

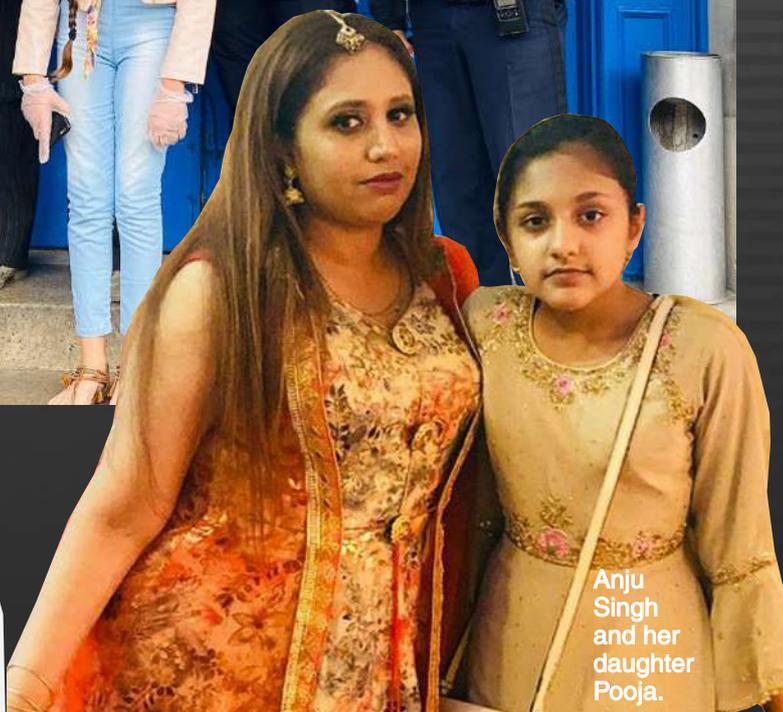
Trini girl and daughter join **COVID** fight in NY ...volunteer, donate masks to frontline workers

Story by *Anju Singh*
on Page 3

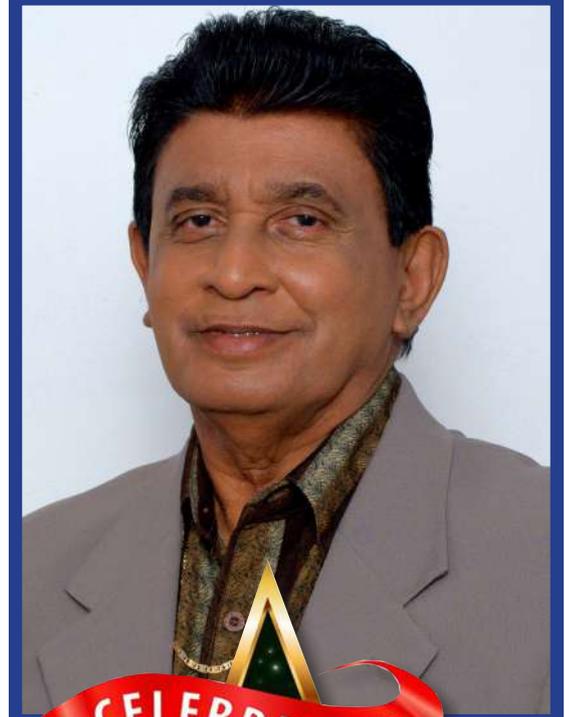
Anju Singh and her daughter, Pooja, pose with police officers from the 70th Precinct in New York, USA, recently. Pooja, who made the masks herself, presented them to the officers.



Anju Singh poses with an army officer during a food distribution drive in New York recently.



Anju Singh and her daughter Pooja.



CELEBRATING

47th

ANNIVERSARY

Krishna achieves a milestone

REMARKABLE ACCOMPLISHMENT: General manager and photo editor for *InFocus National Community Newspapers*, award-winning multimedia educator and grand master of photography **Krishna Maharaj** celebrates 47 years in the field of photography. Maharaj is the principal of Trinidad and Tobago School of Photography and director of Vision 2 Photo and Video Production.

—Photo: DAVY GOPAUL

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At the epicentre of COVID-19

By Anju Singh
IN NEW YORK

MUCH of the world has been crippled by the emergence of this COVID-19 virus, however, the United States of America has been the most severely hit nation with over a million cases confirmed. Within the country, the state of New York has seen the highest numbers of infections.

As a Trinidadian-born civilian who works in security and as a parent of three, this was of great concern to me. In security, you are constantly interacting with customers who may not necessarily heed the warnings of health officials to use masks and practice social distancing.

With the spread continuing at an astronomical rate in my area, it threatens the lives of many persons who are deemed essential staff such as doctors, nurses and members of the protective services. These persons are on the frontlines during this pandemic and face a much higher risk of being infected. I was able to speak to a few members of the police force who related their experiences to me.

Officer Oscar Juan is a 15-year veteran of the 103rd Precinct in Queens, New York. As an officer, he stated that some of the challenges police officers are currently dealing with during the pandemic are arrests and routine vehicle stops.

As police departments are not equipped with testing facilities at checkpoints, interacting with the public has become somewhat of a dilemma for officers; but these are not the only dangers they face. Other dangers involve the New York Police Department being a major target by criminals who have chosen this crisis to act out on the police and there has been an uptick in criminal activity.

In April, auto thefts and burglaries increased, with commercial burglaries increasing by a whopping 169 per cent, with criminals targeting small merchants and small restaurants.

Aside from the increased rate of crime, police officers find themselves being unable to see their families due to their role on the frontlines.

"I have a 14-year-old daughter and I have been unable to see her except for video calls," said Juan.

The control of crime during this pandemic has proved to be a major undertaking and the effort by the police department to protect citizens during this difficult time depends on the cooperation of the general public.

Another officer who identified himself as Joe, related his personal experience after contracting the COVID-19 virus. Initially, Joe was completely asymptomatic and as his symptoms developed, he assumed that he was coming down with the flu. However, his symptoms became more severe in the days that followed.

"There were body aches, lots of it. Moderate to severe headaches as well as a loss of taste," said Joe.

During that time, Joe was self-quarantined in his basement and was unable to have any physical contact with his wife and sons. He was forced to communicate with his family by cell-phone despite them being just a room away. His meals were passed to him through the kitchen window by his wife.

Using a space heater, Joe attempted to keep himself warm in the cold basement. He experienced chills from the virus and there were even moments of complete hysteria which mostly happened at night. There was also the emotional aspect of the virus that put additional strain on him.

"I would worry about dying from the virus. All sorts of thoughts would run through my mind," said Joe.

After three weeks in self-quarantine at home in Syosset, Long Island and three tests later, Joe was declared COVID-free.

As for myself, I was one of many who were furloughed as businesses were forced to close their doors. As I remained home,

I watched as my children, a pair of 17-year-old twins and my 11-year-old daughter exchanged their active lifestyles for one of remote learning and isolation.

