

Saints Stanislaus College (Guyana) Alumni Society

Annual General Meeting

September 24, 2023

As I come to the end of my second year as President of the Society, I have to reflect on the accomplishments of the Society in support of its mission as a charitable organization dedicated to enriching the life of students of the College. To be quite clear, our achievements in the past year would not have been possible without the support, advice, talent and energy of the members of the Executive and a few non executive members such as Hugh Hazlewood, Des Jardine, Rupert DeCastro and Vibert Lampkin. I thank you for your contribution and am pleased that most of you have agreed to stay on in support of the new President whom we will elect shortly.

During the two years that I was President of the Society, all of us faced the challenge of the Covid Pandemic and its impact on our personal lives and the lives of our families and friends. Like us, Saints Stanislaus College, its teachers, its students and the students' parents also had to deal with the impact of Covid in their society. Unlike us, here in Canada and the United States, the School, teachers and students did not have the benefits of living in a developed country with governments who were prepared to spend vast sums to address the needs of their residents.

As a result, Saint Stanislaus College (Guyana) Alumni Society had to step forward and help fill the gaps, as the Board of Governors and administrators in Guyana identified the assistance that they needed to carry on the education of students. To the tune of more than US\$100,000, we supplied technology such as laptops, tablets, projection equipment and other technology to enable on line learning. The Guyana government sees our school's technology as a model that it wants to see replicated in the other schools.

Through the generosity of two donors, we are now providing nine bursaries for needy students to attend the school. We funded also the first year of the Bobby Fernandes Scholarship, which as you recall was set up to honour Bobby

Fernandes, a past president of the Alumni Association in Guyana, who was instrumental in helping to set up our organization here in Toronto.

The School under the guidance of Robbie Fernandes, the Games Master, has seen success in field hockey and basketball in interschool competitions and at the national and international levels. We contributed to the support of these teams by providing funding for students' participation in tournaments. We also provided support to students taking part in robotic competitions, chess competitions and table tennis competitions. The Executive considered that all of these activities were worthy of our financial support because in the end they will help to make the students better-rounded individuals and citizens of Guyana.

You may ask how we could continue to provide funding in the amounts that we have done. Well, it has not been easy. We were fortunate that with the support of the Lebovic Foundation, we were able to hold successful Golf Tournaments. These tournaments made us modest sums, while they gave members and their friends an opportunity to socialize and have a day of fun in the sun. We held a very successful New Years Eve Gala on December 31, 2022, which saw 300 people come out and dance the old year out and the New Year in. In passing, I should note that we will be holding a similar function on December 31, 2023 at the same place; and in spite of rising costs, we will keep the price of tickets at the same level of last year.

As you may recall, we made some significant amendments to the Constitution last year to bring it in line with the new Ontario legislation that had come into force in October 2021. Today we will deal with further amendments, which will clarify some of the terms utilised in the Constitution and resolve potential conflicts between some sections.

During the year, we hosted the former Head Mistress, Mrs. Rebecca Persaud, who retired before the end of the school year because she had reached the mandatory retirement age for civil servants in Guyana. Ms. Donna Isles, who succeeded Mrs. Persaud, came to the school just before the end of term, and visited Toronto in August. Several members of the Executive, with their partners and other members hosted her at a dinner at a local restaurant, thereby giving us an opportunity to get

to know her and at the same time understand better the challenges she and her colleagues are dealing with in Guyana.

I do not want to leave you with the impression though that it was all a bed of roses. We had challenges and some activities did not go as planned. For example, in spite of the best efforts of the Entertainment Committee and several volunteers, our Spring Dance did not produce the results that we wished for. The new Executive will be reviewing this and will determine whether the sun has set on this activity.

Another project that did not come to a successful conclusion was the rebuild of the Toronto Saints website. We had agreed that we still need a website as a communication tool. The website will provide information, news of activities in Toronto, and news about the school and achievement of students, to members and other visitors to the website. The present website is woefully dated, not very dynamic, and not well maintained. In short, the website needs to be modernised. We started the project, and developed Mission and Vision Statements, a revised logo and an outline of what the new website should contain. This was as far we got before we had to manage other activities. I have agreed that I will lead the project this fiscal year with a small committee, which will provide input and oversight, and we will work with a volunteer who has offered his services free of charge.

Critical to the success of the alumni organization in Toronto, has been the support of Chris Fernandes, the Chair of the Board of Governors of the School. The Government appointed Chris as Chair many years ago. Today, he continues to provide direction, advice, support and leadership to the Board, to the administrators, and to the local association in Guyana. He works in tandem with us in Toronto for the greater good of the School. I came to rely on the soundness of his advice and input, and our partnership worked quite well.

On several occasions, I have heard comments to the effect that now Guyana has become financially sounder because of the oil revenues, perhaps this organization is no longer required. I should point out that in spite of numerous statements by the Government that Education is critical to the success of the country there has been little action to support the talk. The school struggles to get much-needed

repairs done and were it not for our financial support, the students would not be able to achieve the successes that they have gotten. Therefore, in my humble opinion, yes we are relevant and will continue to be for some time to come. Our challenge will be to find volunteers who are willing to take up the mantle from the older alumni.

In closing, again my thanks to my friends and the volunteers who supported me during my two terms as the President. In turn, I assure the incoming President of my full support and I will remain available for advice, even as I continue to be a member of his Executive team. As Henry Ford said, **“If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself.”**