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**Chaguanas Chamber of Industry & Commerce**

## **MISSION**

To create an efficient business environment to enhance prosperity and commercial success by proactively partnering with governmental and community entities to ensure a powerful and productive economy and continuously add value towards a higher quality of life for our membership.

## **VISION**

To be the premier membership-based organisation and leading provider of business-to-business networking opportunities and to be the foremost and respected voice of business in the Chaguanas area(s) and assist with economic growth.

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# MINISTER'S MESSAGE

Senator the Honourable SATYAKAMA MAHARAJ,  
Minister of Trade, Investment and Tourism



I am pleased to extend congratulations to the Chaguanas Chamber of Industry and Commerce (CCIC) on the occasion of its 30th Anniversary. Together with Dr. Colin Neil Gosine, Parliamentary Secretary and Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West, we commend the Chamber for three decades of dedicated service to the business community and its valuable contribution to Trinidad and Tobago's economic development.

Today, Chaguanas stands as one of the country's most vibrant commercial corridors, home to more than 1,300 registered businesses and a diverse population exceeding 83,000 residents. Over the past 30 years, significant development and investment have transformed the area into a thriving business hub for retail, services, manufacturing and logistics. Through its ongoing focus on enterprise development, engagement and local economic activity, the Chamber has played a pivotal role in fostering this growth.

## Private Sector – Engines of National Progress

The Government is firmly committed to accelerating Trinidad and Tobago's economic transformation, with the Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism (MTTI) leading efforts to expand and diversify the non-energy sector. The MTTI understands the critical importance of strategic collaboration with the private sector—as engines of national progress. From job creation and investment to innovation and export development, the business community plays a vital role in building a more competitive, resilient and forward-looking economy.

To support this, the MTTI is fostering a business environment that unlocks private sector potential. We are prioritising initiatives to reduce bottlenecks, modernise regulatory systems and streamline processes that hinder growth. Improving the ease of doing business is a strategic priority, as we work to make it simpler, faster and more predictable for businesses to operate, invest and grow in Trinidad and Tobago.

At the heart of our strategy is strengthening engagement with the private sector. The MTTI is spearheading the creation of a National Private Sector Organisation of Trinidad and Tobago—an

umbrella body designed to unify and coordinate structured, solution-oriented dialogue between the Government and businesses. We view business support organisations such as the CCIC as critical pillars of the private sector, whose combined influence will be amplified through a unified national platform to better influence policy, foster enterprise growth and ensure that government initiatives are grounded in the practical realities of the business community.

In the coming weeks, the Government will also launch a patriotic "Buy Local, Build T&T" campaign aimed at encouraging consumers to patronise local businesses and home-grown products. More than a call to shop locally, this initiative aims to stimulate domestic production, generate employment and strengthen community-based entrepreneurship. We encourage the business community, including the CCIC, to champion this campaign as a powerful avenue to boost national pride, deepen local value chains and increase the visibility of Made in T&T goods and services.

## Strengthening Exports and Expanding Access to New Markets

In the area of trade, a coordinated, data-driven, business-focused approach is being employed to unlock the full potential of Trinidad and Tobago's export sector. Emphasis is being placed on strengthening the capacity of local exporters—particularly small and medium-sized enterprises—to innovate and scale operations. Deliberate steps are also being taken to expand market access through targeted trade missions and deepened economic integration and co-operation under bilateral and multilateral trade agreements to open new trade corridors—particularly in the African markets.

We recognise and commend the CCIC for its proactive role in advancing this agenda. Its recent trade mission to Guyana exemplifies efforts to prepare local businesses for export readiness and cross-border expansion, while creating new opportunities for growth across sectors.

# MINISTER'S MESSAGE

## Digital Transformation

Digital transformation is reshaping the way businesses operate and compete globally.

Implementation of the National E-Commerce Strategy 2025-2030 will strengthen digital readiness, expand e-commerce participation among MSMEs, improve access to digital payment systems and boost consumer confidence in online transactions.

In alignment with this agenda, the CCIC's embrace of digital tools, such as its Black Card Programme and upcoming launch of a business e-card, reflect a progressive strategy to equip businesses with the tools needed to thrive in a rapidly evolving digital economy. Together, these coordinated actions are paving the way toward a more competitive and resilient economy in the years to come.

## Looking Forward

As we look ahead, the future of commerce will increasingly be shaped by digital integration,

enterprise innovation and stronger partnerships that advance broad-based economic participation. The Government is committed to supporting businesses of all sizes in embracing innovation, enhancing adaptability and future-proofing their operations for long-term success in an increasingly dynamic global economy.

I extend heartfelt congratulations to the Executive and membership of the Chaguanas Chamber of Industry and Commerce. You have made a meaningful mark on national development and stand well-positioned to achieve even greater impact in the years ahead.

May the next 30 years be marked by bold innovation, continued national impact and a lasting commitment to sustainable and inclusive prosperity.

I look forward to working closely with the business community to build a more resilient future for Trinidad and Tobago.



# MAYOR'S MESSAGE

His Worship The Mayor FAAIQ MOHAMMED



The 30th Anniversary of the Chaguanas Chamber of Industry and Commerce (CCIC) is a momentous occasion, marking three decades of exceptional service, advocacy, and leadership within the business community. As we reflect on the Chamber's achievements, we also recognise its pivotal role in shaping the economic, social, and cultural landscape of Chaguanas, transforming it into a thriving commercial hub at the heart of Trinidad and Tobago.

Established in 1994, the CCIC was founded to promote trade and commerce in the rapidly growing Borough of Chaguanas. From its start, the Chamber has been a strong voice for local businesses. It champions policies and initiatives to encourage economic growth and create opportunities for entrepreneurs. Over the years, it has worked to address challenges faced by businesses, while promoting innovation, collaboration, and investment.

A cornerstone of the CCIC's success is its partnership with the Chaguanas Borough Corporation. Together, these two entities have formed a dynamic alliance that drives development and prosperity in the region. Their public-private collaboration has enabled critical infrastructure projects and promoted community development. It has also supported small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)—the backbone of our economy. By aligning their efforts, the CCIC and Borough Corporation have helped position Chaguanas as a center for commerce and industry.

However, the true strength of Chaguanas lies not just in its businesses or infrastructure but in its people. The hardworking, resilient, and innovative residents of Chaguanas infuse the borough with a unique spirit and vibrancy. Entrepreneurs, families, and local leaders are the driving forces behind this progress. Notable examples include local success

stories that have become national icons. For instance, Pennywise began as a modest stall in the Chaguanas Market and has grown into a chain of plazas across the country.

Fair and Square, which started on Chaguanas' Main Road, has expanded its reach by establishing the renowned M6 Plaza. Likewise, Xtra Foods, originally known as Naipaul's on Chaguanas Main Road, now operates a chain of grocery stores throughout Trinidad and Tobago. These stories exemplify how vision, perseverance, and community support have propelled local enterprises from humble beginnings to national prominence.

As we celebrate the CCIC's 30th Anniversary, we acknowledge both its past achievements and its forward-looking vision. The Chamber understands that in today's rapidly evolving global economy, it must continuously innovate and adapt. This commitment includes promoting digital transformation, advocating sustainable development, and preparing businesses to navigate emerging trends and challenges.

In conclusion, the 30th Anniversary of the Chaguanas Chamber of Industry and Commerce is not merely a celebration of institutional success—it is a tribute to the people of Chaguanas. The collective spirit of this community continues to drive progress and innovation. As we honour these accomplishments, we also look ahead with optimism, confident that the strong foundation of collaboration, hard work, and shared vision will lead to an even brighter future for Chaguanas.