This isolation made me reflect on the changes in my community. Queens itself is a multicultural area, with persons from many different countries and backgrounds calling it home, it's usually a bustling area with many activities. To say that this virus has caused a disruption is an understatement, but upon reflection there were many who were not as fortunate as I am.

There are several Sikh temples that serve food to the public almost 24 hours per day. For many, this is their only means of getting a hot meal on a daily basis. However, these temples have temporarily halted operations and this has directly affected the less-fortunate and homeless persons that depend on it daily. Taking this into consideration, I decided to volunteer at a nearby synagogue, Kehilat Sephardim. The synagogue's pantry stocks dry goods, fruits and vegetables which are distributed to the less fortunate.

My youngest daughter, Pooja, also decided to start making face masks to distribute to the protective services. She was inspired by a family friend, Chris, who happens to work at the 70th Precinct. Chris is a detective in the Special Victims Unit which deals with sexual offenses. He and Pooja have a very close bond, one akin to a father/daughter relationship and she greatly values the work he does to help victims of rape and other sexual crimes. Pooja recently created and donated 50 masks to the 70th Precinct.

"The police are always the last to get anything. They do so much for us and I love them for it," says Pooja. "Cheering for them isn't enough, so I decided to do something more meaningful."

Despite the ongoing pandemic, my family has managed to avoid the virus thus far. It is a blessing that we do not take for granted. I hope that your family also remains safe during this difficult time.



Volunteer Anju Singh, right, at Kehilat Sephardim Food Pantry.



Officer Oscar Juan



Volunteers of Kehilat Sephardim prepare to deliver Pizza in Flushing New York, USA, recently. —Photo: SAPNA SINGH



Kehilat Sephardim Food Pantry. —Photo: ANJU SINGH

We're a bit late, but we're here!

WE'RE back with another issue of *InFocus*! We hope you've been well during this trying time while adhering to the advice of the authorities.

In this issue, we focus on the effects of the COVID-19 virus. Our featured story comes from a Trinidadian currently living in New York who has been volunteering her time during this crisis. This story highlights the personal experiences of her family along with that of some members of the New York Police Department, one of whom recently recovered from the deadly virus.

Closer to home, we take a look at Tobago just before the stay at home order was implemented. We also examine the effects of the virus on nature, our differently-abled citizens and our educators.

An Indian Arrival Day feature, community highlight and a featured article on one of our local basketballers round off this issue.

As the country moves towards re-opening, we look forward to returning to our community focus in our next issue.

We are a community newspaper, designed to allow communities to shed light on issues that are normally overlooked by the mainstream media. This volunteer driven publication will focus on community-based journalism, providing coverage focused on individuals, neighbourhoods, suburbs and community life in Trinidad and Tobago.

We again invite non-profits organisations, community groups, schools, community sports teams and individuals to share their stories and

photos with us. We are here to put you in focus.

InFocus will be published bimonthly (once every two months) and will be available free of charge at select locations around the country. It is also available for download via our website, with a digital version of Issue 5 coming very soon at <http://www.infocustt.com>

Be sure to follow us on social media for updates on new issues.

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Would you like to contribute a story, article or photo? Or maybe support our publication by advertising with us? We would love to hear from you.

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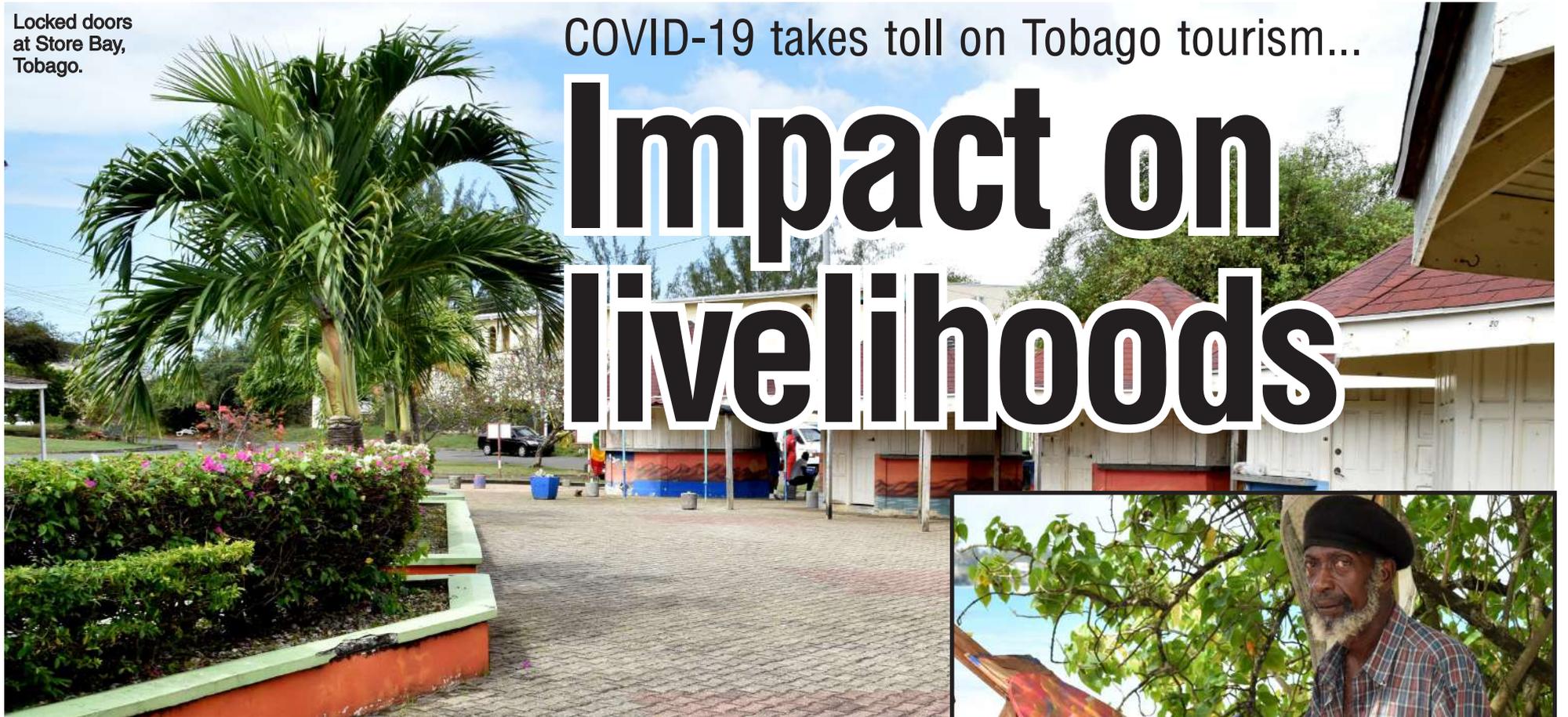
RENTALS OF
HEAVY AND LIGHT EQUIPMENT

WE'RE NOT JUST ABOUT TRANSPORT, WE'RE ABOUT SERVICE

Locked doors at Store Bay, Tobago.

