. He volunteered through the Christian Brothers program which led him there. Kym wanted to see what he was doing and loved the community. Over several years she drove down, two times a year by herself, to spend a week volunteering."

Kym fell in love instantly with the community and its around 1,533 residents. She saw much potential in the children she met and longed to continue doing what she could when she could.

"That led to us bringing youth groups down for spring break trips and more. Eventually, we felt God calling us to pick

up everything we had and move," he adds. "When we moved South, we were familiar with Mound Bayou. We had established friendships and were comfortable. The outpouring from several in our community made a significant impression on us."

Schank said the Delta is a unique place in many respects.

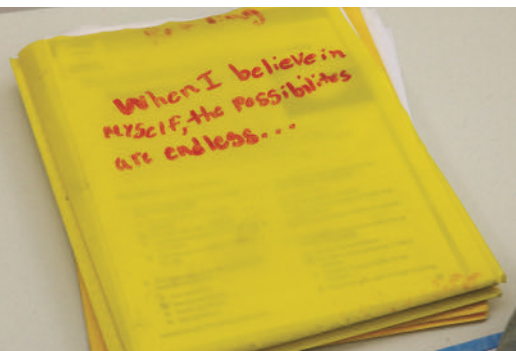
"The pace in the South is much slower than in the North. I remember going to the hardware store to get a few, simple things. This trip would have taken me five minutes in Wisconsin," he explains. "Forty-five minutes later, full of stories, I left the hardware store with what I needed. I have come to appreciate the intentionality when someone asks how you are doing. In the north, it usually is small talk."

The first year, the Schanks were not exactly sure what type of help they would



Above, Phil Schank conducting an after school program.





**Right, native Wisconsinans Phil and Kym Schank moved to Mound Bayou six years ago to spearhead the after school program, C2K Ministries.**



provide. They did know however, it would be something that involved children.


"After researching after-school programs for one year, we decided that we would start one. During our second year of living in Mound Bayou, we started a program called RE>Direct. During our first year, former mayor Darryl Johnson allowed us to host our program in the facilities building," Schank says. "After one year, we were asked to move out. We contacted Sister Donald Mary, the former executive director of St. Gabriel Mercy

Center, to see if we could use their church."

The Schanks were granted their request and they moved into the church, only to be informed they would have to move after Sister Donald Mary retired.


"Once again, we had to find a place for our program, which now had grown to twenty students," Schank says. "CEO John Fairman and the board of directors at the Delta Health Center have come through hugely," he adds. "They gave us a part of the Education and Training Center building (the old DHC building)





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to conduct our program. We are so grateful to them for all that they have done and continue to do for our community and kids.”

RE>Direct, a holistic after-school program, currently serves twenty students from the North Bolivar School District.

“We find that many kids struggle academically, socially, and spiritually and our organization provides the tools and resources to help them overcome the challenges they face and become a healthy and productive citizen in their community,” says Schank. “When kids arrive, they get a healthy lunch comprised of a protein, fruit, and bottle of water. Group ‘A’ gets on their laptop computers for forty minutes using a reading comprehension program called Fast forward. Every student has increased their comprehension by at least one grade level over the past year, and some have increased two grade levels or more. Group ‘B’ would be getting help with homework. Forty minutes later the groups switch. During the last forty minutes of the program, students will do one of many activities; STEM, teamwork projects, an art project (through Delta Arts Alliance), bible time, games, free time and others.”

Schank says they hold students to higher standards with the program. Parents fill out a comprehensive application and attend one of two parent meetings just for their student to qualify. Students and parents must comply with all rules and expectations.

“Because our program is in high demand—we currently have 18 students on a waiting list—we have a three, unexcused absence policy,” he explains.

A student cannot miss more than three days without a qualified excuse. If he or she does miss, that student is removed from the program, placed on the bottom of the waiting list, and the next student on the list is accepted.

“We have strong incentive programs for students to do well. For instance, we have RE>Direct dollars which is a money program where kids can earn dollars to purchase real items,” Schank says. “Every student has a checkbook that they need to balance, make deposits, and write checks from. We open our store weekly where kids can use those dollars to buy real items. Two times a year we open a large store with computers, tablets, games, bikes and more. We also offer a trip to

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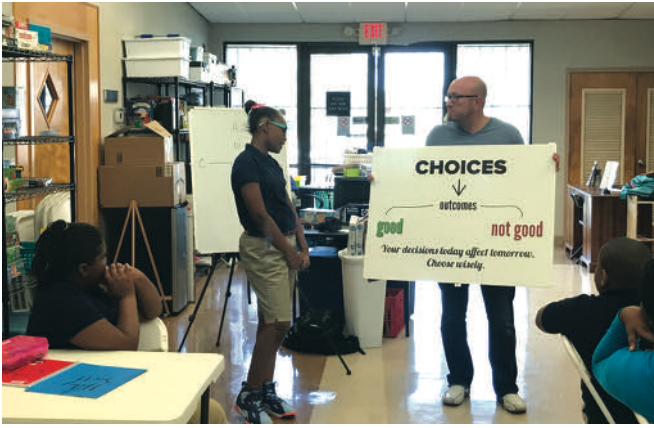
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Wisconsin for one week where kids get to live in a house on a lake and enjoy all the fun that comes with it.

Schank says they expect their students to perform at high-levels, and to do so, they maintain a staff of excellence.

“Our staff is incredible. Megan Munro, serves as program director, Linda Dorsey is a child and family coach, and Brenda Jackson, Loise Fipps, and LaTonya Fields, all serve as mentor specialists that work with our students daily to ensure that standards are met,” he adds.

The program is showing signs of success.

“One of our students who was behind in school recently skipped two grades because of the progress that he has made,” Schank says. “Another student who struggled to get a grade above a ‘C’ is now getting all ‘A’s’ and ‘B’s.’ It is amazing what can happen when you look a student in the eyes and tell them that you believe in them and that they can do this,” Schank says. “We encourage them to rise to the individual that God created them to be. When we believe in them, they start to believe in themselves, and that changes everything.”

As with a growing program, there are

growing pains, one of which is expansion.

“We have several other programs and ideas that require a building of our own. Currently, we have the land, but we need the funding for the Youth Center,” he says. “With it, we can expand our programming to include more students, start our Leadership Development Program, Delta Music Academy among others. We have big plans and we have a big God.”

To learn more about C2k Ministries or would like to contribute to the program, log-on to [c2kministries.org](http://c2kministries.org). **DBJ**

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