# CCIC PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

CCIC President BALDATH MAHARAJ



## More than 30 Years of Impact, Innovation & National Contribution

Thirty years ago, a small visionary group of business leaders came together to give the business community in Central Trinidad a stronger voice. They recognised that collectively their voice was heard. From those early conversations in 1994, the Chaguanas Chamber of Industry and Commerce (CCIC) was born. Today, we proudly celebrate three decades of progress, leadership, and advocacy for Chaguanas and national development.

The Chamber's journey has been one of bold ideas and collaborative action. We have grown from a modest start to become a powerful and respected stakeholder in the national landscape. Over the years, two of our past presidents have gone on to serve as Government Ministers, demonstrating the calibre of leadership that has come through this organisation. In addition, many of our directors and executive members have held senior roles in both public and private sectors, contributing significantly to national policy, economic strategy, and civic advancement. The Chamber has not only shaped business—it has helped shape the country.

From our earliest days, the Chamber has remained committed to structured development in Central Trinidad. Our pioneering 4Cs proposal—focused on Couva, Caroni, Charlieville, and Chaguanas—laid the foundation for properly zoned business spaces, industrial expansion, education campuses, green areas, and residential planning. We are proud to have played a role in advocating for borough status and we will push for full city status as Chaguanas grows into a central hub of economic activity that in our opinion is the fastest-growing retail hub in Trinidad and the Caribbean.

As a Chamber, we recognise that leadership must go beyond advocacy. Over the past three decades, we have invested in our people and our community. Our calendar includes signature events that reflect

our commitment to inclusive growth. The Indian Arrival Day dinner and awards

honour outstanding entrepreneurs and cultural contributors. Our youth summer camp is hosted annually, and we aim to cultivate the entrepreneurial spirit in young minds. The Annual Health Fair provides free medical screenings and wellness checks to hundreds of residents, and our highly anticipated Annual Dinner and Awards is a grand celebration of excellence and unity across the business landscape.

Networking and professional development remain a core part of our mission. We regularly host mixers, stakeholder forums, and training sessions to keep our members connected and informed. In today's evolving business climate, these platforms are invaluable for collaboration and opportunity building.

We have worked closely with law enforcement and the Chaguanas Borough Corporation to improve safety, traffic management, and urban planning.

We have been very vocal on matters such as foreign exchange shortages, digital commerce, port and customs delays, and crime and traffic. These are issues that affect the competitiveness of our members. We've also expanded our influence regionally through trade missions like our recent engagement in Guyana, where we signed an MoU with the Chamber of Commerce representing Suriname and Guyana as we seek new frontiers for commerce and partnerships.

As we commemorate more than 30 years of service, I wish to thank all past presidents, directors, members, and partners who have helped build this legacy. We look to the future with renewed purpose and optimism—ready to lead, ready to serve, and ready to grow.

# TREASURER'S MESSAGE

Treasurer KEVIN RAMGOOLIE



Positioned at the vibrant epicentre of Trinidad's commercial activity, the Chaguana Chamber of Industry and Commerce (CCIC) operates as an indispensable architect of economic transformation. It transcends the conventional role of a business advocate, functioning as a dynamic catalyst dedicated to forging a robust and diversified national economy.

Established in 1994 by a pioneering group of businessmen, the CCIC has mirrored the dynamic growth of Chaguana. Incorporated in 1998, the Chamber's board, comprised of distinguished leaders from a spectrum of industries, provides a formidable reservoir of expertise, ensuring its strategies are both pragmatic and visionary. This collective acumen uniquely poises the Chamber to collaborate synergistically with the government, pivotal stakeholders, and fellow Chambers to orchestrate comprehensive national progress.

Navigating the nation's regulatory landscape presents a notable undertaking, as Trinidad and Tobago is ranked 105th among 190 economies in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index. This ranking underscores a regulatory environment that can pose challenges for enterprises, particularly burgeoning Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

It is within this context that the CCIC's role becomes critical. The Chamber actively champions the cause of its members, lobbying for business-friendly policies and essential infrastructure improvements that directly benefit commercial operations.

Through its highly successful Breakfast with the Commissioner of Police and regular meetings with

various stakeholders, the CCIC translates its advocacy into actionable support. By providing essential resources, strategic guidance, and a powerful collective

voice, the CCIC empowers SMEs to overcome systemic hurdles, turning potential obstacles into opportunities for growth and innovation.

The Chamber's strategic foresight identifies immense potential for growth within the non-energy sector, viewing it as the cornerstone for a sustainable economic future. It actively promotes strategic diversification into high-potential fields such as fintech—a sector actively supported by national initiatives to create a regional hub—alongside agriculture and agro-processing, export-oriented manufacturing, and a revitalised tourism industry.

The systematic development of these sectors is paramount, as it directly contributes to expanding the nation's export portfolio. This, in turn, reduces the chronic imbalance of payments and generates much-needed foreign currency, thereby insulating the economy from volatile energy markets.

Looking ahead, the CCIC is committing to a digital Chaguana initiative, aimed at integrating advanced e-commerce and fintech solutions across all member businesses, solidifying the region's position as a blueprint for sustainable, modern commercial activity in the Caribbean."

## MESSAGE FROM THE SME DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Director SAJJAD HAMID



The SME abbreviation has become a popular acronym for several reasons. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are important as they account for most businesses globally and locally. They contribute significantly to employment, family income generation, and the national economy. SMEs can potentially transform Trinidad and Tobago's economic landscape, making it vital to policymakers and businesspeople.

The Chaguanas Chamber of Industry and Commerce (CCIC) has recognised this sector's significance. We have recently formed an SME Development Committee (SMEDC) to assist those who fall into this category. The SMEDC's mission is to be the leading organisation supporting members and non-members of the Chamber in their desire to achieve entrepreneurial growth.

Last year, we had our inaugural session at the CARIRI's Centre for Entrepreneurial Development (CED) in Freeport. We started where the entrepreneurial culture needs to be infused—the youth segment. The team hosted secondary school kids in an Entrepreneur Vacation Camp, and they learned about the entrepreneurial mindset, how to identify opportunities, and how to evaluate them. Our guest speaker was director Vishnu Charran, who spoke about his entrepreneurial journey from sugar cane cutter to book retailer.

Our committee comprises retail entrepreneur Vishnu Charran, Accountant Shalini Budhu and SME & Family Business Adviser Sajjad Hamid. As we plan for 2025, we are developing training and development programs tailored to SMEs. Recognizing the gap in specialised training and networking opportunities, we aim to recruit specialists in digital marketing, industrial relations, talent management, artificial intelligence (AI), and business planning, among others to better support SME growth

We will also create an online entrepreneurial resource hub to bring experts and SMEs together so the latter firms can get more specialised assistance at a discounted price.

The SMEDC will also host networking events and seminars so entrepreneurs can meet key stakeholders to position their enterprises for growth. We plan to form alliances with key state and private bodies in the entrepreneur ecosystem so SME owners can seek assistance.

To achieve a successful entrepreneurial programme, the committee will conduct surveys and other data-collecting initiatives to determine the sector's specific needs. There is a general lack of data on SME demographic profiles, key challenges, and methods of intervention that can be deployed in the diversified SME sector. We will also develop specific support for family businesses that comprise most of the sector to address succession, conflict, governance, and entrepreneurial growth.

As we enter a more volatile and disruptive world, the need to build agile and adaptive organisations rests on ecosystem members.