COVID-19 takes toll on Tobago tourism...

Impact on Livelihoods



Story & Photos by Anastein Ragoo

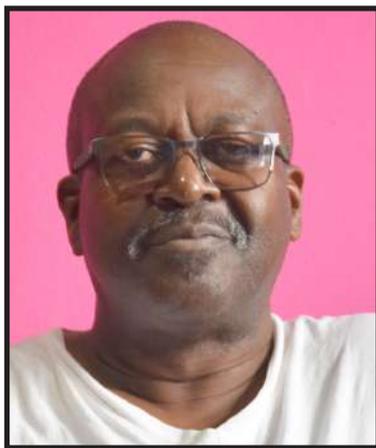
ON THE roadway to Pigeon Point Heritage Park, one may notice a lone figure, nestled under the branches of a tree, his area covered by what appears to be a tattered piece of canvas. For over a decade, this location has been home to artist Anthony McCaan, who showcases his passion and talent for art through the masterful paintings that he creates on the spot for park visitors.

McCaan, a Trinidadian currently living in Tobago, spent most of his life in the United States and returned to the islands about a decade ago. Originally a photographer, McCaan has been painting for far longer than the decade he has spent in Tobago and considers it to be his life's true passion.

"I grew up in the United States and lived there for 50 years. I came back ten years ago to take care of my father, who later passed away," said McCaan. "This is something I do for pleasure more than profit. Although this is how I make my living, my art is something I would do for nothing."

With the COVID-19 virus now on our shores, McCaan is concerned about the potential impact on his livelihood.

"Virus or no virus, I gotta do what I gotta do," said McCaan. "As far as this is concerned, it is slowing down my business because I depend on tourists."



Derek Joseph relaxes at the Conrado Beach Resort.

He believes that things will get worse before it gets better, but at this point in his life he cannot imagine anything else that he would rather be doing.

"I am hoping that it doesn't come to a point where they say I cannot come out and do this anymore," said McCaan. "I'm just waiting to see what takes place. No one knows how it will turn out."

Heading out of Pigeon Point, not a shop or store was opened. With gates locked and carparks empty, a lone vendor stood on the side of the road, her table packed with fudge, red mango, bene balls and sugar cakes among other well-known Tobagonian delights.

She lamented that sales were slow, almost down to nothing at all, but the sale of these items is how she makes her living, so she came out to "try some-



Lawrence Reece, manager of the Conrado Beach Resort.

thing". The loss of tourists due to the closure of our borders is not the only thing affecting small businesses in Tobago. Fear of being infected by the potentially deadly coronavirus has stricken almost all would be weekend visitors from the sister isle of Trinidad, slowing business down even further.

The vibrant colours that littered the shores of the Store Bay Beach Facility, were noticeably absent on that Saturday morning. No blaring music, no laughter filled the air with only the sound of the crashing waves every so often whispering that everything was wrong at the popular attraction.

With the reef boats moored to one side of the beach, the silence was deafening. There was no crab and dumpling, provision, stewed



Painter Anthony McCaan produces his art near the Pigeon Point Heritage Park in Tobago.

chicken with callaloo or coo-coo on sale. A few vendors were seen gathering up their perishables and securing their shops until the time comes that there are visitors that they can serve again.

Lawrence Reece, manager of the Conrado Beach Resort, noted that his local clientele is still desirous of visiting. However, based on the advice of the Government, all international arrivals have been cancelled, dropping the resort's bookings to zero, which he said was unavoidable due to the closure of our borders.

"We intend to remain open until we are instructed to do differently," said Reece, but he admitted that due to the drop in demand they will have limit their staffing. He also noted that extra sanitisation protocols were implemented at the hotel since the disclosure of the virus a few months ago.

President of the Petroleum Dealers Association, Derek Joseph, a visiting guest at the resort said that his vacation was a gift and he decided to confirm his reservation

and take advantage of this quiet time, since a lot of foreigners were not expected to be on the island.

"We are happy that we did it, you don't have the crowds that is usually here. Tobago is quiet and pristine," said Joseph.

Reece hopes that the crisis caused by the virus will be over soon and is optimistic that the country will be able to bounce back after the crisis has passed.

"We really hope that this crisis will be over sooner rather than later. I hope that citizens adhere to the rules and guidelines specified by the authorities and I am optimistic that this country will get past this epidemic safely and quickly."

—Note these interviews were conducted before the stay-at-home order was instituted in late March.

Visit our YouTube Channel InFocus Community Newspaper for a video clip by Kavita Ramcharitar on this story.

GET HELP

Dear Readers,

A new, exciting and tell it like it is column titled **Get Help** will be starting soon in this newspaper.

This column will not be political

nor will it be accepting gossip information, or abusive language. Such will not be printed.

Your letters will be edited for clarity and libel.

However, we need your help from today in getting this column started by submitting your e-mails to infocusmediatt@gmail.com

Your topics can include martial

problems, mother and father any family-related issues. Please do not include names, addresses or telephone numbers. Phone calls will not be accepted. Your e-mail address will **NOT** be printed.



Forrester Kishan Ramcharan stands next to the Caura River during an interview recently.
—Photos: KAVITA RAMCHARITAR

Nature heals itself during covid crisis

Story and Photos by Kavita Ramcharitar

“WITH the stay-at-home restrictions, there has been a noticeable improvement in the quality of the environment as compared to before,” said Kishan Ramcharan, Forester 1 at the Forestry division’s North West Conservancy in St Joseph.

Ramcharan made these comments during an interview with *InFocus* at the popular Caura River where he discussed the impact of the COVID-19 virus on the environment and wildlife in Trinidad and Tobago.

For the last month, our nation has been put on alert with the closure of schools and non-essential businesses. Coupled with the Government’s social distancing restrictions, these measures led to the cancellation of events and social activities across the country.

Ramcharan noted that these restrictions have caused a reduction in various types of pollution, owing largely to the decrease in human activity which previously contributed air, water and noise pollution.

“The reduction in traffic on the nation’s highways has resulted in a decrease in the carbon monoxide emissions, which leads to improved air quality for breathing,” said Ramcharan.

With our borders closed, there is now less air traffic movement, a reduction in nitrous oxide in the environment together with a decrease in the greenhouse gases that contribute to the depletion of the

ozone layer.

Ramcharan also said that for the first time, the skies and mountains are more visible while rivers are looking cleaner and clearer. Fishes are now visible and other animals including birds are able to come out of their habitat.

“Because Caura is an area where there is a lot of noise pollution such as cars playing loud music, horns blaring, and people talking, this discourages animals from coming out,” said Ramcharan.

