

St Stanislaus College (Guyana) Alumni Society

Week of Celebrations in Guyana

October 8 to October 14, 2024

After several months of planning and discussion about how to honour Father Herbert Feeny, the first Science Master at St Stanislaus College, the family of Fr Feeny and the Board of Governors, with input from the alumni associations decided to proceed with a renovation of the Physics and Chemistry laboratories. The School completed the renovations with financial support from Fr. Feeny's family, the Guyana Government, the alumni associations, alumni and the Jesuits.

The Board of Governors, with assistance from the Administration, and the Toronto St Stanislaus College (Guyana) Alumni Society, organized a gathering in Guyana to celebrate the dedication of the science laboratories to Fr Feeny. The initial concept transformed into a week of celebrations from October 8 to October 14, 2024, that honoured Fr Feeny, celebrated the opening of a new staff room paid for with a bequest from alumni Ron Harford, and provided an opportunity for alumni, the Feeny and Harford families, and other friends and family members to gather in Guyana. While the visitors trickled into Guyana on various flights from the UK, the USA, Canada and the Caribbean, the majority arrived late night on October 7. Our Immigration contacts facilitated our entry into Guyana, and then Raymond Shaw and Robin Low had our transportation waiting for us to take us to our hotels

Assembly, Business Meeting, Lunch and Dedication Ceremony

The following morning of October 8, Raymond and Robin once again arranged our transportation to the school for the Assembly in the Marion Forum. It was an impressive sight to see the students neatly dressed in their uniforms, and seemingly quite comfortable in their setting. Rupert DeCastro and Alfred Carr, among others, addressed the students. Rupert outlined a history of the Toronto organization, and Alfred stressed the quality of education at Saints that alumni had received and the importance of lifelong learning as our World changes. Robbie Fernandes, the Games Master enjoyed the most enthusiastic reception, with the announcement of recent inter house competitions, of which Galton House was the ultimate winner. The Assembly concluded with the presentations of the DeCastro Bursaries by Rupert, and the Albert Sweetnam Bursaries by the HM, Mrs. Donna Lewis Isles, followed by performances from the choir, the new steel band, and a poem recited by a student.

Following the Assembly, representatives of the Board of Governors, the alumni associations, the PTA, some teachers, the Administration and the HM met to discuss plans for the school. There was a good exchange of ideas, and because the alumni had to attend a lunch hosted by the President of Guyana, the group decided to resume discussions later in the week.

As indicated, while non-alumni attended lunch at another venue, all alumni attended a lunch hosted at State House by the President of Guyana, Dr. Mohammed Irfaan Ali, an alumnus of Saint Stanislaus College. Dr. Ali welcomed the alumni and recognised the Feeny and Harford families. He outlined his vision for Guyana and the role of education in achieving this. Dr. Kofi Dalrymple, a member of the Board of Governors, in reply thanked the President for hosting the alumni. At the conclusion of the lunch, the guests returned to their hotels.

Dedication Ceremony

The highlight of October 8 was, however, the dedication ceremony for the Fr. Herbert Feeny Physics and Chemistry laboratories, and the Harford Staff Room. The School dedicated the Staff room not only to Ron Harford, but also to two former masters, Stanley Marques and Dr. Leslie Cummings. This well-orchestrated event clearly showed the detailed planning that the organizers had undertaken.

The school choir and the steel band gave several performances, including the National Anthem of Guyana, and the School Song. Dr. Kofi Dalrymple gave opening remarks, and Roger Devers of the SSCGAS gave a tribute to Fr. Feeny as his former lab assistant. Members of the Feeny and Harford families provided an overview of the manner in which the decisions to renovate the laboratories and the staff room came about.

A medley of patriotic songs, including “Leave me a River” (composed by recently deceased alumnus Dr. Dave Martins) performed by students, and supported by the music teacher, preceded the feature address by His Excellency, Dr. Irfaan Ali. Dr. Ali, in his address, recognised the long service given by Chris Fernandes to Saints and Guyana. He announced the Government’s intent to create an Innovation Fund to promote innovation in Guyana and that Saints would have a role in the use of this fund. He stated also that the Government would provide funding to start the work on the new Saints sports field, together with a three-storey building to be ready in 2025. Following his address, the Head Mistress, thanked all the speakers and in particular the President, and the Feeny and Harford families, for their support of the school. Immediately afterwards, the President cut the ribbon to officially open the Fr. Herbert Feeny laboratories and the Harford Staff Room. Many of the guests stayed on afterwards to enjoy the cocktail party.