At the CCIC and the SMEDC, we will support the sector with unique and knowledge-based initiatives so SME entrepreneurs can scale their ventures. We strive to make our SME stakeholder organisations more environmentally conscious, digitally driven, export-ready, market-oriented, and globally positioned.

We hope you can join us in creating a prosperous and vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem.

# GREETINGS

President of the Cunupia Business Chamber RASHEED ALI



## A Milestone of Progress: The Cunupia Business Chamber Celebrates CCIC's 30 Years

As the Chaguanas Chamber of Industry and Commerce (CCIC) proudly marks its 30th Anniversary in 2024, the Cunupia Business Chamber extends its heartfelt congratulations on this remarkable milestone.

On behalf of the Cunupia Business Chamber, President Mr. Rasheed Ali offers sincere commendation for the CCIC's profound impact and outstanding achievements over the past three decades within the business community of Trinidad and Tobago. Their journey of commitment and dedication serves as an inspiration to all, showcasing a remarkable track record of progress and influence.

The Cunupia Business Chamber deeply values the enduring partnership that exists between our two esteemed organisations. We share a fundamental commitment to driving economic development and fostering prosperity within our collective community.

Our Chamber's work, which includes advocating for diverse businesses, organising networking events, and spearheading initiatives like the Cunupia Police Station renovation, exemplifies our dedication to fostering a vibrant and secure environment. It

is our firm belief that collaboration is not just beneficial, but essential, in cultivating a landscape where all businesses in our region can flourish and contribute to enhanced community safety.

We are absolutely honoured and delighted to join in the celebration of this momentous occasion.

The Cunupia Business Chamber extends its sincerest thanks to the Chaguanas Chamber of Industry and Commerce for their continued dedication and invaluable contributions to the business landscape of Trinidad and Tobago.

Here's to many more years of shared success and collaborative progress!

### **About the Cunupia Business Chamber:**

*The Cunupia Business Chamber is "In Business for Business," representing a diverse range of enterprises in the Cunupia district. We are dedicated to promoting economic growth, fostering a safe and secure business environment, and advocating for the interests of our members and the wider community.*



# GREETINGS

President of the Couva Point Lisas Chamber of Commerce  
DEORAJ MAHASE



## Honouring 30 Years of Business Excellence A Congratulatory Message from the Couva Point Lisas Chamber of Commerce

As the Chaguanas Chamber of Industry and Commerce celebrates three decades of unwavering service to the Chaguanas business community and the national business community, the Couva Point Lisas Chamber of Commerce extends heartfelt congratulations on this impressive milestone.

It is with great pride and admiration that I, on behalf of the Board of Directors, Executive, and membership of the Couva Point Lisas Chamber of Commerce, extend warmest congratulations to the Chaguanas Chamber, its present and past Boards and their members on the occasion of your 30th Anniversary.

For thirty years, the Chaguanas Chamber has stood as a pillar of strength and leadership, serving not only as a voice for the business community but as a driving force behind the Chaguanas community. Your legacy is one built on visionary leadership, resilience in the face of challenges, and a deep commitment to business advocacy, development, and innovation.

The Couva Point Lisas Chamber is proud to reflect on the many ways in which our organisations have collaborated to further our shared mission. Over the years, our partnership has grown stronger through mutual support, joint initiatives, and a united

approach to tackling the issues that matter most to our members and by extension the national community.

Together, we have championed the cause for economic growth, regional and national development, standing as steadfast advocates for the prosperity and empowerment of our business communities.

As the Chaguanas Chamber looks back on 30 years of service and achievement, I commend your leadership, your members, past and present, and all those who have contributed to your continued success. This anniversary is a celebration of vision, hard work, and an enduring belief in the power of enterprise.

We at the Couva Point Lisas Chamber of Commerce look forward to continuing our collaborative journey, building on the foundation of partnership, trust, and shared purpose. May your Chamber continue to rise to greater heights in service to business, community, and country.

Once again, congratulations on this extraordinary achievement. Here's to the next chapter of progress, innovation, and impact.



# GREETINGS: PAST PRESIDENTS

STEPHEN CADIZ  
Past President, 2008-2010

## Congratulations to the CCIC on its 30-year anniversary!

A true milestone for a Chamber of Commerce located in the fastest growing business area in the country. The CCIC has played a major role in the development of the business sector creating the space for major investment.

Becoming part of the Chaguanas business community in 1987 I have seen the area move leaps and bounds from what was a relatively small area of commerce. Chaguanas is now the mecca for retail, manufacturing and the services industry. Its location right off the main thoroughfare, central to the two

largest populated areas, makes it ideal for business.

Its strategic location is also a beacon for people making decisions about how far a distance they will be willing to travel to and from their places of employment. This adds to the attraction of Chaguanas.

The possibilities are unlimited!

Congratulations are very much in order to the President Mr. Baldath Maharaj and his Board of Directors on this very important anniversary celebration. We wish the President, the Directors and all staff members true success for the CCIC in the coming years.

Chaguanas—the place to be!

ZAMANATH "BILLY" ALI  
Past President, 2010 - 2013

## People focused, service driven

When I reflect on my time as President of the Chaguanas Chamber of Industry and Commerce (CCIC), I do so with a deep sense of gratitude, humility, and pride. Chaguanas has always been more than a central business district; it is a symbol of entrepreneurship, diversity, and progress. To have served as a steward of its economic development through the Chamber remains one of the most rewarding chapters of my professional life.

At the heart of the Chamber's mission has always been its people—our members, our partners, and the wider community whom we serve. During my presidency, I focused on strengthening the Chamber's role as a bridge: between the public and private sectors, between legacy businesses and emerging entrepreneurs, and between traditional practices and modern innovations.

Chaguanas was rapidly evolving during my time in office. As the fastest-growing borough in Trinidad and Tobago, the needs of our business community were expanding. There was demand for better infrastructure, stronger representation at the national level, and access to tools that could help local businesses remain competitive in an increasingly global marketplace. We responded by becoming more visible, vocal, and engaged, while celebrating our heritage through functions for Indian Arrival Day and Emancipation Day.

Our advocacy efforts were amplified—we sat at the table with policymakers, ensuring that the voices of Chaguanas business owners and the wider community

were heard on issues ranging from reducing crime and infrastructural development to improving traffic management and the availability of foreign exchange. We held forums and consultations that brought together business owners, government officials, and the community to openly discuss the future of commerce in the region.

Advocacy was only part of the story. We understood that for our members to thrive, they needed practical support. Under my leadership, the Chamber increased its emphasis on capacity building, hosting seminars and networking events that connected our members with Government officials and ministries, members of the Protective Services, financial institutions, and business advisers—and this continues to date.

Of course, the Chamber's achievements are never the result of one person; they are the outcome of collective will. I was fortunate to serve alongside a passionate and competent Board of Directors, as well as a diverse and forward-thinking membership base.

Together, we faced challenges, seized opportunities, and moved the Chamber—and by extension, Chaguanas and Central Trinidad—forward, positively impacting national development.

I must extend my sincere thanks to the Presidents and Directors who served before me, from those who founded the Chamber to those who led up to my own tenure. We must never forget their invaluable contributions. I wish to extend my congratulations to the current President, Mr. Baldath Maharaj, and his Board on their achievements thus far, and I convey my best wishes for continued success in all their current and future endeavours.



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Mr. Sunil Moonasar  
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Mr. Sajjad Hamid  
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# HISTORY OF CCIC

The Chaguanas Chamber of Industry and Commerce (CCIC) in Trinidad was established in 1994 and officially incorporated in September 1998.