“There is a great improvement in the quality of the water in the rivers and seas like Maracas for example. As a result of less human activities, animals have become brave.”

Forester Ramcharan appealed to persons involved in agriculture and quarrying to be vigilant in their daily activities. He also noted that it is in the public’s best interest to avoid the illegal dumping of garbage and called on members of the public to maintain the responsibility of not littering at sites such as Caura or Maracas when the current restrictions are lifted.

“Walk with your garbage bags when visiting the rivers and beaches. Obey the laws and observe the regulations of the Litter Act.”

Visit our YouTube Channel *InFocus* Community Newspaper for a video clip by Kavita Ramcharitar on this story.



An aerial view of Maracas Bay.



Fireman saves ‘Fireball’

By Krishna Maharaj
Photos by Trevor Ramkissoon

FIRE OFFICER Trevor Ramkissoon should be commended for his actions which saved the life of an iguana that tried to escape a bush fire along the St James Main Road in Port of Spain.

Ramkissoon, who is attached to the Belmont Fire Station, said while refilling a water tank at a hydrant, fire officers were alerted to a bush fire in the St James area.

“While proceeding along the Western Main Road, there was a lot of smoke on the side road between Mucurapo and the flyover. The hose was rolled out and the fire was eventually contained,” said Ramkissoon.

While this was happening, two fisherman at the Cocorite Fishing Depot happened to notice two iguanas in the vicinity of the fire and alerted Ramkissoon to their presence.

“I looked down and saw two iguanas, one was approximately five feet long, while the other was a baby,” said Ramkissoon. “I tried to rescue both of them but the larger one fled and the little one came running towards my feet.”

Picking up the scared iguana, Ramkissoon noticed it was partially burnt and held it under the running

water of the fire truck to help the animal cool off.

Before leaving the scene, he tried to release the animal back into the wild, but it would not leave his arms, so the firefighter decided to carry the little one back to fire station with them.

After returning to the fire station, he gave the little one a name, “Fireball”. He later fed it and placed it on the flowers outside the station. By the next day, the “Fireball” was gone.

“It is in our nature to rescue and help. Life is not about saving human lives only,” said Ramkissoon.

With 15 years of service, he noted while this is the first time he has personally encountered something like this. It is not the first time they’ve saved animals in the Belmont area. He believes there is a lot of wild life in Belmont that goes unseen.

“Our culture generally is if someone sees an iguana, they will attempt to capture and eat it, but I am more realistic. I just did my little part and I feel proud to have saved the life of a baby iguana,” said Ramkissoon.

Ramkissoon has advised that citizens who encounter any fires to contact the Fire Service by calling 990.

“If you notice any fires, please don’t waste time by calling friends or other persons. Contact the Fire Service directly and make a report.”





Young farmers pursue their passion for planting...

LOVE FOR AGRICULTURE

**Story and Photos
by Anastein Ragoo**

FOR childhood friends, Leonardo Jones and Sunil Rajkumar, gardening is something that runs in their blood. Coming from four generations of farmers, these young men chose to earn their livelihood by continuing in their respective family's footsteps by pursuing agriculture in Dow Village, South Oropuche.

"After finishing school and working hard to get our education, we turned to this," said Rajkumar.

The crops grown by the friends include lettuce, patchoi, tomatoes and eggplant, which more commonly known as bhaigan. The demand for these fresh, healthy short-term crops encouraged them to plant these particular items on a larger scale.

"The quality we produce is second to none. The shelf life of our lettuce is four times that of one grown using water," boasted Rajkumar as he proudly gestured towards a bed of the largest heads of lettuce in the field. He believes that their success comes from using natural elements to grow their produce.

Jones explained that they preferred traditional farming methods



over the increasingly popular hydroponics technique. They consider traditional produce to be the healthier option for consumers today and they are both confident that they will keep on planting this way for a long as they can.

"This method is what we have known and what we are accustomed to," said Jones. "The quality of the harvest is of utmost importance to us and we will strive to grow the best produce that we can."

As with all agricultural ventures, there are challenges and problems

to consider whilst they toil to produce their crops. Aside from the occasional pests like flies or moths, the farmers note that their biggest challenge is maintaining a water supply.

The supply of water in the dry season is a challenge they have faced year after year. During the dry season, their water is sourced from ponds which were dug on their land for the specific purpose of watering their crops.

However, with limited rainfall during the early months of the year, it becomes a considerable chal-

lenge to maintain a proper supply of water, especially when the water levels in these ponds begins to run low.

Conversely, in the wet season, too much rainfall forces them to retreat to higher ground to protect their crops.

"Flooding is not a problem, but because of the types of crops we produce, too much water is not good for them," said Rajkumar.

Both have noted that fertilisers and other chemicals are very costly, so they have chosen an alternative

method to improve the fertility of the land, although this is not as easy as it sounds.

"We cannot bring or use tractors after we have planted, so one system we use is rotovating the soil manually," said Rajkumar.

Both farmers noted that housing developments have started to take precedence over agriculture, with prime agricultural land being used to construct housing settlements across the country as opposed to farms, resulting in the importation of fruits and vegetables that can easily be grown locally by local farmers.

They hope that they can continue to use their land to carry on producing crops like the generations before them, as they strongly believe that growing our own food is the key to our stability and long-term sustenance.

As suppliers to the local area market and a few supermarkets in their vicinity, Jones and Rajkumar are still looking to expand their supply. With the demand for healthy vegetables rising rapidly, they don't see this as being a problem. Along with changing viewpoints and healthier lifestyles worldwide, many persons are now choosing to eat fresh foods rather than those that are processed.

KIDS Playground

Students from various schools in the Penal area paraded the streets in their Carnival costumes on Wednesday 19th February. They were supported by their parents and teachers.

—Photos by Kavita Ramcharitar



Assisting those in need

By Skarlett Lluvia
Photos by various groups

ON THE two busiest banking days for pensioners during the months of April and May, various community groups in Mayaro embarked on a Senior Citizens COVID-19 Response Initiative.

To ease the wait endured by the elderly visiting the only bank in Mayaro, comfort and assistance was provided by the volunteers. A tent and chairs were arranged in the parking lot and upon arrival, the aged persons were guided according to the recommended social distancing practices.

Stations were also set up to encourage proper hand hygiene. In addition, the seniors were treated to tea and sandwiches. Those in need were gifted with facemasks.

This venture saw the success-

ful collaboration of non-profit organisations, corporate groups and several individuals. These included the Mayaro Boys Sports Club, the Community Police, Lions Club Mayaro, Mayguaya Youth Foundation, Project X, Mayaro Past Pupils Association, as well as the staff at Republic Bank Mayaro, bpTT and Matthew Pierre, and many other contributors within the community, who seized the opportunity to serve our elderly.

