Breaking the Cycle of Poverty

Volunteer Ministry

Jim and Deb Pyle’s Two Decade Relationship with CCC
By Patrick Ervin

Like the past three years, this year at Cary Christian Center began with a blessing in the form a humble dedicated couple from Zeeland, Michigan. After finalizing care arrangements for Deb’s mother, Jim and Deb Pyle made a choice to come south each year for a couple of months to do mission work. Deb retired first to care for her mother and Jim retired in 2013. But, the relationship between Cary Christian Center and the Pyle’s goes back more than two decades. In 1995, Jim attended a Promise Keepers meeting in Detroit where he met former Cary Christian Center director Dorsey Johnson who shared the story and work of their ministry. “Our youth group leader shared with us that we were always looking for a place to go for mission work,” Jim recalled. “In 1996, we took a week-long mission trip with the church and we’ve been coming back ever since.” In the early years of the trips, Jim and Deb would often come during spring break with other church families to accommodate their children’s school schedules. Now Jim, a retired glass installer and former computer programming systems analyst, works mostly assisting volunteer manager Robert Jackson in local home improvement projects and in general maintenance for the center’s buildings and grounds. Deb often took on administrative and clerical duties in the development office, finance and in the children’s village. “I actually started out cleaning, sorting and helping organize different parts of the ministry,” Deb, retired educator recalled. “I really like the interaction and working the people. One of the reasons why we love Cary so much is that fact the ministry is child friendly and it encourages groups to bring kids into mission work.” We have also grown to love the employees and the Delta people. For the past four years, Deb has also had a tremendous role in the coordination of our annual fundraiser, Delta Lights. Jim and Deb have three children: Kelly, a well-traveled quality control worker who is a formally trained animal biologist; Jonathan, a law school graduate and daughter Jamie who is employed in the clerical field. Jamie’s son, Keavhon is the couple’s only grandchild.
Having studied Cary Christian Center immediately upon accepting the position as CEO towards the end of 2015, excitement gave way to the sobering reality of the organization’s financial and public perception struggles. Quite frankly, the task of revitalizing Cary Christian Center has not been accomplished in my first year on the job. There have been highs and lows, but an undeniable vision for continued operation, evangelism and service have manifested. Reflecting on 2016, the year started with an immediate buzz of excitement. Within the first 90 days, we were approved for grants from the Home Depot, Delta Radio, REAL Christian and Dollar General. Our initial success in getting awarded grants gave way to the harsh reality of the competitiveness associated with seeking funds in this manner. The only other grant that we received in 2016 (albeit a large one) came through the Women’s Foundation of Mississippi for $25,000 to educate the public about planned pregnancy. We also developed a significant partnership with the Foundation for the Mid-South through its Ally Program designed to expose young African American males to nonprofit environments.

In 2016, I also had to help the organization come to grips with its present situation reminding everyone that we could not be all things to all people currently. Staff was reduced and restructured, wasteful practices eliminated and prioritizing of our Christian service to community made visible. Cary Christian Center took tremendous strides in our public rebranding through website updates, national television coverage for our parent-child ministry and completing a door-to-door survey in three counties through a partnership with AmeriCorps VISTA. Our children in the Village after school program continued to outperform their peers in robotics competitions and state subject area tests. Through a new workforce development partnership, 15 students received phlebotomy certifications at Cary Christian Center. We reconnected with our traditional support centers in Iowa, Illinois and New Jersey and welcomed new volunteers from Texas and Kentucky while regretfully canceling our trip to Michigan.

As 2016 ended, the organization was smaller in number but embolden by a large measure of faith. Seeds planted late in 2016 have the promise of blossoming with old ministries becoming new again, a well-trained, well-respected staff, and a Cary Christian Center that is vibrant, stable, competent and committed to serving God’s people. We look forward to God’s manifestation of prosperity and stability in 2017.

Patrick L. Ervin

CEO
Delta Lights

“Some People are sources of light that promise hope for others”

It is the mission of Cary Christian Center’s Annual Delta Lights event to honor those sources of light. For five years the Cary Christian Center organization has hosted this Delta Lights reception, bestowing the Mollie Van Devender Award to individuals chosen for their selfless contributions to the people and communities of the South Delta. Our 2017 honorees were: Larry Green Dean Steyling, L.C. Thigpen Stanley Vandenberg accepted by his son Bernie Vandenberg.

In accepting the award, Green stressed the importance of education and a strong educational leadership to ensure a successful future for the people of the Delta.

Steyling was visibly moved as he accepted his award, recounting the more than 30 years he has donated his time driving the more than 1,200 miles to Cary from New Jersey with truckloads of donations for Cary Christian Center’s thrift store ministry, and the lifelong friendships made along the way. "I’ve been asked, ‘Why Cary, Mississippi?’" he said. “It’s because of the people.” Steyling’s partner on many of those trips to Cary, Stanley Vandenberg was unable to attend last week’s event, but his son, Bernie, accepted the award on his behalf.

Cary Christian volunteer, Bernie Vandenberg mirrored Steyling’s heartfelt sentiments about the people and relationships they and their families have made over decades helping the organization and the people of Sharkey County.

Longtime educator, coach and Delta Lights honoree L.C. Thigpen credits his childhood sweetheart and wife Annysteen support for everything. “You know a few years ago there was a song about the wind beneath my wings,” Thigpen said. “She’s the wind beneath my wings, and at times, she’s been the wind and the wings.” But, Thigpen said he, too, found the people of the South Delta to be some of the best in the world.

As the patriarch of a family that has built one of the area’s most successful lawn care businesses, Williams has been a role model of hard work and perseverance. He served Issaquena County for more than 30 years as an employee and as a volunteer fireman. At a critical time in his life, he tuned to music and is a founding member of the Sharkey-Issaquena Mass Choir.

Each of these Delta Lights has touched countless other lives, but it seems that the people of the Delta have given each of them just as much in return.

Musical selection given by Linda Vandenberg, Boards Secretary and she was tremendous (centered photo).

The Village Ministry is a program that serves the educational and spiritual aspects of the children we serve. We do this by: Assessing the educational need, defining the mission of why we are here, setting goals and objectives for each individual child, creating tutoring program partnerships with the local schools and various organization with the same goals, selecting or adapting a reading and math curriculum provided by the South Delta School District, providing support for tutors and Village Staff to ensure the children are receiving the best from the program. More importantly we implement the plans that are set before use to provide data to show progress for our work.

We are now asking for volunteers to come and assist us in our Afterschool Tutorial Program as well as our six (6) weeks VBS Summer Program.

For more information and support: ruthie@carychristiancenter.org or deivory@carychristiancenter.org
“Without faith it is impossible to please GOD”
Hebrew 11:6

Devotional Monthly Themes
January 2017 “Trust in the Lord”

February 2017 “Works of the Flesh”

Ministry Needs:
Prayer
Donations (monetary)
Pots & Pans for Dormitory
Volunteer services (Groups)
Vehicles (vans, buses & trucks)
Tractor & Bush Haul
Lawnmower
Thrift Store Appliances
Bailer
Mechanic
A/C Unit

Board of Directors
Don DeWaard, President
Robin Howard, Vice-President
Linda Vandenberg, Secretary
Jean DeWaard, Treasurer
Travis Gully
Flocsie Abney
Don and Jan Postma

Administration
Patrick Ervin, Chief Executive Officer
Carl Watley, Chief Operating Officer
De’Ivory Stamps, Administrative Assistant

Ministry Managers
Nona Cooper, Development
Robert Jackson, Volunteer
Nikki Parker, Parent/Child Ministry
Ruthie Kelly, Public Relations/Village Manager