For more than 20 years, Edward White has shared his passion for drums with the inner city youth of Louisville, Kentucky, linking them to their cultural roots and providing a positive alternative to the drugs, violence, and despair they witness every day.

Edward White studied drum-making and playing with the renowned Danjuma Ighalo of Nigeria. In 1990, Mr. White founded the River City Drum Corps; and with his wife, the late Zambia Nkrumah, they launched “The House of Dreams Arts Enrichment Center” which sponsors programs for computer literacy, math, science, career exploration and multimedia production. Moreover, the Center brings African art and dance to these urban youth.

Mr. White has always held the boys and girls who join the River City Drum Corps to the highest standards of behavior, and he keeps track of them through high school and college. Ninety-percent of his Corps members complete college!

The River City Drum Corps never fails to wow audiences, whether it is in schools, community centers, city parks or concert halls. Mr. White talks of drumming as a heartbeat, a connection to the beginnings of creation in Africa, the cradle of humanity. The Corps’ music, he says, is something to be “felt” more so than heard. And Mr. White has led the Corps across many cultural barriers, taking them to Appalachia and the Kentucky Folk Life Festival as well as to Cajun country in Louisiana.

While the River City Drum Corps has received numerous grants over the years from nonprofit organizations seeking to improve the prospects of African American youth in Louisville, Edward White, a carpenter by trade, has often dipped into his own pocket to feed the young people he works with and to pay for their transportation to practices and performances.

Says NEA-Kentucky Education Association-Jefferson County Teachers Association member Candace Foster: “Mr. White sacrificed his quality of life to redirect the paths of many youth. He has taught them skills, knowledge and self-discipline.”