The pensioners were appreciative of the hospitality offered and admired the efforts of the youth. Patrick Phillips, 21, President of the MaGuaya Youth Foundation explained, "We cherish our elderly within our community of Mayaro because they are the persons whom we have learnt from, the ones who have paved the way for us, the youth, to stand on."



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COVID-19 pandemic keeps crowd away... Empty streets, locked doors on Holy Week

Story and Photos by Anastein Ragoo

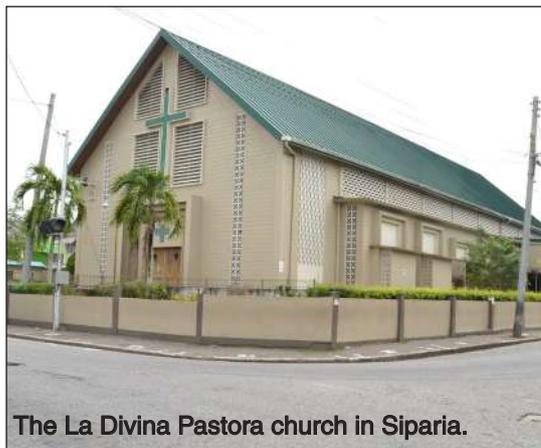
HOLY WEEK is a busy time for many Christians as they celebrate the final week of Christ's life, from his entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to his resurrection on Easter. In Siparia, it is usually a time when many come from all over Trinidad and Tobago to celebrate the annual Festival of La Divina Pastora.

However, the current global pandemic, COVID-19, has forever changed our experiences as citizens with our behaviour and attitudes having changed in the process. The usual buzz of activities and huge crowds that fill the streets of Siparia from Holy Thursday morning were noticeably absent this year. Prompted by the Government's call for social distancing during the current global pandemic, the yearly tradition, noted for its huge crowds was nowhere to be seen.

There were no tents filled with provisions or other market items. Nor were there pottery, jewelry, clothing or stalls with games for the younger ones to entertain themselves. A strange silence filled the streets surrounding the La Divina Pastora Church as only the spots for vendors earmarked by the Siparia Regional Corporation were present.

La Divina Pastora, also known as the Divine Shepherdess, refers to the black virgin statue locked away inside the La Divina Pastora Church. This statue is respected by not only by Roman Catholics, who consider her to be the Virgin Mary, but also by Hindus, who see her as a manifestation of the Goddess Kali and refer to her as Supari Mai, the Mother of Siparia.

Traditionally, hundreds of persons make the journey down to the southern village on Good Friday to make their simple offerings of olive oil, candles, money and even jewelry; believing in return that their prayers and wishes will be granted. They are also confident that giving to the less fortunate on this day will increase their blessings. Scores of less privileged persons can be found camping out



The La Divina Pastora church in Siparia.

from Holy Thursday in order to receive these charitable contributions from the Holy Virgin's devotees.

Julianna Pierre has been selling Indian delicacies at the annual event for over fifty years. This year she believes that it is her civic duty to stay away from any public gatherings as mandated by the Government. She hopes to be to be part of the solution to the ongoing problem facing the country at this time, and while difficult, she notes that she will continue to do her part until advised otherwise.

Residents of Siparia and avid visitors to the event, the cousins Mindy Gangar and Malti Ramlal reminisced about their past experiences at the event.

Accompanied by their grandmother, the cousins would go to the church and join the line to offer olive oil on the body of the statue as well as light candles asking for their prayers to be answered. Not wanting to miss out on the goodies outside, they would then venture into the tents to buy their sweets and play games.

"Mama had to get her provision and salmon for Good Friday lunch," said Gangar. It's a tradition that has continued in their family. While the annual festival may have been sorely missed this year, you can be assured that the tradition will continue for years to come.



A usually busy street next to the La Divina La Pastora Church on Good Friday was empty due to the COVID-19 pandemic which kept worshippers away.



Devotees make offerings to Lord Shiva in celebration of the auspicious occasion of Maha Shiv Raatri.

CELEBRATING Maha Shiv Raatri

Story and Photos
by Kavita Ramcharitar

MEMBERS of the Vishnu Mandir of #5 Scale Barrackpore came out in their numbers to celebrate the auspicious occasion of Maha Shiv Raatri on Friday 21st February, 2020.

The devotees fully dressed in traditional Indian wear, performed puja (prayers) from as early as 5pm under the guidance of Pundits Anil Maraj, Haresh Maharaj and Abhishek Persad followed by Pundit Abhedanand Persad Sharma who spoke on the significance of Maha Shiv Raatri.

Maha Shiv Raatri is a Hindu festival observed in honour of Lord Shiva. On this day devotees worship Lord Shiva, observe a strict fast and do various religious activities by performing meditation, satsangh and offering of milk, honey, ghee, dahee, cane juice, water, bael leaves and flowers.

"Every part of our body is a holy entity and should not be disrespected and treated in a negative way. If we respect our bodies then we would treat it like a Mandir," said Pundit Persad Sharma.

"We are talking about respecting the body. 'Jai Bhagwan' (Oh Lord) Carnival Monday and Tuesday we would see how we respect the body. Many of our young girls and boys have lost respect for their bodies."

He noted that he was not bashing anyone or the festival of Carnival, but rather referred to the manner and way persons carry about themselves at Carnival celebrations.

Pundit Persad Sharma said that people should have an equal vision and a balance mind. He complemented devotees who fasted and prepared themselves for the 12-hour vigil in celebration of Maha Shiv Raatri, The night of Lord Shiva.



Pundit Abhedanand Persad Sharma during Shiva Ratri celebrations.

The Castara Experience

Story By Krishna Maharaj
Photo by Davy Gopaul

"CASTARA is like a different island within an island where foreigners and visitors are greeted with love and positivity," says young Omari Walker who spoke to *InFocus* while sitting on the stern of his boat, enjoying a bowl of fish broth.

Born and raised in Castara, Walker, like most of the villagers makes his living through fishing and the sale of fish.

"I am proud to have grown up in this little village called Castara because the people here show love to each other," said Walker. "It is a fishing village where everyone respects and values each other."

