

President's Report to the AGM of the BHTA

13 June 2012

[Protocol listing] Good morning distinguished ladies and gentlemen.

In this my final act as President of this great organisation, the Barbados Hotel and Tourism Association, I begin by thanking God for the opportunity to serve my industry and my country at this time and in this manner. Some of you may remember that someone else had been elected by you to lead this organisation between 2010 and 2012.

THANK YOU

I wish to thank my wife Charmaine and my daughters Chelsea and Courtney for their patience as I sought to focus much of my attention on the greater good. A big “Thank You” to my Board and the Secretariat of the BHTA led, by the indefatigable Sue Springer for great camaraderie, advice and participation. Members, thank you for your dues – that’s critical – but also, and more important, for your support and cooperation throughout the two years of my tenure. I have always felt that you appreciated what your association was doing and my spirit has been buoyed by your support.

Two special ‘Thank you’ mentions: I have to thank Mr. Peter Odle for allowing me the opportunity to serve this association and this industry. Not many of you know, but it was Peter who called me on the phone one day in 2002 and asked me if I was willing to serve as Vice President of Finance for the BHTA. I did not know Peter and I don’t know why he called me, but I accepted.

Over the last two years Peter has allowed me the time to participate fully in the leadership of the association. Without that support my involvement would have been very limited. Let me take this opportunity to encourage owners to allow their managers to participate in the leadership of the association. Look at the big picture. Think about the development of the industry – your business will benefit as your people are exposed to leadership at the highest levels.

Today therefore also marks ten years of serving on the Board of Directors of the Association. It is fair to say that I started as a lad working with stalwarts like Peter, Denis Tull, Ian Proverbs, Wayne Capaldi and others.

The second special ‘Thank You’ is to the media houses of Barbados. In discussions with Mike Williams of Castagne Williams and Alvin Jemmott over the years I recognised that no message will get to the Barbadian public with maximum impact without the cooperation of the media. Thank you, media practitioners, for your support in getting our message out to the public. Thank you for partnering with us in the process of educating the public.

IMPLEMENTATION OF BHTA STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS

The past two years have been an interesting experience. Your Board has worked hard to move the association forward. We have used as our road map the BHTA Study on the competitive environment faced by Tourism, the challenges confronting us and possible solutions. I sought to focus on a few key areas that I believe are of importance to the sustainability of this industry. I accepted this opportunity to serve and so I will briefly provide an account of my stewardship.

I will begin with a quote that I used at last year's AGM – one that continues to drive my approach. It is by Henry Cloud and says "A leader's responsibility is to cause vision and mission to have tangible results in the world."

BHTA'S MISSION AND VISION

Our first act was to develop vision and mission statements. Our vision is to be the private sector organisation providing national leadership for vibrant and sustainable tourism development and our mission is Bringing people, research, knowledge and technology together to resolve challenges of business; providing strong advocacy while fostering unity among our Tourism partners. Everything that we have done worked to achieve the vision by putting the mission into action.

MARKETING COMMITTEE

A vibrant Marketing Committee was set to work under the competent guidance of Mrs. Annmarie Thompson who I asked to provide leadership to this committee. For the first time a national summer package "Take me to Barbados" was developed by that committee for 2011 and submitted to the BTA for adoption.

We kept pushing the Staycation programme and we have been persistent in our communication with the Minister of Finance that he needs to introduce a Staycation Tax Credit. We have not been successful so far but we are sure that one day the value of saving foreign exchange, maintaining employment, allowing residents to experience and better appreciate the Tourism industry, and providing the environment where workers view residents as legitimate customers of our establishments will be recognised and actively facilitated.

BOOKBARBADOSNOW.COM AND BHTA.ORG

Over many years the association has discussed the need to take greater control of the distribution system and of our ADR. We considered whether or not we should have a booking engine. During the last two years through the hard work of the marketing committee we transitioned from talk to action and have been able to develop and operationalise the BookBarbadosNow.com booking engine. This has been a signal development in the marketing for Barbados in general. David Rice and his team have been very helpful in making this engine the booking engine of the BTA's visitbarbados.org site.

We were also able to redevelop the BHTA.org web site to make it more relevant to our members and to the general public.

BUSINESS EXCELLENCE COMMITTEE AND TRAINING

We recognised that training had become a ‘fuzzy’ concept with unclear outcomes. The committee was reconstituted as the Business Excellence sub-Committee under the capable leadership of Ms. May Hinds. I must say here that the name was floated by May and, being a former People Development Manager, I immediately bought into the concept that located the training and development of our people as the major contributor to excellence in all aspects of business operation.

