

Tourism sector's recovery high on BHTA's agenda

THE BHTA team has been heavily involved with the Tourism Task Force set up by the Government of Barbados, to help prepare Barbados for its recovery of tourism.

New Chairman of the Barbados Hotel and Tourism Association (BHTA), Geoffrey Roach acknowledged the above, as he delivered remarks at the BHTA's Annual General Meeting, held over the Zoom online platform yesterday.

"I believe in our people and for that reason want to focus on one aspect of the work being undertaken by the Task Force and that is the Human Resource Development (aspect). The objective here has been to address the needs of our people and to provide development opportunities for them" Roach remarked.

Pointing to the series of webinars that the Tourism Task Force has set in motion to re-tool and re-train workers in the tourism sector, so they can in turn better assist the tourism sector in bouncing back from the present COVID-19 pandemic, Roach however noted that while there has been a satisfactory response to the sessions, the BHTA would like to see a further uptake, so that everyone can make the most of these opportunities and assist in the tourism recovery efforts.

Roach, who takes over the reins from outgoing

BHTA Chairman Stephen Austin whose tenure came to an end this week, suggested that whilst there is a lot of work to be done by the Association in helping to move the tourism sector forward beyond COVID-19, the BHTA is up to the challenge, since it has faced numerous pressures before and has come out of these situations shining.

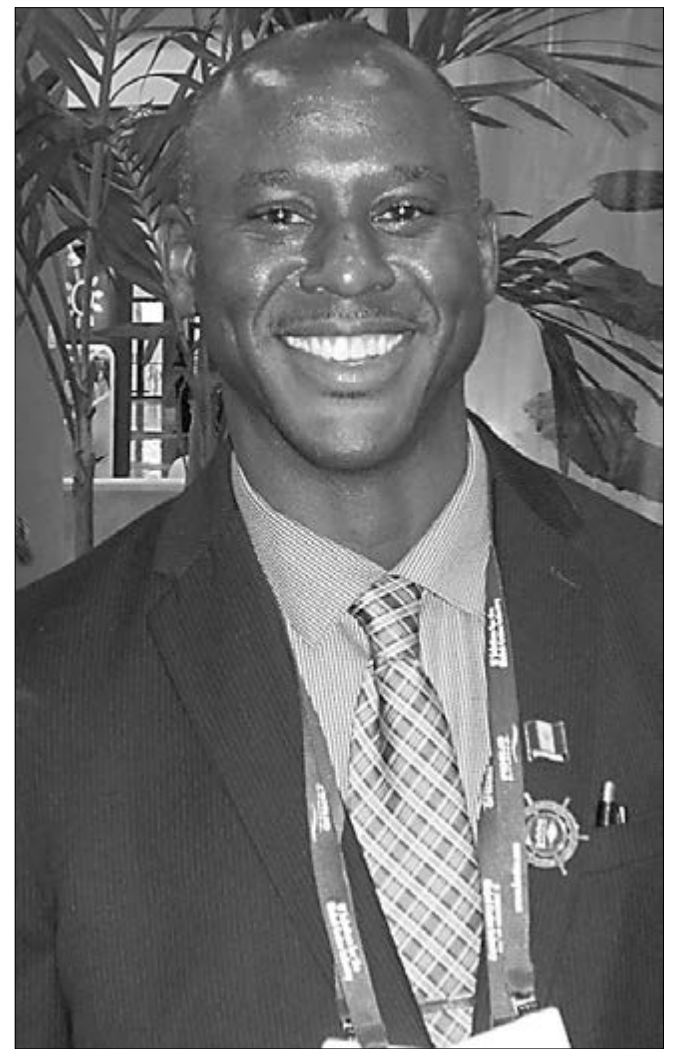
"By now, I do not have to tell any of you the impact that COVID-19 has had on the global tourism industry, on Barbados's tourism industry, on our people and each of us personally. The experts have said that per-

sons over 65 are more vulnerable to COVID. If the BHTA was a person, we would be in that category, and while we have felt the effects of COVID-19, we will show COVID that this 68 year old organisation has no core morbidities and will not be defeated. Barbados will not be defeated. Our people will not be defeated" he asserted.

"Does this mean that we will be unscathed? Highly unlikely, but we will wear our scars as a reminder of the battle that we faced and overcame. There is a quote that says "Grow through what you go

through" and this is what we will do. Further, I am sure that many, if not all of you have heard the statements made about diamonds, but however it is said, the story is the same, diamonds are created under pressure" he maintained.

