

SPEECH FOR INAUGURATION OF NEW SITE

Dr O. Day, 6th March 2008

Your royal highnesses, honourable secretaries, distinguished guests today is a very special day of celebration for the Buccoo Reef Trust as we inaugurate our new site. We are extremely honoured and privileged to have you with us today Sir, as you are a champion not only for conservation but of a new philosophy of partnership, between business, communities and the environment.

We like to think that the Buccoo Reef Trust is a model of such a partnership, where the private sector, local stakeholders and environmental scientists come together and focus on what we all want - a cleaner, healthier more productive environment. Over the last 7 years our partnership has grown steadily and today the Buccoo Reef Trust is one of the largest environmental non-profits in the Caribbean.

Three factors have led to the success of this partnership;

Firstly, we are extremely lucky to have an exceptional partner in the person of Mr. Lawrence Duprey, Chairman of CL Financial. Not only has Mr. Duprey been unusually generous in funding our core costs but he has also shown a long-term commitment by agreeing to purchase this wonderful site for the Tobago Marine Research Centre. He is as determined as we are to make this centre a world-class model of this philosophy of partnership. Sadly Mr. Duprey could not be with us today, but his wife Sylvia, who is also committed to our mission and is in fact a director of Buccoo Reef USA - our American affiliate organization, is here. Sylvia, thank you for the support and commitment, we are delighted that you are here with us today on this very special occasion.

Our partnership has also been a success because at the core we are a science organization, and science unites people because it is impartial, it is about the facts and the search for solutions. The importance of science in development cannot be overstated - one could even say that the road to sustainable development is paved with decisions based on good science.

Finally, our very special staff have made the BRT a success because of their hard work, commitment, and determination to see a better future for the environment and people of Tobago. They have won awards and grants from all over the world, and one of the main reasons for this – and this is something that Gerry MacFarlane is particularly passionate about – is because they make science relevant to communities and ordinary people. Today, with the growing threat of climate change and other environmental issues, the need to make science more accessible to the public is critical. Many of our funding partners such as the UN, the IADB and other international donor agencies increasingly insist that we do this; they call it citizen science or democratizing science. We have been doing it for seven years.

We work with all the primary schools in Tobago and we run a vacation programme for secondary students called Sea, Sun and Science. Barry Lovelace, Hyacinth Armstrong, Rondell Bailly and the rest of the education team have made learning about the marine environment both fun and empowering.

By getting students directly involved in environmental monitoring, Sandra Timothy is breaking new ground in community involvement as part of a regional project aimed at improving watershed and coastal area management.

Our partners Coral Cay Conservation, who have over 20 years experience of teaching volunteers to scuba dive and study reefs, are now in Tobago working with us and the THA surveying the entire coastal zone of the island. We are building perhaps the regions most detailed geographic information system or computer-based map of Tobago and its marine environment. Volunteers from T&T can get all this training for free.

We are putting science on television, so that information about the environment reaches inside people's homes. Thanks to partnerships with Channel 5, Caribbean Media Corporation and other media houses we are now getting these programmes aired across the region.

Our films are on our website, which is fast becoming a major information resource for students and thanks to Vijay Datadin is are now getting a worldwide audience. The Internet will soon be connecting schools from Tobago to schools in the US with a live video link – the potential of the Internet for democratizing science and empowering people is huge.

With this new site we hope to take citizen science to new levels, and make the BRT an even better model of this new philosophy of partnership. Just think what we could do for the Republic of Trinidad and for the region with an Interactive Visitor Centre, Auditorium, wet and dry laboratories, library and accommodation for visiting experts from the Caribbean and the further a-field. Our links with the University of the West Indies, Oxford University, Newcastle-Upon Tyne and University of New England and many others, can be developed much further.

This little island has some of the most outstanding natural assets in the world, the largest brain coral, the oldest protected rainforest in the western hemisphere, the largest contiguous mangrove seagrass and coral reef system in the southern Caribbean, it has the largest number of bird species per square kilometer of any islands. Tobago is the best classroom for environmental science and it attracts the top experts from all over the world. With your help, the Buccoo Reef Trust can also use this island to bring out the best in young people to create our own homegrown experts as well as build pride among the entire population for the wonderful natural assets of this country.

As of today, we are embarking on a fund-raising campaign for the construction of the Tobago Marine Research Centre as an international centre of excellence for citizen science. We invite you all to be part of this exciting opportunity for partnership.

Owen Day
Director