



# Helping Those In Need

BY JEN ENNIS

When my husband, Dan Ennis, began the interview process for the position of Delta State's 9th president, he monitored news sources from the region and learned of the devastating tornado that hit Rolling Fork on March 24 of last year.



Upon receiving the call from IHL (Institutions of Higher Learning) to offer him the position, he immediately began thinking about the impact on DSU students who were from Rolling Fork. As he contemplated how he could help, The Rolling Fork Day of Service became a vision of Dan's. It is customary at many universities to adopt a community service project around a new president's inauguration and Dan felt that Rolling Fork would be an ideal location for such a project.

In April, during our first official visit to campus, Dan asked Dr. Michelle Roberts, DSU's Vice President of Executive Affairs and

Chief of Staff, to organize a meeting between us and a few people in Rolling Fork to find out how DSU would be able to help. Dr. Roberts scheduled a meeting with us and Kyla and Neil Holcomb. Kyla graciously agreed to take us on a tour of the community, the Red Cross distribution center, and one of the few businesses still standing, the Bank of Anguilla, so that we could meet other survivors.

It was at the bank that Kyla introduced us to her friend, Susan Perry. Susan and her husband, Kelly, have a miraculous survival story that gave me chill bumps as she recounted it that day. As we met more people, we were in awe of countless other survival stories and how, amidst grief and tragedy, this tiny town had pulled together to help each other as they dealt with the loss of their homes and possessions as well as loved ones. I had seen the aftermath of brutal hurricanes before but never had I seen the kind of devastation that I saw as we toured Rolling Fork last April.

We learned from Kyla that 80% of the town of Rolling Fork had been leveled, including businesses and private residences, but even more rental properties. Susan later

told me the loss of so many rental properties threaten the town's social and economic infrastructure for if people move out of the town and never return, the population decreases and schools and businesses suffer. Meeting Susan, the Holcombs and others, including later on, Charles and Ann Weissinger, solidified Dan's desire to make the community of Rolling Fork the location for his inauguration project. Dan shared with them his desire to bring a group of volunteers from DSU to Rolling Fork and provide a day of service, doing whatever was needed.

I stayed connected with Kyla and Susan over the spring as we prepared to move to Cleveland. After we were settled and Susan and I continued to talk about the help that was needed in Rolling Fork, I asked her if she would be willing to serve on the inauguration steering committee, since she is responsible for community outreach as Director of Marketing for the Bank of Anguilla. She graciously agreed to be the point person on the committee for the day of service in Rolling Fork. Susan, along



with other subcommittee members including Dr. April Mondy and Nick Bobo, are organizing this day of service on Friday, February 23, when we will bring approximately 50 students and faculty to help the rebuilding efforts in Rolling Fork. Dan recognizes Delta State's responsibility to the Delta, not just in education, but in service. As we prepare for his official inauguration as Delta State University's 9th president on Saturday, February 24, we are grateful for the opportunity to serve the victims of the Rolling Fork tornado and humbled by the help and support offered by the Delta State family.

*Jen Ennis is the wife of Delta State University President, Dr. Dan Ennis.*