Through this committee we signed an MOU with the Caribbean Tourism Organisation (CTO) and the National Initiative for Service Excellence (NISE) and have adopted Hospitality Assured as our standard of excellence for tourism member organisations. The BHTA’s own Secretariat is in the process of becoming Hospitality Assured certified.

NATIONAL TOURISM VISION STATEMENT

The committee was also able to lead the process of developing a national vision statement for Tourism. We are thankful to the Minister Sealy and his Permanent Secretary, Ms Shelly Carrington for recognising the need for an articulated vision and working as partners with us to develop the statement. *“Delivering an unmatched experience that is truly Barbadian, created by a warm, welcoming, friendly people, ensuring benefits to the entire nation.”*

ORIENTATIONAL TOOL

The need for the vision came out of the committee’s efforts in developing an orientation tool for Barbadian workers so that they, and Barbadians in general, can be made aware of the importance of Tourism to our socio-economic development. With funding from the TDC we were able to launch this tool in March. On further review of the finished product we are realising that this tool, in its totality or in segments, could be useful in orienting our Country Teams overseas, the Diaspora as well as working with partners who sell Barbados to visitors.

A training brochure was also developed based on what you identified as your needs and this document allows members to select courses and pre-vetted service providers.

RESEARCH AND THE TOURISM WORKING GROUP

Research has always been one of the weaknesses of our association and of our industry. I have recognised over the years that members are sometimes hesitant to provide information to their association. The idea of the ‘honest broker’ emerged and we approached the Central Bank of Barbados. Working with their Research department we were able to form the broad-based Tourism Working Group made up of the BHTA, Central Bank, Ministry of Tourism, Barbados Tourism Authority, Caribbean Tourism Organisation and the Barbados Statistical Service.

So far the Tourism Working Group has identified the research information that exists and it has produced research findings on the 2011 versus 2010 performance of our members. Research is currently being conducted on the impact and contribution of the villa sector to Tourism and, by extension, the economy.

STEP

In my first article in the BHTA Weekly Newsletter of 25 June 2010 I said that one of my two areas of focus would be sustainability in its wider context and that the education of the nations' children about Tourism would be a key part of it. The programme we now call STEP (Schools Tourism Education Programme) is the result.

STEP builds on the TEAM and Adopt-a-School programmes and includes the pairing of schools and tourism businesses, the immersion of teachers in Tourism, the provision of teachers and schools with textbook and people resources to aid in the delivery of the Tourism segment of the Social Studies syllabus, career showcases, mentorship programmes, and job attachments among others. We have been able to pilot the programme with mixed results, but I am happy to say that there have been significant positives.

The programme was broadened to include annual school's competitions, the first of which was an essay competition on the Tourism is Key theme and the second a STEP logo competition. We also participated in two of the annual career showcases staged by the National Association of Guidance Counsellors. The intention is to develop our own Tourism career showcase.

This is still an important programme and if you believe that it is a departure from what our mandate should be as an association, you might be considered short/narrow-sighted and not strategic as a leader. Thank you to the many members who recognise the importance of the programme and have come on board. Your incoming president has agreed that I should continue to lead STEP with her active support.

I was kept on track – indeed we were all kept on track – by the visionary, thinking, energetic chair of the BHTA Study Implementation committee, Roseanne Myers.

60TH ANNIVERSARY

The 60th anniversary of the association was also one of the significant milestones of the association during my term of office. We began by thanking God at the church service. We were able to complete the preparatory work on a 60th anniversary coffee book on the history of Tourism in Barbados. This is something that both Sue and I shared a passion for and God willing it will be launched later this year. Thank you Keith Miller, our publisher, Senator, Professor Henry Fraser and Dr. Kerry Hall, the writers, for their hard work on this project. I have been telling Dr. Hall for some time now that the history of Tourism needs to be shared with Tourism practitioners as well as the general public and I am very happy that this dream is soon to become a reality.

I was asked to contribute to the book and assisted with a piece titled "Tourism at the Crossroads" in which I take a look at what the future may portend given both the current economic landscape of the world as well as Barbados' unique offerings and geographical location. I encourage you to make full use of this book by purchasing and reading it, allowing it to add to your knowledge of our industry as well as sharing copies with friends and guests.

BARBADOS WORKER UNION

We have been able to continue our good relationship with the Barbados Workers' Union. The three (3) percent agreed for hotel workers is not anything that the hotels could afford – it was not an economic decision but represented an understanding of the plight of the worker and the reality that the worker is the most important aspect of a hospitality business. We believe that the BWU's approach was one that suggested an understanding of the crisis facing hotels in Barbados.