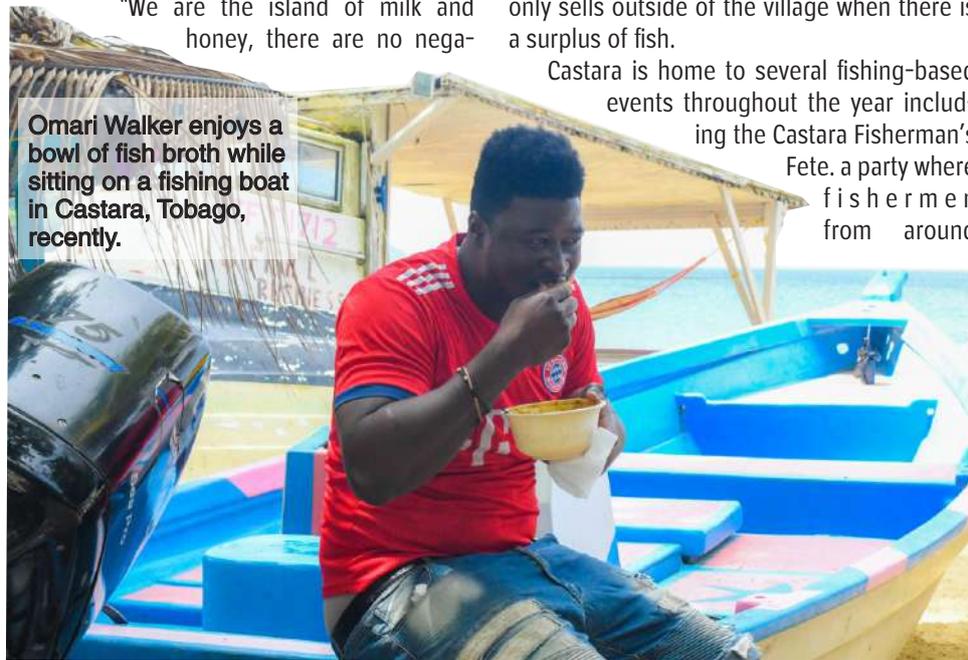
"Foreigners like here so much that they come from abroad to get married on the beach and that's because of the love and respect shown to them by the villagers."

He notes that the small community has a group of volunteers who fulfil many duties including cleaning the shore of the beach and helping the less fortunate in the village with activities including helping the older villagers

with their tasks and repairing homes.

The lifestyle he saw growing up has greatly influenced Walker and he believes the Castara village life is one that cannot be replicated anywhere else in Trinidad and Tobago.

"We are the island of milk and honey, there are no nega-



Omari Walker enjoys a bowl of fish broth while sitting on a fishing boat in Castara, Tobago, recently.

tive vibes here, we try to help everyone," said Walker.

As a fisherman, Walker spends most of his time at sea fishing, after which he proceeds to the local market to sell his daily catch. He only sells outside of the village when there is a surplus of fish.

Castara is home to several fishing-based events throughout the year including the Castara Fisherman's Fete, a party where fishermen from around

Tobago and as even as far as Toco, assemble with the pirogues for a weekend of revelry.

"This is the largest fisherman's fete in Trinidad and Tobago, we keep it here in the month of August," said Walker.

Fish Fest is another celebration where villagers make different fish related dishes and to top it off there is beach bonfire held during that week. Walker says that the younger generation doesn't value hard work and it is a problem that will affect their future.

"I believe that young people should think of their future and work hard to make something of themselves," said Walker.

I am one of those young men that have their head on the shoulders. I am not getting carried away by this and that. I plan to own an establishment one day and make a name for myself."

But more than anything, Walker hopes that one day his little village will be a hub for tourism, so that all people can experience Castara for themselves.

"I hope that Castara grows and becomes more established. With better accommodations for guests we can bring the world to Castara."



Rio Claro Sporting & Leisure Foundation do their part...

Simple reminders

By Skarlett Lluvia

On Saturday, May 2, 2020, members of the Rio Claro Sporting & Leisure Foundation stood around the roundabout, displaying placards with simple reminders of safe practices against COVID-19 to environs and passersby. They also displayed placards thanking those in the essential services for their service during this difficult time. Stylish hand-made cloth face masks were also distributed to persons.



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- MAINTAIN A SAFE DISTANCE
- FLATTEN THE CURVE
- WEAR A MASK

Pandemic poses challenges for the differently-abled

Story & Photo by
Vinayaka Marajh

ACCORDING to the Merriam-Webster dictionary COVID-19 is “a mild-to-severe respiratory illness that is caused by a coronavirus (which) is transmitted chiefly by contact with infectious material (such as respiratory droplets) or with objects or surfaces contaminated by the causative virus, and is characterised especially by fever, cough, and shortness of breath and may progress to pneumonia and respiratory failure.”

In layman’s terms, this illness is transmitted, nurtured and spread via social contact;

hence the need for the “social distancing” guideline/mechanism. This adds merit to the Government’s “stay-at-home” order for the general population as it would usher in a decline in the number of infections and symptoms related to the virus. At least, this is how it goes for the general public. But what about those who are in a different situation to the average citizen?

In a previous issue, we looked at the achievements of an individual from a unique part of the nation—visually-impaired post-graduate, Anil Waithe. Anil is a representative of a minor but prominent part of the nation’s populace—the differently-abled quota.

This raises some important questions. How does a virus that spreads and grows through physical contact affect those that, for the most part, rely heavily on the aforementioned contact to coexist with the rest of the nation? Secondly, what is being done by the authorities to assist the differently-abled in overcoming this issue?

Damper on progress

“When the authorities introduced the social distancing mechanism, it alluded towards the control and prevention of the spread of the virus,” said Waithe. “But that same mechanism has been a damper on



Anil Waithe chats with Shamla Maharaj—cerebral palsy advocate and UWI post-graduate, at the Caribbean Development Bank’s Youth Outreach Programme held at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in July 2019.

progress and independence of the impaired quota.”

Waithe explains that many institutions such as banks, and groceries, even public transportation enforces the six-feet-apart rule which would separate him from his guide and leave him exposed and without assistance. He strongly feels that this should not be the case as they should instead be treated as one individual.

“Banks have a special time for assisted citizens—between eight and ten in the morning. But what if I or the person I’m relying on cannot make those hours because of work or transport? Are we expected to line-up outside of the bank for hours when it’s common knowledge that we’re more susceptible to illnesses than others? Why isn’t the priority given to us whenever we get there? If we are truthfully considered to be the minority, it shouldn’t pose a problem, right?”

When asked about the Government’s assistance in the matter, Waithe said, “Now, I understand that this event is unprecedented and support is somewhat chaotic, but it’s almost as though we aren’t even on the Ministry’s radar! The e-forms are visual-oriented and as such, not accessible to us. Additionally, I’ve been told that the Ministry’s ads on the television are just flashes of text on the screen without audio—which obviously would not work for us! So how would we get the information and know how to proceed?”

Waithe noted that he attempted to contact the Ministry of Social Development, with varying results.

“I did try to contact them and for the most part, the call has gone unanswered. But on the rare occasions that I did make contact, I was told to either download the e-form and have a sighted person fill it out for me or to hold (indefinitely) until

they could find someone to assist me. Is that not the same as trying to limit my independence?”

On a positive note, Waithe praised the Ministry of Education for their using technology to keep classes going during this stay-at-home period.

“I see technological progress regarding learning resources in the advent of Zoom classes between teachers and students, and I applaud the quick responses of the Ministry (of Education) to maintain their growth.”

