

More than \$9,000 Raised for Barbados Youth hotline

July 24, 2001.

By Stan Walker

Hartford West Indians were praised for their wonderful manifestation of public spiritedness and generosity by Barbados Consul General George S. Griffith, SCM, JP at the Cricket Hall of Fame's Second Annual Humanitarian Award function, held in the ballroom of the Sheraton Hotel, East Hartford, Saturday, June 2.

Cosponsored by the Barbados American Society of Hartford (BASH) and Banks Cavaliers Inc., more than \$9,000 was raised at the function to help in the establishment of a national hotline that will cater to the youth in Barbados. The brainchild of Griffith, the Hotline is an emerging crisis support service that will unify organizations in Barbados that caters to youths. It will provide peer counseling to youngsters who are contemplating suicide or who are impacted by underage sex, teen pregnancy, drugs, prostitution, sexually transmitted diseases and family abuse. Guidance on topics such as communication with parents and career choices will also be provided.

Griffiths, who was making his first official visit to Hartford, said that he enjoyed the hospitality of the residents and could feel the enthusiasm and commitment of the West Indian community's presence in Hartford. "The outpouring of generosity and support given to the project by the community is a very moving experience for me," he said, "and I look forward to continuing the work with youths."

At a town meeting held at BASH's headquarters on Homestead Avenue, the following day, Consul General Griffiths, who himself has years of experience working with troubled youths, promised that when the hotline is ready, it will not get started until a person from Hartford is available to take the first call.

During the introductory part of the ceremony Griffiths was presented with the key to the city by Councilwoman Veronica Airey-Wilson, who brought greetings from the members of the council.

Explaining that his country is one of the most densely populated in the world, Griffith said that in order to ensure that our people get the opportunity to enjoy the best quality of life, the government have made education and health its top priority.

Citing the increase in teenage births, AIDS cases, drug use and indiscipline among the youths, Griffiths said we need to find ways to effectively control our children. "Our young people are entering a very challenging state of development and we must utilize new strategies working with the youth to bring about changes," he said.

It is our belief that young people are better able to influence each another, so the hotline project is based on the conviction that it will be easier to change their behavior if they are able to deal with people whom they have already identified with. Through the hotline, young people will have the capacity to help bring about the necessary changes, he said.

The hotline will allow young people to get advice when they have problems from their own peers who have their interest at heart and understand what they are experiencing. "We want you to understand that this is serious business," he said. "We see this as your project and your contributions will make a significant difference to the lives of the young people in Barbados. We will make the best use of the opportunity that you have given us to ensure that the hotline is a success. Our children are our number one priority and we hope to face up to the challenges that we will confront us," he said.

Shantal Munro-Knight, president of the Youth Development Council of Barbados, who flew in for the program, said that what you have done today by contributing to this fund-raising is larger than contributing to a youth hotline. What you have done is to enter into a partnership with young people and the Barbadian society for the goal of social development.

"I am not being idealistic and suggesting to you that a youth hotline will be the panacea for all youth problems," the youthful speaker said, "what I am suggesting is that it will be a critical part of the muster that will lay the platform from which other solutions can be derived."

The youth hotline is vitally important because it will allow young people as volunteers and peer counselors to become involved in the process of providing solutions, Munro-Knight said. "I want to assure you that your efforts will not be wasted or not appreciated, but that your support for the hotline project will give impetus to ensuring youth participation and youth empowerment."

“We have in Hartford a true Barbadian community who cares and cares enough to express it in the most tangible way by contributing to ensuring a positive social development for our people,” she stated.

Also addressing the gathering was Judge Juliett Crawford of New Haven who spoke on the problems and development of the youth.

Comedian Kevin “K. B. Kleen” Hinds, who also came up from Barbados for the program, kept the audience in stitches as he made jokes based on present developments in Barbados using the consul general as the target.

A few youngsters also got the opportunity to showcase their talents at the function. Terence (trumpet) and Theresa Greaves (Clarinet), led off by delivering their rendition of the Barbados and U.S. national anthems at the opening of the program. Angelina Hastings, read a poem (her own creation), while Stephen Brathwaite, and budding classical singer, Elan Williams, performed a song.