THE FUTURE OF THE INDUSTRY AND THE ASSOCIATION

I do not use the word 'crisis' loosely. I recently attended a Tourism investment conference and it appeared to me that most of the investors present consider the traditional hotel model to be dead and gone. Barbados will have to ensure that it creates an environment where full-service hotels, as major employers and major providers of VAT revenue to Government; providing as they do, continuous inflows of foreign exchange and moving the numbers of people that allow us to sustain the volume of airlift to which we have become accustomed, can thrive.

Based on a conversation I had with Gordon Seale I decided to bring all living past presidents together in an informal way to chat and discuss the issues facing the BHTA in particular and the industry in general. We have met four times beginning last June and I must thank all of them for being willing to share their thoughts with me. I also wish to thank them for their support throughout my term in office.

I confess that I feel satisfied with the progress that the association has made over the past two years. I felt satisfied with my own accomplishments until I heard a Japanese proverb a few weeks ago which says, "When you have completed 95% of your journey you are only halfway there." There is a certain truth to that proverb.

Owners and managers of Tourism businesses need to demonstrate greater hunger for business growth and business excellence. Nothing comes easy anymore. We have to get up and get – move out of the comfort zone and go after the possibilities that exist. Get on board with BookBarbadosNow.com. Adopt Hospitality Assured as your standard for business excellence. Engage in a programme of environmental certification. Participate in STEP.

After sixty years we have reached the point where we need to make some decisions as it relates to leadership of the organisation. I am of the view that we need to broaden the pool from which we can select a leader for the BHTA.

This is a subject which generates quite emotive responses. However, some mechanism needs to be developed which allows our Direct Tourism Services members both to have a greater financial stake in the BHTA and allows persons in that group to become president of the organisation. To do otherwise is to attempt to deny a present and future reality where we will restrict ourselves in terms of possibilities and disadvantage ourselves with respect to our future development. We simply will not be in a position to select the best talent available if we do not increase the possibilities.

Earlier on I stated that the past two years have been an interesting experience. One of the many things I have learned is that progress will only be made through cooperation. I want that message

to get to players in both the private and public sectors. I wish particularly to encourage policy makers – actively and deliberately engage the private sector in your work. We are the people on the ground. We don't wish to engage in any turf battles and we certainly don't wish to steal any thunder. Most persons in the private sector are focussed on their businesses and are working to create profitable operations and are quite happy in that pursuit.

No policy maker will create effective policy by standing on a platform or sitting in an office and liaising only with other technocrats. It does not work that way – never has, and never will. Those who have to work with the policy must be engaged through their representative bodies. Too often we hear of deliberations and the BHTA has not been consulted or invited to attend. Organisations like ours must not be involved in the ad hoc way that is sometimes evident. Involving partner private sector organisations must be a matter of course.

Ladies and Gentlemen, policy makers need to focus more on facilitation. The days of focussing exclusively on how to ensure that all the rules are adhered to are over – long gone. This is 2012 – the second decade of the 21st century. Our policy makers must now refocus on how they can assist the private sector in increasing our country's GDP, increasing employment, developing our human capital, increasing foreign exchange inflows and building effective linkages for balanced national development in an orderly manner than does not damage the socio-cultural fabric of the country.

The critical sectors in our economy must be treated with the importance that is necessary. We need to see urgency and leadership at the national level. We in the private sector are not without fault in driving development, but national leadership is expected to push/lead all sectors in a direction that will benefit the entire nation.

Specifically it must be understood that Tourism is an export business. Even though we sell directly to the consumer this industry cannot be treated like retail. We do not have a captive market. We are not selling gasoline or cheese or orange juice to residents – who can complain bitterly but will still have to purchase those items in Barbados. Prices cannot be increased and taxes cannot be added and it be expected that we pass them on directly to consumers. It does not work that way. Our customers have options – many of them, excellent options. We face tremendous competition from many other warm weather island destinations, almost thirty in the Caribbean alone and dozens more across the globe including the Gulf States and the increasingly popular Indian Ocean countries (Seychelles, Maldives, Mauritius, etc).

This is my eighth report to you and I know that you really have no wish to hear anything more about the Tourism Development Act not being updated. I will not tell you that after Wayne's two years and my two years, at the time of writing this report, we are able only to report failure in our attempts to have the Schedule to this important piece of legislation updated.

We demonstrate a lack of seriousness, a lack of focus and a lack of leadership when important matters are allowed to languish for extended periods of time. Important legislation must not be allowed to take years to update.

TOURISM PRODUCT

There is a challenge with our tourism product. This is the case with accommodation businesses as well as with attractions and activities. The traditional full service hotel is in trouble in Barbados. The country needs to recognise that these entities are important in the economic structure of the country and should be retained.