## Formation and Purpose

Widely referred to as the Power Chamber, CCIC was formed to serve as the voice of the central business community in Chaguanas. Its vision is to be a "one stop shop" for commercial services for its members, fostering an efficient business environment to enhance prosperity and commercial success.

## The Beginnings of Chamber

For the first nine years of its existence, the Chamber was housed at Daisy's on Market Street. Meetings then moved to Kampo Restaurant on Ramsaran Street. Those attending the initial meetings included: Robert Balroop, Kenneth Medford, Vishnu Boodoosingh, Naresh Roonarine, Franklyn Marajh, Fleming Joseph, and Anon Naipaul.

Its first president was the late Kenneth "Chic" Medford, who served from 1994 to 1997.

Since then, the organisation has grown significantly and is now located at 17 Cumberbatch Street, Chaguanas.

## Role and Activities

The Chamber works by proactively partnering with governmental and community entities. It offers programmes and benefits to address business needs and interests, assists members in connecting, and aims to create a vibrant economy across all sectors.

**Advocacy and Representation:** A core function of the CCIC has been to promote, develop, and protect the well-being of its members. It represents Chaguanas businessmen on both local and national issues and advocates on matters affecting businesses.

**Community and Economic Development:** The CCIC is committed to contributing to the socio-economic recovery and broader national development of Chaguanas. It plays a critical role in guiding its membership and the borough toward economic recovery, collaborating with government ministries like the Ministry of Trade and Industry to develop policies and programmes for sustainable businesses and economic growth.

**Milestones and Initiatives:** It has sought increased cooperation with Central-based organisations

and State agencies, signing Memorandums of Understanding with entities like YTEPP and Servol's Chaguanas Regional Life Centre.

The Chamber has also expanded its reach internationally, signing an MoU with the Mississauga Board of Trade 2014, visiting the Dubai Chamber of Commerce in and offering trade missions to Guyana in 2024.

The CCIC regularly hosts monthly breakfast meetings featuring high-level players in government, politics, and economic and social spheres.

CCIC also host an annual awards ceremony to recognise individuals and businesses who have shown resilience, innovation, and philanthropy.

**The Power Chamber continues to be a significant pillar of strength in the Borough of Chaguanas, working towards the growth and development of businesses and advancing the commercial, industrial, professional, agricultural, and civic interests of the area.**





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## CCIC Presidents over the years

The Chaguanas Chamber of Industry and Commerce (CCIC) was established in 1994.

Here is a list of its past presidents with their dates of service.

- Kenneth "Chic" Medford: 1994 - 1997
- Douglas Lucky Samaroo: 1997 - 1999
- Kelvin Tang Niang: 1999 - 2001
- Richard Sirjoo: 2001 - 2003
- Rudy Maharaj: 2003 - 2005
- Gavin Seemungal: 2005 - 2008
- Stephen Cadiz: 2008 - 2010
- Zamanath Ali: 2010 - 2013
- Richie Sookhai: 2013 - 2016 (First Term)
- Vishnu Charran: 2017 - 2021
- Richie Sookhai: 2021 - 2023 (Second Term)
- Baldath Maharaj: 2023 - Present (elected for a three-year term as of June 2024)



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# THE ICONS OF CHAGUANAS

## Vishnu Boodoosingh: Bringing a vision to life

The Chaguanas Chamber of Industry and Commerce was born out of necessity. A clear need existed for a pressure group in and around the Chaguanas area to support local business owners, particularly regarding national issues and traffic congestion.

The Chamber was the brainchild of the late Kenneth Medford and, as Project Manager, I assisted him in bringing this vision to life.

Its inception occurred in the early 1990s, following the development of Medford Gas Station—the country's first newly constructed filling station. This project was fraught with difficulties, from land acquisition to securing a reliable and regular fuel supply. It was a difficult journey to open a privately owned filling station.

Compounding these challenges, the Government of the day altered the flow of traffic both on the Chaguanas Main Road and directly in front of the new station. This change threatened to negatively impact local businesses. Business owners often view these decisions differently, sometimes finding themselves in direct contradiction to state policy.

Traffic was, and remains, a major issue in Chaguanas. Altering the flow without consultation

with the business community directly affected their income and sales. A pressure group was urgently required to effect positive change for the betterment of Chaguanas.

We proceeded to register the organisation, create a logo, and hold regular meetings. Through numerous press releases and consistent efforts, the Chamber began to successfully advocate for the borough.

And from those beginnings, the Chamber has continuously grown over the years, consistently moved from strength to strength.

### **Our very first meeting comprised:**

Kenneth Medford  
Vishnu Boodoosingh  
Naresh Roopnarine  
Anon Naipaul  
Robert Ramroop  
Franklin Marajh  
Flemming Joseph

### **About Vishnu Boodoosingh**

He is a Chartered Accountant and Land Developer.

An alumnus of Iere High School, Boodoosingh received a Government Scholarship in 1973 to pursue his studies in London. Upon his return, he began his career in the public service, working for four years at the Ministry of Health. His dedication led to a second scholarship, where he focused on Project Management.

During his tenure at the Ministry of Health, he gained valuable experience, working closely with the then Minister of Health Kamaludin Mohammed.

Boodoosingh transitioned out of the Civil Service and started his private sector career as an accountant at Well Services in Palmiste. It was here that he gained significant knowledge and a passion for land development.

Over the years, he has established himself as an influential developer, a passion that has become his primary focus. His notable development projects include:

- The construction of two malls.
- The establishment of five gas stations across the country, with the first being Medford in Chaguanas.



Vishnu Boodoosingh



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# THE ICONS OF CHAGUANAS

## Robert Ramroop (Daisy's Exclusive): Success comes with hard work

### The journey

My inspiration are my parents, Daisy Rampersad and Rajkumar Ramroop, who started as pavement vendors. They had one location and eventually a second so straight out of high school I went into the business.

Some of the challenges in the early days were trying to get that bit of market share, sourcing the right items at the right prices because we were fairly new in the business; importation was a challenge for us.

Daisy's was registered in March of 1981, but we started in 1979. At present, we have branches in Eleanor Street, Main Road and M6 Plaza.

### What values have guided your decision-making over the years?

Born and bred in Chaguanas, his drive for success has been his core value. Since I was young I admired my parents I always wanted to be successful.

### As a founding member, what vision did you and your group have for the organisation?

To make sure Chaguanas is a better place. The business community did not have a voice; whereby we can lobby the different ministries and government to make Chaguanas better. We were challenged with traffic and drainage issues at the time.



Robert Ramroop

### How has your involvement with the Chamber shaped your approach to business and leadership?

It gave me a different perspective. Meeting with the business community allowed me to see different ways or different approaches two issues within the community. Over the year meeting with the various agencies help me in the way I run my business.

### What advice do you have for young entrepreneurs looking to get involved in business or community leadership?

You have to be committed and willing to go the long haul. Success does not come overnight, it is a lot of hard work a lot of commitment. You are married to a business; you work seven days a week. Unless you are not committed to doing that, you are not going to be successful especially in the current climate that we are with an economy that is a bit sluggish at this point.

### You have witnessed tremendous growth in Chaguanas over the years, what are the most striking changes you've seen?

Chaguanas has transformed over the years.

The amount of businesses and the change in business models. What we were doing 15 to 20 years ago that model does not work now.

### What would you like to see happen next in Chaguanas' development?

Before we get to city status, and we should be awarded city status, we need to alleviate issues such as traffic and drainage.

Have the new area people gravitate to Endeavour where you have Heartland. Xtra Foods, Pennywise Plaza, M6 Plaza, Price Plaza; everything is happening on that strip commercially.