Positive response

Waithe has many recommendations for updating and upgrading the present system for not just the assisted and impaired population, but for the general public as well, such as redesigning the e-forms, installing full voice feedback via headphone ports on the various banking ABMs, adding braille labels to the ATM’s keypad, inculcating more tactile learning resources for the online classes at schools i.e. vocal and physical feedback takes priority over visual feedback, etc.

But for the most part, Waithe is impressed with the positive response taken as a result of this dire pandemic.

He describes how quickly online submissions over physical submissions (of forms and other paperwork) have taken effect, the rapid response of the education system to maintain the growth of its students, the rapid response of the nation to adopt and adapt to this new stay-at-home order during these harsh times to halt the advance of the spread of this virus, and above all else, the ingenuity, creativity and determination of the nation’s people to do their part in controlling the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Tribute to Past Pioneers on Indian Arrival

By Krishna Maharaj



JIT SUKHA SAMAROO was hailed as the country's most clinically accurate arranger, famous for his arrangements on the steel pan. He was a versatile composer and occasional bass player in his family band the Samaroo Jets. Jit was awarded the Humming Bird Medal of Merit (Silver) in 1987 as well as the Chaconia Medal (Silver) in 1995. In 2003, Samaroo received an Honorary Doctorate from the University of the West Indies. He passed away in 2016.



AJEET PRAISINGSH was a well-known businessman and cultural icon. He founded the Mere Desh Committee, an organization that aims to highlight the contribution of Indo Trinidadians in various areas of nation building. He received many awards including the Humming Bird Medal of Merit (Silver), various awards of recognition from the Chaguanas Borough Corporation, Hindi Nidhi Foundation, National Chutney Foundation among others.



PUNDIT HARDATH MAHARAJ has contributed to religion and culture. He served in many countries for over 65 years. He was awarded the Chaconia (Gold) medal in the year 2011. An institute of learning called Pundit Hardath Dharmashala was built in his honor at Caratal, Cumuto which is now run by his sons Pundits Bimal and Pradeep Maharaj.

vali Celebration in St. Helena. The group performs various styles of dance including Bollywood, Folk and Semi-Classical. Having participated in the Best Village competition, NCIC Dance Competition, Mastana Bahar among others, they have also performed in the United States and even as far as India.

Government Meeting in 2009.

After completing his secondary education in 2014 at ASJA Boys college, Ramdath then moved on to UWI where he later completed his bachelor's degree in Geomatics Engineering. In 2015, Ramdath entered the Mastana Bahar competition where he placed 2nd overall, with 1st place finishes in the preliminary and semi-final rounds. In 2019, he competed at the Prime Minister's Best Village competition where he captured 1st place in two categories. Earlier this year he competed at and won the top spot at the Sangeet Chutney Cup.

With several devotional and traditional chutney releases, Ramdath continues to look to the future. Now a student at the Center for Language Learning, he expects to complete Level 1 in Hindi language studies soon. He also plans to continue his education by pursuing his Masters in Geoinformatics.

Ramdath firmly believes that sincerity and humility can allow a person to soar to great heights and so he continues to pursue his musical career with those traits.



Photo: KAVITA RAMCHARITAR

Keeping the culture alive

Story by Kavita Ramcharitar

CLASSICAL INDIAN SINGER: DEVASHISH RAMDATH

Devashish Ramdath is a 24-year-old classical singer from Longdenville, Chaguanas. At the age of six he began learning how to play the Tabla, studying under Dr. Rakesh Prabhakar. Ramdath studied the Ramayan for almost a decade at the Hindu Prachaar Kendra in Enterprise, Chaguanas.

During this time there, he won several awards including Best Singer and Chanting the Ramayan while playing the Dholak. He was also praised for his Ramdilla performance at Queens Hall during the Commonwealth Heads of



Photo: KAVITA RAMCHARITAR

NRITYA SANGAM DANCE COMPANY

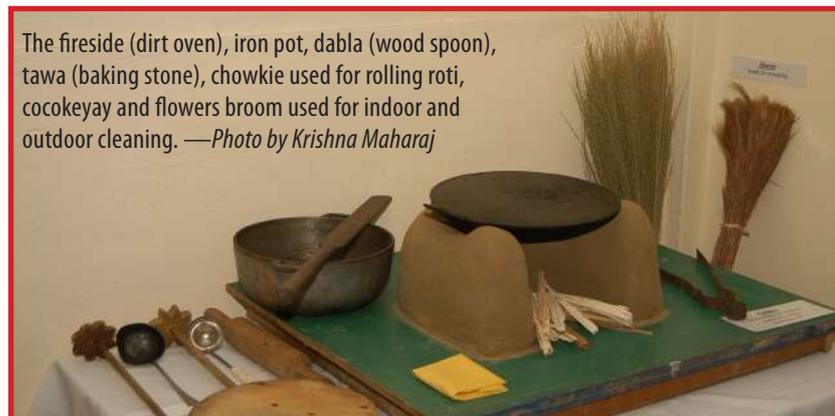
Members of the Nritya Sangam Dance Company perform at a Di-



DANA SEETAHAL (SC) was a prolific attorney at law and lecturer at the Hugh Wooding Law School. In 2002 she was appointed as an Independent Senator, a position she held until 2010. She received many awards and honors from various institutions. Unfortunately, Seetahal was killed on May 4th, 2014.



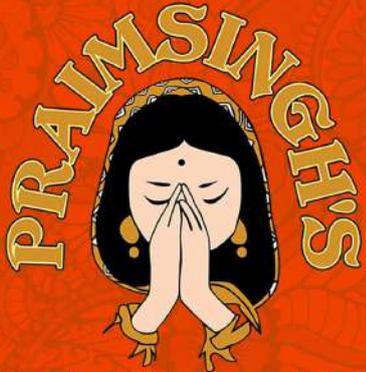
BODIL MAHARAJ was a well-known Indian classical singer who sang for almost 30 years. He would often be found in the company of his mentor singer K.B. Singh at various events, weddings and religious functions during his tenure. He died in 1980.



The fireside (dirt oven), iron pot, dabra (wood spoon), tawa (baking stone), chowkie used for rolling roti, cocokeyay and flowers broom used for indoor and outdoor cleaning. —Photo by Krishna Maharaj

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COVID-19 changes the modus operandi...

Different approach to learning

Story by **Sasha Matthews**

THE COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our normal flow of operation and in so doing, changed the way in which we conduct our activities. One of the main responses to treat with the virus is to "social distance" based on the science presented to us. As such, while essential workers were asked to report to duty, teachers and students were called to adhere to the stay-at-home order.

Hence, the education of students had to follow a different approach namely, online learning. As a primary school teacher, I write to give my views on this new form of education of students at the primary level, during this period of quarantine.