Baganara Resort

On Wednesday October 9, a group of 30 crossed the Demerara River to drive to Parika, where they were transported by boat, firstly to Fort Island, a former Dutch fortified island, and then to Baganara Resort. At Baganara Resort, some of the visitors took the opportunity to swim in the river after lunch, before we boarded the boat for the return trip to Parika and our transportation to our hotels in Georgetown.

Kaieteur Falls and Appreciation Dinner

Thursday was a free day and many of the visitors arranged their own private outings, visiting with family and friends in some instances. On Friday, a small group of 13 travelled to Ogle International Airport and flew to Kaieteur Falls. For some, this was the first time that they had had an opportunity to view Kaieteur Falls up close. Unfortunately, a persistent shower dampened the event for the entire 30 minutes walking to and from the Camp to the Falls. This was the only time during the week when we had any rain. After viewing Kaieteur Falls, we flew back to Ogle and then returned to our hotels in time to get ready for the Appreciation Dinner on Friday evening.

Most of the alumni and other visitors still in Guyana attended the Appreciation Dinner. Many of the teaching staff, including the Head Mistress, the PTA, Board of Governors members, and the local Association attended. It was a casual, relaxed atmosphere with attendees mixing freely throughout the evening and making new friends. The highlight of the evening was the presentation of a bouquet by the Head Mistress to Mrs. Shelley Anne Harris to recognise her stellar assistance in organizing and managing the week of Celebrations. In recognition of Chris Fernandes' contribution over many years as Chair of the Board, Alfred Carr presented Chris with a piece of original Inuit Art on behalf of St Stanislaus College, and the alumni.

Continuation of Business meeting, website planning and “liming” at the Pegasus

Saturday Oct 12, 2024, saw alumni from the associations in Guyana, BRASS and SSCGAS, meet with members of the Board, PTA and School Administration to continue the Business Meeting that had commenced on October 8. Attendees agreed on a plan of action going forward and identified several priorities, which the team will consider in developing the agreed Strategic Plan for the School.

A discussion followed on how to maintain the new school website and keep the material kept current. Ryan Devers will continue to work with the local staff, and the Toronto Society will assist with financial support.

On Saturday evening, most of the visitors went to the Pegasus Hotel to enjoy a relaxing evening poolside, listening to the live music and having dinner. It was a pleasant evening enjoyed by all.

Picnic at Bounty Farm

With an awareness that the week was rapidly ending, we journeyed on Sunday morning to Bounty Farm, after some people attended Mass at Brickdam Cathedral. Our last day in Guyana for most visitors, turned out to be yet another warm, sunny day. At Bounty Farm, we were treated to a splendid lunch, with refreshments. Some sampled the pool. Some volunteered to play dominos in an impromptu tournament featuring players from Etheridge, Butler and Galton Houses, the original three. Butler House emerged as the

winner of the tournament. Shortly afterwards, the attendees travelled back to their hotels to prepare for the majority to leave Guyana on various flights the following day and thereby bringing an incredible week to a close.

Conclusion

Everyone who travelled to Guyana was effusive in his or her praise for the manner in which the week was so well organized. A big vote of thanks goes to Chris Fernandes, the Chair of the Board, and Mrs. Harris, the School Administrator, supported by a fund raising team and others, for providing overall direction. Raymond Shaw and Robin Low managed our transportation, with assistance from an alumnus in the GDF, and they resolved many issues. Raymond and Robin were available at all times of the day, and without their support, the visitors would have had challenges in getting from their hotels, and other accommodations, to where they needed to be. In addition to the fore mentioned, other members of the Board of Governors, like David Singh and David Fernandes fully supported and managed the Business Meetings.

Last but by no means least, was the graciousness of His Excellency, Dr. Irfaan Ali, in hosting the alumni at lunch and attending the Dedication Ceremony for the new laboratories and Staff Room. Dr. Ali stayed on after the event on Tuesday night sharing his views on many subjects with alumni and others.

Alfred Carr

Aeterna Non Caduca