We enlisted a traffic consultant Ray Furlonge, and we proposed an overpass and underpass and this was submitted to the Traffic Management Branch of the Ministry of Works.

Where we have thousands more cars on the road, we haven't seen any new roads in the borough of Chaguanas.

The planners at Ministry of Planning and Town and Country should have a 30-to-40-year plan to improve infrastructural work.

# CONGRATULATIONS

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*From the Management and Staff of*



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# THE ICONS OF CHAGUANAS

## Vishnu Charran: 75 years of business, building the heart of Chaguana

### The journey

The story of the Charran business began in 1950 with my father, Roopnarine Charran. He founded R Charran & Sons, a company situated right across from the Chaguana market on the main road.

When he passed away in 1975, my siblings and I formally established Charran Brothers Ltd a year later in 1976. Even before his passing, we had already started expanding. We had established ourselves all over, starting from Chaguana—which always remained the main branch—and moving on to Sangre Grande, along the East-West Corridor, and out to St James and Diego Martin.

I am the last of 12 children—eight boys and four girls.

We initially began as a haberdashery, a general store. The community was small, and so were the number of businesses in the area, so we carried whatever the people were asking for.

As the population grew and flourished, Chaguana started to expand, and more businesses moved into

the area. This is when we made a pivotal decision: we began to reduce our range of products and decided to focus on education. That's how we got involved in selling schoolbooks and school supplies.

Over time, we went further by getting into manufacturing. We became the leading manufacturer of school uniforms, from preschool to secondary schools, across Central Trinidad. This is now a very large part of our business. We subcontract a number of small factories that produce work under our brand, which assures us of the highest quality and standard.

We pride ourselves on offering the best quality and service. The only reason we've been here for over 75 years is that we must be doing something right. We are not just a bookstore; we are a brand.

### Championing the Business Community

My brother, Anthony Charran, along with other members of the community, initially formed the Chaguana Business Association. This association was later absorbed by the Chaguana Chamber of Industry and Commerce.

### What was Chaguana like back then?

The boom in Chaguana was driven by competitive prices. A lot of vendors came in during the week and on weekends, making it a very competitive area for shopping, offering bargains, fanfare, and crowds—especially during Christmas time. People would come from all over to shop.

The hours for shopping extended, including Sundays, to cater to people from all over. One year, we at Charrans decided to test out Christmas Day shopping. We placed an ad that we were opening on Christmas morning, and we never expected so many people. We tried it on Boxing Day, and it was the same thing. Then everyone started to open on Christmas Day and Boxing Day. I believe we set the trend.

You can come to Chaguana any day of the year; business never stops.

### Biggest Challenges and Future Plans

Chaguana has been growing exponentially over the years, but there has been no emphasis on



Vishnu Charran

# THE ICONS OF CHAGUANAS

developing the borough's infrastructure. They've had development plans for 20 to 30 years now.

The Chamber has been at the forefront, championing this by inviting experts and making proposals to the government. But politics has a way of getting into things. These plans included developing the Monroe Road Flyover and traffic management down to Chaguana, but very little has been done. We are hoping that this administration can introduce the plans for traffic management in the borough.

Decentralising ministries into this central area has been on the discussion table for some time. We would like to see some of those plans come to fruition. There has already been a trend in the private sector, as some businesses have been moving their distribution centres and manufacturing sectors into Chaguana and the central region.

All we need is for the government to decentralise. We are looking forward to that.

## Values and Advice for Young Entrepreneurs

You learn a lot from your parents and from your

early days when you had nothing. You learn what it is to make sacrifices. Growing up, I cut cane; I planted rice and sold in the market with my parents—that is my root.

My purpose, and the purpose of the Chamber, is to help those fledgling businesses—to empower them, guide them, and mentor them so they could become big businesses.

The Chamber is here to grow and move Central Trinidad, establish manufacturing, distribution, and export, and work with various agencies like CARIRI, NEDCO, and the Ministry of Trade to see how best we can develop central businesses.

The world has become small. We need to change people's mindset from a small-country mentality into a mind that thinks global. If you don't understand how to think globally, you won't be able to progress in life.

My advice is simple: read, study, travel, and never stop learning. The Chamber is there to assist you.

**Mr. Vishnu Charran is a current Board member and a former President of CCIC**

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# THE ICONS OF CHAGUANAS

## Anon Naipaul: Celebrating 60 years of success

**“Sixty years is more than a milestone. It is a celebration of faith in God and diligent work with a higher purpose.”**

As we mark the 60th anniversary of Xtra Foods, I am filled with deep gratitude and humility. This milestone is not just a celebration of longevity but a tribute to the people whose faith, hard work and dedication built and sustained this company across generations.

Our story began in Felicity when my parents Naipaul and Leela Sukdeo opened a small parlour in the heart of an agricultural community. Guided by their values of discipline, service to others and devotion to God, they expanded that humble venture into a supermarket on the Chaguanas Main Road. Coincidentally, or should I say, propitiously, the supermarket was opened in the same month I was born, July 1965.

From the very beginning they treated every customer and employee as family, living by the mantra “Service to humanity is service to God.” Those words became the moral compass of our business and laid a core foundation for our corporate social responsibility.

I also acknowledge my elder siblings whose sacrifices and dedication alongside my parents paved the way for what Xtra Foods has become. Their guidance and wisdom continue to shape our direction today.

When I assumed leadership at the age of 24

after completing my studies abroad, I carried those same values forward. These values, augmented and enriched by those developed through my own life experience, have steered our company, as well, from its humble beginnings. For the past 36 years they have guided every decision personally and professionally as we grew from a single store to a national supermarket chain serving communities across Trinidad and Tobago.

Our success has always been driven by our people. To our employees, your loyalty, diligence and commitment to excellence are the backbone of this company. You are not just members of staff, you are family. Xtra Foods is proud to have provided opportunities for growth and advancement to so many of you all. As we continue to expand, we will remain steadfast in creating even more opportunities for those who believe that the sky is the limit.

To our suppliers, I extend sincere appreciation for your continued partnership and support. You help us deliver Xtra value to our customers who remain at the heart of everything we do. To our customers, thank you for your trust, loyalty and the privilege of serving you. You are the reason this 60-year journey has been possible.

Xtra Foods has always believed that serving customers, means serving communities. We are not merely building supermarkets, we are creating opportunities, generating jobs, fostering innovation, supporting families and contributing to national growth. Our collective effort strengthens the very fabric of our society.

To the families of our long-serving employees, thank you for your patience and support through the years. Behind every Awardee stands a family whose encouragement makes it all possible.

As we look to the future, let us remain grounded in the legacy that brought us here, faith, service, excellence, humility and placing God as our Shepherd.

To all of our employees, I love you all. I care about you and your families deeply and I take this opportunity to remind us of the words of a well-known African proverb, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

May our collective efforts continue to bless our beloved and beautiful nation of Trinidad and Tobago.



Anon Naipaul

# THE ICONS OF CHAGUANAS

## Franklyn Marajh: 40 years of hard work, passion, and the power of starting small

### The journey

This September, Fair & Square celebrated 40 years in the retail business as a corporate entity. The whole concept was birthed at the Chaguanas market, where I spent most of my formative years.

Most of the people who started at the Chaguanas market are successful business owners in the borough today. I will always maintain that this market is what truly built Chaguanas. Individuals who were active in the market are now business owners, skilfully applying lessons learned—especially in pricing and marketing merchandise—from their market experience.