The Ministry of Education, has asked teachers to continue delivery/instruction of education using electronic devices such as smart phones, computers and laptops. That being said, based on correspondence from the office of the Ministry of Education, the Minister has advised on a plan to distribute laptops and arrange internet connectivity for students who require such.

It is, however, uncertain when this process would be accomplished. Apart from this, I think that it may be a good initiative to incorporate some form of online learning into our existing system, in the long term. I say this based on two reasons.

Firstly, I feel that technology is the

way forward and we need to conform. Secondly, online learning would be convenient in the event of another pandemic such as this or a world crisis where we are unable to attend class. In light of the above, if online learning were to be made mandatory teachers will have to be trained in order to update their skills.

Currently, online learning exhibits some challenges. Based on surveys conducted, many students do not have

access to laptops and or internet connectivity. Therefore, many teachers have decided to use their phones to reach parents and students, resulting in the creation of WhatsApp class

chats, myself included. This gives teachers an avenue to deliver instruction in the form of notes, worksheets, videos and other learning activities.

Some teachers have also set up the zoom application which allows teachers and students to interface. While this may be the more popular approach, it is not without its cons. A parent said to me, "Miss I have a basic phone which has to be shared among my three children and it is difficult."

While this may be the reality for some parents, for others they may not have a phone, or may have one that does not support a variety of application or an abundance of information being received. Additionally, there is the concern of internet connectivity, whereby though some parents may

have a phone, they may not have internet access.

However, the general consensus from the parents that I have communicated with is that despite these issues, they are happy to receive some form of instruction from teachers, rather than none

at all. Hiccups are expected with the onset of new plans. Hopefully, the goal is achieved at the end. In conclusion, teachers that I have spoken to, are contented to deliver some sort of instruction in whatever way may be convenient to them at this time. As for me, it

gives me a sense of satisfaction and the feeling that I am doing my part in making the best of a tough situation. I also feel that the students may be eager to continue learning amidst a period that may seem mundane, having to stay at home.



Back in business



Chef Michael Gopaul in the kitchen preparing for the reopening of his business at Marabella.



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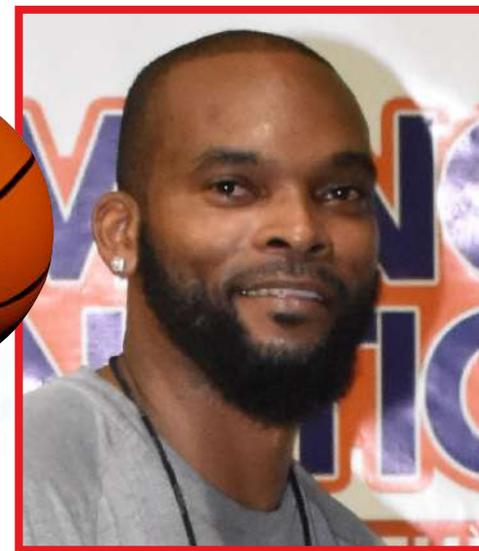
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Adrian Joseph.
—Photo: ANASTEIN RAGOO

By Anastein Ragoo

ADRIAN JOSEPH is one of the most well-known athletes in the local basketball community, but basketball was not always his game of choice. As a child, Joseph loved cricket but it was a programme on television that got him interested in basketball.

"I remember sitting and watching Michael Jordan on the popular NBA Jam show on local television and that was the first time I thought about playing basketball," said Joseph.

He was nine years old when he decided that he wanted to play the game, but it was not until he was 12 that he started training under his first coach, Earl Skeets.

As he entered secondary school, Joseph began playing for St Benedict's College, where he led in all categories, catching the eyes of other local coaches who invited him to play with their teams. He eventually began training with the National Under-21 team and they eventually travelled to the United States to compete, it was here that he found the success that would shape his future.

Joseph attributed his success to his coaches, who took advantage of his abilities and made him work harder to improve on them.

His level of play made a great impression during his stay in the United States and this led to several offers to play on other teams. He was also offered scholarships to attend Marianapolis Preparatory School and later Brewster Academy in New Hampshire to complete his high school education.

It was during his senior year that he was chosen as a McDonald's All-American nominee and was ranked number one in the state of New Hampshire. He became the highest recruited player from his school, but he would soon find out that his road to success was not all glitz and glamour as he expected.

He faced many challenges, including having to adjust to the new climate conditions, but a major challenge was his West Indian accent. This led to him having to speak slowly and give lengthier explanations, which became frustrating at times.

Joseph also faced discrimination at every stage of his international career but he did not allow that to become a distraction.

"It was something I adjusted to and got used to," said Joseph. "I dealt with it because I knew it existed."

There were also financial challenges which forced Joseph to turn two opportunities because of the limited financial support for sportsmen across the board. The first opportunity came from the Toronto Raptors B team in Canada whilst the second was an opportunity to play on a USA All Star travelling team. To say that he was disappointed would be an understatement.

"Who knows what would have happened then, the sky would have been the limit," said Joseph.

Despite the challenges, Joseph continued to play basketball in the USA. From 2004-2008, he attended the University of Virginia where he played college basketball with the Virginia Cavaliers. Following this, he proceeded to play basketball in other countries including

Canada, Mexico, Portugal, Puerto Rico and Spain. In 2013, Joseph returned home to participate in the Hoop For Life tournament where his team emerged victorious in the tournament.

In 2019, Joseph represented the Caledonia Clippers in the North Zone Basketball Championship and was named Most Valuable Player (MVP). Earlier this year he was named as the MVP in the National Invitational Championship tournament.

Joseph's ultimate goal is to be the driving force behind the development of the next generation of our local basketball players.

"Having my own programme and my own 24/7 facility that is available to players for training so they can get better and do this full time is my passion," said Joseph.

He wants players to have access to a facility where others can come to support them and where games can be streamed or even televised live, giving players the opportunity to be seen by talent scouts.

However, he faces many challenges in achieving this goal. One such difficulty is acquiring the lands to make this dream a reality. He wants this to be a sustainable career so he can focus his energies and channel his mountain of experience into producing young athletes, who will move forward and someday surpass him.

When asked about his role models, Joseph wasn't hesitant to choose his mother. She taught him to live the best life because of her kind-heartedness, teaching him to help those who were down and even

those who treated him badly by never holding grudges.

Another role model was Michael Jordan, his approach to the game and methodology were an inspiration for Joseph. Jordan always played his best not only on the court but in whatever he did because he never knew who was watching.

"Play your hardest on the basketball court, there is always someone out there who hasn't seen you play before," said Joseph.

This is something he tries to instill in his students every day. Today, Joseph is one step closer to making his dream a reality. He is the owner and head coach of the Advance Genetics Sports and Cultural Club, which currently has a membership of almost 30 young hard-working individuals, but he is still looking to grow. He wants to develop an overall strong parent/student/staff body to produce these superstars' results that would one day be internationally recognised.