Roach stressed, "I am optimistic about our future, despite the current challenges that we are facing and I know that as long as we join hands and work collaboratively no matter what role we play or what organisation we represent, the Diamond that is Barbados will shine bright". (RSM)



New Chairman of the Barbados Hotel and Tourism Association (BHTA), Geoffrey Roach.

Unique festival experiences may draw tourists

IN the future, Barbados may need to consider how it can provide unique festival experiences that distinguish it from other Caribbean countries, so as to make it more appealing to visitors, who have numerous destinations from which they can choose in the region.

Carol Roberts-Reifer, Chief Executive Officer of the National Cultural Foundation (NCF) suggested the above, as she spoke during the Inter-American Development Bank's (IDB) online Zoom session held yesterday under the theme, "The Pivot Series: The Future of Festivals". During that session, various stake-

holders from across the region discussed the future of festivals in the Caribbean region and how countries can pivot and adapt to the changing world, given that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused several 2020 Caribbean festivals, including Barbados' own Crop Over Festival, to be cancelled.

"Barbados is very similar to Jamaica, where a huge percentage of the participants in the festival are actually visitors to the island. With our borders closed to non-essential travel, you can imagine what that impact or that lack of participation regionally

and internationally would have had on the festival. I like to see opportunities in every challenge and so, under the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, I think it has presented a wonderful opportunity to take a step back, look at the state not only of the festival, but of the sector and come up with meaningful ways to identify gaps (and to fill them," Roberts-Reifer commented.

She later noted the need for Barbados and other countries in the region to look to see how they can make their festivals, including the Crop Over festival, unique, so as to appeal to different

audiences, seeking key experiences.

"It forces us to confront a question, a scenario that I first had to confront when I took over this post as CEO of the NCF in 2018 and that is, while we are collaborating, what makes each festival unique within its physical space, because if you look at it, we cannot get away from the fact that the costumes are generally, at the very basic level all similar. They pretty much look all alike, certainly for what in Barbados we call the party bands. So if I can buy my costume and my experience cheaper in jurisdiction A, what is going to

make me go and pay for the same costume and the same basic kind of experience in Jurisdiction B or C? Shouldn't there be something else in that experience that is unique to that country that makes me say, 'Well this year I am going to go to Trinidad, Jamaica and Antigua, because I've been to Barbados or, I am going back to Barbados or I am going back to Trinidad, because I am guaranteed a good time?' Those are some of the questions, when we consider collaborations, that we are going to have to confront and find meaningful answers to." Roberts-Reifer noted. (RSM)

Country prepared to test all arrivals

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public health officers in this Ministry were fully aware and have been advising the Government that we should be prepared for an uptick in cases once travel from hotbed areas resumed. I wish to assure the public that Barbados is much better prepared today to deal with this challenge than we were in March when the viral illness sur-

face here. We certainly have more capacity and experience than we had at the beginning," he said.

Going on to state that the public health threat was far from over and that persons could be tested if they chose to, Minister Bostic said that the island was well armed to face what could possibly come at us at present. "We have a more than adequate supply of testing kits so we are able to test every-

one arriving into the island as well as to continue testing anyone who is recommended to be tested or who wishes to be tested in Barbados. I wish to take this opportunity to commend the officers at the Best Dos Santos Public Health Laboratory who have now completed more than 6000 tests for COVID-19 which is a significant achievement for a small island state such as ours. From the beginning,

we have understood what is required and will continue to do all in our power to identify, isolate, treat, contact trace and contain the spread of COVID-19 in Barbados. We all accept that it will be around for a long time, or at least until a vaccine is developed, but we are also determined that we will not be paralyzed by its presence. We must never retreat or surrender but we must learn to live with the knowledge

that this virus is around us," he said.

When asked a question about if the government intends to continue repatriating persons who stay stranded in other countries, Minister Bostic explained that it would be wrong to deny persons the right to come home and that as long as the capacity existed, Barbados would be open to her citizens. "If there were Barbadians who were

abroad and who reported that they were COVID patients, we would not turn them back as long as we have the capacity because that is a duty and a responsibility for us to look after our people and we have more than enough capacity at this point in time to be able to do so and all Barbadians can continue to expect that we will be accepting persons returning home," he said. (MP)