I was born in Chase Village. Both my parents were market vendors, each operating two separate spots. The market was where we spent most of our time. We had a cot where the youngest would sleep; we ate, slept, and even bathed there. Even while I was attending High School, most of our free time was spent assisting at the market.

Even on a Sunday, when most people were resting, we had chores: cleaning the vehicle, cleaning the warehouse, and repacking the van. We only had free time after all those tasks were completed.

Fair & Square started 40 years ago in Centre City Mall. We stayed there for 10 years, during which time we were able to acquire the Chaguanas Main Road property. It was there that my wife, Marlene, and I truly built the company. We then expanded to Mid Centre

Mall and Yard Street, Chaguanas (which was later sold).

The Endeavour branch was opened about 15 years ago, as we recognised the critical need for ample parking facilities, which this location provides.

### What are some of the biggest challenges you faced?

Presently, the biggest challenge is the U.S. dollar shortage. Our business was built on variety and competitive prices, and today, we are unable to fully meet that promise due to the unavailability of the US dollar.

It reminds me of when we first started: we didn't have enough TT dollars to pay our suppliers. We had to make do with what we had. Today, we have the TT dollars, but we're in the same boat, unable to get enough U.S. dollars to pay our foreign suppliers. These suppliers, however, are standing by us and continue to sell us goods because of our long-standing business relationship.

Fair & Square isn't just a name; it's how we do business, it's how we operate every day. I live by my name, and I teach my four children the same.

### What was Chaguanas like when you started in business 40 years ago?

It was a real struggle, trying to build your name, a brand, and a loyal clientele. We started the business without much money, relying solely on our reputation and promises.

### What values have guided you through this journey?

My father was a market vendor, and people looked up to him in terms of merchandising and pricing; that is fundamentally what we do here. I like to offer people products and prices that they can truly appreciate.

We also believe in giving back to society and have been doing so all our lives, especially to those in need within the Chaguanas community.

### What was your involvement in the Chamber?

Fair & Square only rejoined the Chamber two years ago, but I was actually one of the founding persons of the Chamber.

The catalyst for forming the Chamber was a traffic



Franklyn Marajh

# THE ICONS OF CHAGUANAS

management plan that blocked the Chaguanas Main Road. Authorities requested that all store owners receive goods before or after working hours. This was mission impossible, as no supplier would deliver goods to an entity after hours, creating a massive accessibility issue.

The State was unwilling to listen to individual business owners unless we formed an entity to represent the collective needs of Chaguanas businesses.

Once formed, the Chamber dealt with a myriad of issues, including the exorbitant insurance costs facing business owners and problems with building certificates and Town and Country Planning approvals.

## What do you to see next for Chaguanas as a borough?

We absolutely need to take care of this traffic situation. What we need is a flyover close to Barakah grounds that goes straight across to the reserve road

next to the fire station. This would allow communities from Pierre Road and Felicity to exit Chaguanas (either North or East) without coming into the town centre. This is what will truly ease congestion.

Only those living in areas such as Lange Park or Montrose will use the existing Endeavour Fly Over, which is why we continue to have a major bottleneck.

Another critical item, one that has been discussed since the Chamber was first formed, is the need to build a multi-storey carpark in the savannah to alleviate the severe parking issue shoppers face. New shopping areas like Pennywise Plaza, Xtra Food Plaza, M6 Plaza, and Heartland Mall are having their growth stifled due to traffic congestion and limited parking.

## Do you have full entrepreneurs or startups?

Hard work and dedication are the secret to success; you must have a passion.

Not all businesses require large sums of money to set up, start small and don't give up.



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## FAIR AND SQUARE

### Celebrates 40 years

In September 1985, the first branch of Fair and Square was opened at Centre City Mall. Just three years later, in 1988, the well-known branch on the Chaguanas Main Road opened its doors, a location that quickly became a favourite among the people of Chaguanas. It was more than just a store, it was a trusted part of the community.

With growing momentum, another branch was opened in 1989 at Mid Centre Mall and again on Yard Street, Chaguanas in 1993, bringing its business to even more customers, solidifying Fair and Square's presence as a household name.

In 2003, Fair and Square established its flagship location in Endeavour, Chaguanas, where customer experience is a top priority. With safe, secure parking and a warm, welcoming environment, it continues to serve the community with convenience and care.

Though Fair and Square has its roots planted in Chaguanas, its reputation has stretched far beyond, drawing customers from across Trinidad and Tobago, and even the wider Caribbean. It's a business that goes beyond convenience; it's a brand that people trust.

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**Fair & Square congratulates the Chaguanas Chamber of Industry and Commerce on its 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**



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# THE ICONS OF CHAGUANAS

## Sunil Moonasar: Adversity brings strength - The Eye See You Ophthalmics Story

### The Journey

After working for an international company for thirteen years, my job was made redundant in February 2011. With a mortgage to pay, no vehicle, two small children with their stay-at-home mum, and a lot of experience in developing the regional ophthalmic market, this is where I learnt that adversity brings strength.

It's like when a diesel mechanic is made redundant from a bus company: either he goes to work for another vehicle company, or he opens his own business because of his skill, experience, and institutional knowledge.

Being sent home was a blessing in disguise.

Two companies approached me to be their sales representatives, but I told them I would like to be their exclusive distributor for the Caribbean. Three ophthalmologists encouraged me to go for it, they said, 'start your company and we will buy from you'.

That's how our niche and start-up company was born.

Eye See You Ophthalmic & Medical Supplies Ltd was formed in March 2011 in a small 12'x20' room in the garage of my childhood home in Edinburgh Gardens, Chaguanas with one driver, one customer care person and my wife, Nadine.

### Values that have guided me

This Chaguanas location was ideal since I had easy

access to all parts of the country: easy distribution pathway and the rent was free as my mom still lived on the premises at that time.

My dad, who passed away the year before opening the company, and my mom, who died two years after, always believed in hard work and sacrifice brings success. These are also my core values.

I am passionate about ophthalmology and the optical industry. I love what I do. The sacrifices made are seen as a normal day at work.

### Biggest challenges

As a start-up company (not inherited or purchased), I took the largest risk of my life where I used all my life savings (the banks didn't want to lend) and the belief that I am going to invest myself into my company to give the best quality product and the best customer care never experienced before in the ophthalmology business.

Fast forward to 2025, the biggest challenge is access to US dollars and Euro dollars to support an essential business model that supplies eye drops, surgical consumables, cataract and retina machines to all the market segments in T&T and the Caribbean region.

### Chamber involvement

I have been a member of the Chamber for 10 years, four of which I have been Secretary/Director and very active on several committees including functions, traffic and crime and membership/SME development.

Along with the President and Executives of the Chamber, I try to elevate the Chamber on national issues, fund raising dinners, health fairs and awards selection.

Eye See You Ophthalmics has supported the Chamber in the form of sponsorships for several activities including the Annual Health Fair where we set up eye screening, dry eye, glaucoma and cataract testing for patients.

### Changes in Chaguanas

Thousands of young entrepreneurs having the confidence in opening their own niche businesses like mine, whether it's on any busy main road or even in their homes.



Sunil and Nadine Moonasar

# THE ICONS OF CHAGUANAS

Geographically, Chaguanas has expanded to Felicity in the west, Longdenville to the east, Freeport to the south and Monroe Road/Warren to the north.

The competitive nature of the businesses in Chaguanas; the cost of living is more affordable in Chaguanas—homes, food, health services.

