

Bringing African American History into America's Homes and Schools: How One Entrepreneurial Business Takes on the Challenge

Black Heritage Series(tm) Games and Puzzles, and Black History School Challenge Fund

HIGHLAND PARK, NJ /Send2Press Newswire/ – When they first formed GEEBEE Marketing(R), Inc. in 1997, Gayle Brill Mittler and Robert Kersey, former colleagues in a large toy corporation, had one common vision: to create a complete line of games, toys, and puzzles that would bring the vast rich and diverse history of America's nearly 15,000,000 citizens of African American descent into homes and classrooms.



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Photo Caption: Product image of 'Black Heritage Trivia Game.'

Today, the company's Black Heritage Series(tm) line includes three games and two puzzle assortments. The products are manufactured for GEEBEE Marketing, Inc. by the Pressman Toy Corporation of New Brunswick, New Jersey. The line is distributed by retailers such as Wal-Mart Stores, K-mart, Walgreen's, as well as gift and book stores across the country, online retailers and others. Its success has earned GEEBEE Marketing recognition as a leading marketer of

ethnic products.

The company's games include: 1. My First Matching game, for ages 3-6 years, teaches about African American culture, 2. I Can Do Anything(tm) career path game, for ages 4-8 years, a board game that details the many different career opportunities available today, and 3. The Black Heritage Trivia game, for ages 8 through adult, with over 1200 questions on African American history and culture. The puzzle assortments include: Madame CJ Walker 24 piece puzzle, Elijah McCoy 24 piece puzzle, Buffalo Soldiers 100 piece puzzle, and Harriet Tubman 100 piece puzzle.

This year the Black Heritage Series will be featured in promotional main traffic areas during February in over 350 Wal-Mart Stores across the country.

"As an African American child growing up in America, I had to learn about my heritage by myself. Today I can help children grow up aware of the contributions African Americans have made to the development of our great country," said Robert Kersey, creator of the Black Heritage Trivia game.

"The Black Heritage Series is gaining a market share. The interest in black heritage is growing beyond just black families," reported Al Johnson, former manager of the Wal-Mart store in Princeton, New Jersey.

"It actually took us several years to convince retailers of the large potential market waiting for products like ours," said Gayle Brill Mittler, one of the founders of GEEBEE Marketing, Inc. "Today retailers more readily recognize the importance of the African American and other minority markets."

Brill Mittler did not stop her efforts to expand education of African American history with the success of their Black Heritage Series. In 2003, she founded The Black History School Challenge Fund, a non-profit 501(c)3 corporation. It is based in Highland Park, NJ. The Fund's initial mission was to introduce the Black History School Challenge Contest in schools as a means of gaining inclusion of African American history in public schools, at minimal cost (to the schools), and in a timely manner.

The Black History School Challenge Fund is comprised of educators, business people, and community leaders who are interested in ensuring the study of African American history throughout the school year. Ms. Rochelle Gray, a teacher in Piscataway, New Jersey schools created the Black History School Challenge Contest. The contest is based on the Black Heritage Trivia game's 1200 questions. Ms. Gray adapted the game for usage in in-school competitions. Members of the Fund procured corporate donations to award United States Savings Bond prizes to individual or team winners. Most of the funds donated to date have come from Pressman Toy Corporation and GEEBEE Marketing, Inc.

The first Black History School Challenge Contest was run in the Alexander Hamilton Middle School in Elizabeth, NJ in 2003. Students were divided into teams. Teams competed against each other in a "Brain Bowl" format. Their enthusiasm was overwhelming.

"I wished I'd taped the final game between the two 8th grade teams. It was absolutely wonderful and exciting. The two teams were so pumped up. They had banners and posters while rooting for their teams. You'd have thought it was an athletic event," said Ms. Gray.

After word of the successful event held in Elizabeth spread, the Fund was approached by several other school districts. Some of the contests have been run amongst 5th graders (Conerly Road School in Franklin, NJ), high school students (Project Grad students in Newark NJ), and 8th graders (Alexander Hamilton Middle School in Elizabeth NJ). The Fund now has a waiting list of schools hoping to participate in the program.

"Word is certainly spreading," said Gayle Brill Mittler. "We've been contacted by schools in New York and Virginia who want to participate in the program. This is exactly what we had hoped would happen. The goal is to bring African American history into the mainstream. To have all of our children learn it as a part of American history, not just in February, but all year-round."

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