The Barbados Tourism Authority, under whose aegis product falls, needs to pay greater attention not just to the registration of the places of accommodation, but on the strategic development of all aspects of the product – accommodation, attractions, and activities. We are not asking for Government or any of its agencies to build anything or run anything. We are asking that it create an enabling framework that will focus the entrepreneurial gaze and accompanying funds to the areas that are in the best interest of the further development of our Tourism industry.

Alternatively, product development could be located with the Ministry of Tourism.

Our guests, especially our repeat guests, are asking for more. We can provide more. We must provide more. And our size is no hindrance.

NATIONAL TOURISM HOST PROGRAMME

I am happy that the BTA has finally made some progress on the National Tourism Host Programme. It is long overdue, but better late than never. This is a programme that recognises the critical importance of Tourism to all residents of Barbados. To be successful this programme will need buy-in from everyone – from the Prime Minister to the school child. We cannot draw this out like we do so many other things. We are already late. We need to act immediately.

MARKETING

Let me at this point reiterate my view that pursuing markets in Central and South America make sense at this point in the development of our industry. Our position has always been that we should not neglect our traditional source markets of the UK, USA, the Caribbean or Canada. Good economic thinking however suggests that we need to ensure that we spread our nets a little wider especially in markets that are vibrant. Brazil and the Scandinavian countries definitely fit the bill and the BTA is to be complimented for going into those markets.

As an association we do not believe that enough has been done to exploit the possibilities of the Brazil market. Using our vision as our guide we have decided not to wait for something to happen but we are using our leadership role. We have approached the BTA and have co-sponsored a seminar designed to jump start a renewed thrust into that market.

CRUISE SECTOR

The Cruise sector has caused much concern recently due to the lack of visible drive on the part of some. I will not say much on this matter, but I will say this: The private sector has been told that we should not be driving this sector – that it should be public-sector led.

We waited long enough – long enough to realise that nothing will be happening anytime soon. Some in the private sector have correctly decided to ignore that myopic idea and have, for the sake of the country and for the sake of their own businesses, decided to work hard and invest

their own time and money meeting with the major players with a view to getting ships to return to our shores.

As a result of their initiative to drive this sector, they have been able to report some measure of success.

CONCLUSION

Because I was given an opportunity ten years ago to make a contribution within the leadership of the BHTA I have tried to encourage younger people to become involved in the association. I have failed miserably in that regard. As I conclude I wish to leave a word with those younger persons. Yes, everything takes too long. It is true that there is too much time wasting. However, if we are going to be able to fashion the future that we desire, we will need to be patient and work the system to achieve results – complaining on the sidelines will not achieve progress. We cannot hope that someone will do it for us. We have to create the preferred future and it will call for some measure of sacrifice.

My personal motto, which is part of my email signature, is a quote from George Washington Carver. He said “No individual has any right to come into this world and go out of it without leaving behind distinct and legitimate reasons for having passed through.”

The last five months of my term in office were particularly challenging after the death of my Dad who was my guide and role model. Much of my attention had to be placed on assisting my family with and providing guidance to the business my father operated. As a result I was not able to devote my attention and focus my mind on BHTA matters in the same way that I was able to do in the preceding nineteen months. I must thank the Board for being patient with me and for understanding the situation.

Bill Cosby once said, “I don’t know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody.”

I did not try to please everybody, and I may have annoyed some and disappointed others, but I allowed my God to lead me and I endeavoured to do what was right. I wanted to get a few things done and leave the industry a better place than I found it or assist in positioning it to become better. I followed Warren Buffet’s thinking that “You only have to do a few things right in your life as long as you don’t do too many things wrong.”

It has been a fantastic journey. And like the Chinese proverb says, “The journey is the reward.” Thank you for the opportunity. God bless you, your people, your businesses and this wonderful industry.

Summary of achievements over the past two years:

- BHTA Vision and Mission statements
- Implementation of the recommendations of the BHTA study
- Reorganised committee system

- Reconstituted and refocused Training sub-committee as the Business Excellence sub-committee
- BHTA-developed national summer package “Take me to Barbados”
- BookBarbadosNow.com booking engine
- Redesigned BHTA.org website
- Adoption of Hospitality Assured as the standard of excellence
- Led the development of the National Vision Statement
- Worker Tourism orientation tool
- Training brochure
- Monthly columns in both daily newspapers
- Tourism (research) Working Group
- Schools Tourism Education Programme – STEP
- Annual schools competition
- Participation in annual careers showcase
- Successful collective agreement negotiations
- Past-Presidents consultative group
- 60th Anniversary coffee table book on the History of Tourism in Barbados (in progress)