## Future

As the Chairman of the Traffic and Crime Committee of the Chaguanas Chamber, I would like to see a proper road development plan actioned with two overpasses being built (one at Brentwood and the other by Soogrim Trace intersection), construction of bypass roads on the outskirts of Chaguanas, easy access to the northbound and southbound onto the highway

I also envision:

- A Chaguanas Health Centre in one location.
- A centralised taxi hub located where the old Health Centre was on Chaguanas Main Road.
- More police and police presence.
- The Borough of Chaguanas to evolve into a self-contained city where all Government statutory departments are located and you don't have to leave Chaguanas to shop, dine, play, party, and exercise.

## Advice for Entrepreneurs/Start-ups

- Work hard, sacrifice, create a smart sustainable business, and be fair to yourself and your staff. Remember, when you hire your employees, you also hire their families.
- Share the successes and disappointments and show resilience. Your family will understand your long hours and sacrifices, and they will continue to support and love you.
- The customer care experience: treat your customers like how you would like to be treated. Wow them, so they will be loyal and remain your customers for life.

- If you are planning to do a start-up, try to finance yourself (or use your family or friends' money) because the banks seldom lend to start-ups, and you end up working to pay the bank.
- Do not take out your dividends/profits for the first five years so you will have enough cash flow. When you are ready to expand, then use the bank's money. They will come looking for your business then.
- Read trends in your industry or business, use social media wisely and strategically.
- Learn to walk away from some business deals; sometimes it's not worth it.
- Network with other businesses and your community; join a business Chamber, preferably Chaguanas Chamber.
- Be patriotic to your school and your country.
- Enjoy what you do and don't give up that burning light for success.

## Giving back

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Philanthropy plays an integral role in our company where we support local cultural groups, sporting teams and primary and secondary schools' events.

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**Mr. Sunil Moonasar is the Secretary of the Board and chairman of the Traffic and Crime committee.**



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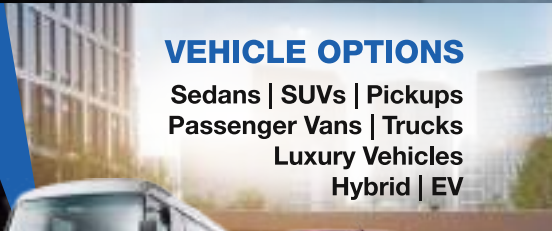
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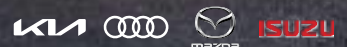
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# THE ICONS OF CHAGUANAS

## Sase Narayn Bisnauth (Radica's): Let honesty, truth and transparency guide you

### The journey

I came to Trinidad in 1974 to attend the funeral of my aunt who died. My father didn't like travelling so he sent me to represent the family with \$5 in my pocket. And that started the ball rolling.

I came to the funeral and after that my uncle said, "You can't leave." He was alone with an adopted girl and I was needed to help run the business.

My uncle had set up a small handbag factory for my dad in Guyana so I was able to assist my uncle in his business. But after nine months we couldn't work together anymore. My uncle was an alcoholic and I was a non drinker so that couldn't work.

The deal was, he would be returning to Guyana in a year or two. I would work for him free of charge for now and when he leaves, he would leave the business to me.

He never left. We couldn't get along anymore so we parted ways. He gave me \$350 and with that I started my own business.

I manufactured bags for 10 years then went into the textile business. We were able to move it from a mom-and-pop business to having four locations and over 100 employees.

### What was some of your biggest challenges?

Proper Trinidad language: everybody used to laugh at me in those days.



Sase Narayn Bisnauth

After 51 years I learned to speak properly and now everybody is heading back to Guyana and they want to sound Guyanese.

### Can you describe a moment when you knew your business had truly made it?

My business made it when I realised the whole of Trinidad and Tobago was depending on us for the best quality goods. We are the trendsetter and the price setter and we are proud to know we are employing people for the last 50 years. People who are very proud of the company and how we operate.

### What values have guided your decision-making over these years?

The values that really guide us are the value of honesty, the value of truth, the value of being as transparent as possible between customers and our company, between suppliers and our company. We travel around the world to supply what we have on our shelves and we do not supply anything we cannot use ourselves.

The Trinidad marketplace is very competitive, very industrious. It's one of the largest marketplace in the Caribbean with a national budget at one time of \$60 billion. When you compare that with other countries in the Caribbean, they were at \$1 to \$3 billion. When you look at our financial industry, we are huge and robust.

I once rented the Indian bank some space at one point in time and the manager told me that he could not understand how a small nation, with one and a half million people, could turn over more business than some of the largest cities in India with more than 3 million people.

I set up a branch of Radica's in Miami for 10 years and I could tell you we are ahead by miles.

### What was the vision for the creation of the Chamber?

In 1984, there were very few business organisations: only one Chamber downtown Port-of-Spain, the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturing Association and there was also the South Chamber which was introduced in 1956.

# COMMUNITY ICON

We had a lot of visionaries who formed this Chamber. Kenneth Medford, Robert Ramroop (Daisy's), Flemming Joseph come to mind.

Our vision was to make the Chaguanas Chamber a pioneer of Chambers. We had so many issues that it was impossible to discuss within any other business organisations.

We had traffic from day one, crime, unemployment, infrastructural issues, businesses were suffering due to limited parking and a whole lot of other issues. It was comforting to form our own Chamber at the time.

From the get-go we engaged with the borough corporation. At that time the market vendors association and they were making strong representation. We were able to partner with them to create a better environment for business.

When the Chamber was formed it was a backbone for all the businesses in the area. They could come to us, we would make representation for them on their issues.

The first office opened at Daisy's on the Main Road opposite the market. Our membership fee was \$300. We grew to 25 to 30 businesses in the beginning. In those days we had more vendors than businesses.

The Chamber remained at Daisy's for years until Kampo Restaurant offered a space for regular meetings.

All the presidents and boards throughout the years have done an excellent job. Chaguanas Chamber is where it is today because of this.

Being a part of so many organisations, and on so many boards, usually it's only a few people who do all the work; not only that, they sacrifice their own work and family to get things done .

The Chamber is no different. It is because of that sacrifice born by these businessmen that the Chamber is where it is today.

## What would you like to see next in Chaguanas' development?

I would like to see a solution to the traffic issue. We had a main road in my days, now we have a shopping strip, or several shopping strips. It is impossible to move around on a weekend in Chaguanas.

A lot of traces have turned into roads, and many are in disrepair. We lack proper street lighting and there is a lot of indiscriminate parking, the latter is cumbersome for many neighbourhoods. All these can improve.



## What advice do you have for young entrepreneurs?

In my days there were no higher purchase, you had to carry a great grandmother to get a loan in the bank. Today you can get furniture for a dollar. You can go to SBDC, NEDCO, a lot of government organisations and get facilities.

In my days there were no fax machines no cell phones so in today's world, the facilities and the infrastructure that are open to young entrepreneurs are the best. What we need is mindset. That's the set back.

A lot of people want to do business but have the wrong mindset.

The government has a programme that produces at least 4000 entrepreneurs a year. There's was one Port-of-Spain, Mayaro, Princes Town, Couva just to name a few.

I was a guest speaker and I have never seen so many entrepreneurs in one space.

The business sector is on a good footing. The access ability to market, to goods and services, to travel, to grants and funds and government programmes.

I could see there is a bright future for our entrepreneurs.

# THE ICONS OF CHAGUANAS

## Remembering Kenneth 'Chic' Medford

**In 2010 Kenneth "Chic" Medford received an award from the Chaguanas Chamber of Commerce for his contribution to business. This was his acceptance speech:**

Today I am grateful for the award given to me as a result of my contribution to business.

I recall the early days before the formation of the Chamber when we faced numerous difficulties with the traffic situation, vending, lack of recreational facilities, and the absence of a proper market. Crime was not a great problem, and our focus was how to build a Chamber to take the issues forward.

As the first president of the Chamber, I must say thanks to the pioneers: Bobby, Vishnu, Tang Nian, Roopnarine, and Anon Naipaul, and some other members of the business community. We were able to plan and organise ourselves to tackle our immediate problems.

Today our hard-fought battles have not been in vain. Our Chamber has grown from strength to strength with new members coming to the front.

I have contributed to the start of the Chaguanas Lions since I was the charter president, helping in many charitable causes up to today. Business has always been a way of life for my family and myself. We have had to struggle sometimes against all odds. We have succeeded most of the time, learning from our failures.

My greatest business venture was perhaps the start of Medford on the flyover. It had its genesis in my family since my father started in the gas station business in 1950 at the bottom of High Street, San Fernando. He was forced to move by the City Corporation to make way for new traffic arrangements. We were forced to look for another site and eventually found one here in Chaguanas. Trial Street gas station was run by my family from 1964 to this very day. The gas station business is a tough business, and the government of the day made it harder by not agreeing to honour its pledge of giving us an alternative site for the loss of the San Fernando property.

We won, eventually and we started planning for our new dream: a state-of-the-art gas station and c-store with all the facilities of a large North American site, tailored to our local setting.

This entailed visits to sites in North America and the Caribbean. Planning was slow and eventually, I bit



the bullet and placed my jahaji bundle on the flyover. with a loan from the bank and all my savings, I took a chance to set up a great business on the flyover.

We opened in 1999 against the advice of my Petroleum Dealers Association buddies who said that I was building a parlour to sell sweets in the bush.

The site was bushy with only Chan Ramlal in sight. I must say that we are now one the largest station in the English-speaking Caribbean with the following facilities:

- convenience store
- in-house bakery
- Royal Castle fast food outlet
- restaurant
- gym
- large gas station

I must give thanks to my father who asked me to cut short my studies in the UK where I graduated in business and return home to help in the gas station. He taught me the ropes and he is still there today at 84 years old. I have patterned my dedication to work from him. there are some lessons i have learned on the way:

- never give up
- stay focused on your dream
- work hard
- strive to do better
- never forget your friends
- give something back to the community

I must say thanks to the people of Trinidad & Tobago and especially the Chaguanas community who have patronised me over the years. to the Chamber and its members, thanks for the award.

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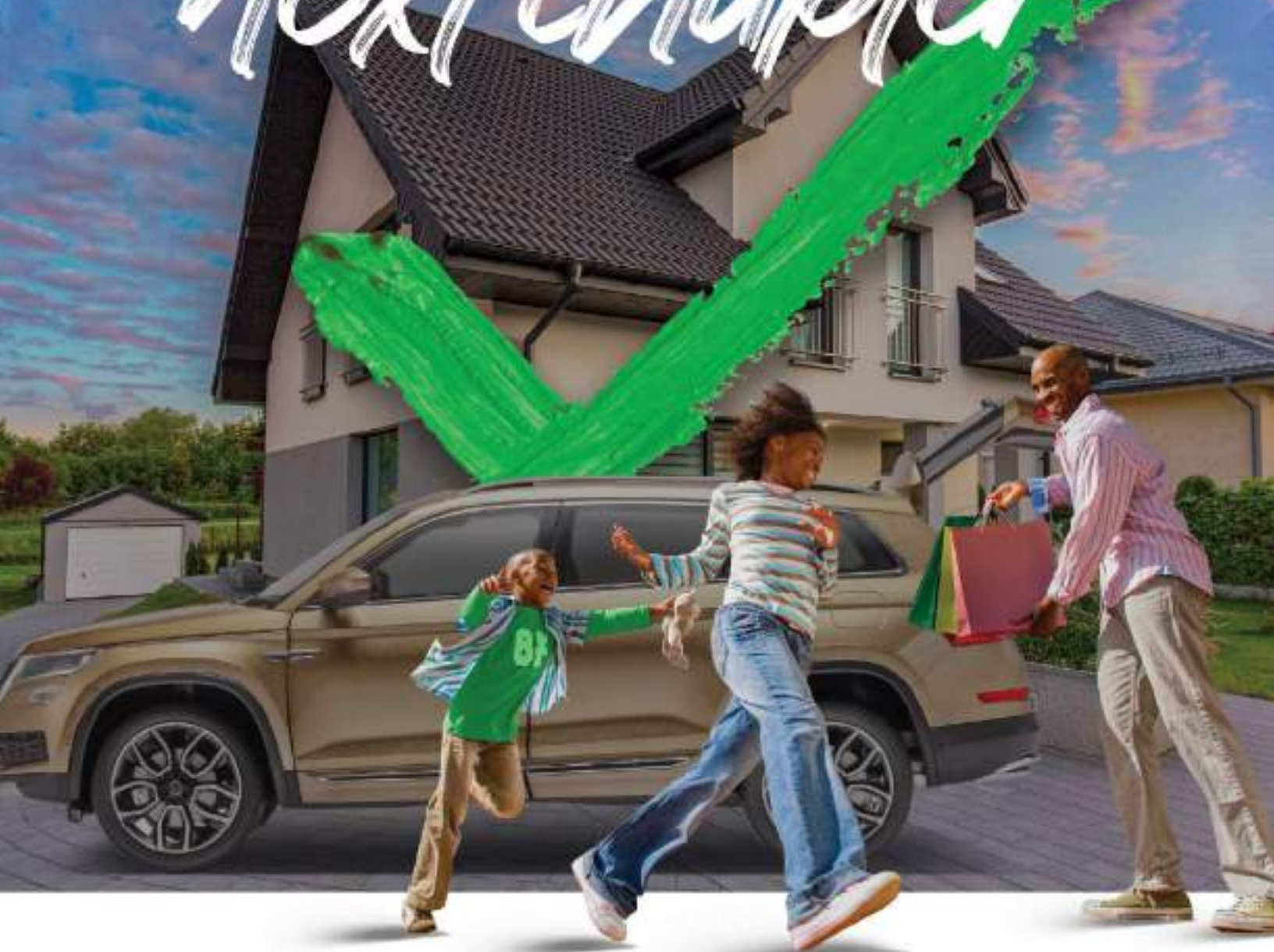
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# URBANISATION & DEVELOPMENT

## The rise of Chaguanas

Over the past three decades, Chaguanas, nestled in the heart of Trinidad, has undergone a breathtaking metamorphosis. What was once a predominantly agricultural and "bazaar town" has grown into Trinidad and Tobago's largest municipality and fastest-growing urban centre, a true testament to its strategic location, entrepreneurial spirit, and diverse population.

### From Cane Fields to Commercial Hub: A Rapid Transformation

Thirty years ago, Chaguanas, while already a significant market town, still bore the hallmarks of its agricultural past, surrounded mainly by sugar cane fields. Its elevation to borough status in 1990 was a pivotal moment, setting the stage for an unprecedented period of urbanisation and economic expansion. This rapid growth can be attributed to several key factors:

- **Strategic Central Location:** Positioned between the capital, Port-of-Spain, and the southern city of San Fernando, and intersected by major highways like the Uriah Butler/Solomon Hochoy, Chaguanas became

an ideal nexus for commerce and transportation. Historically, the railway network ensured Chaguanas as a junction hub, serving lines north toward Port-of-Spain/Arima and south toward San Fernando and Couva.

This central location made it attractive for both residential and commercial development, drawing people and businesses seeking convenient access to both north and south Trinidad.

- **Affordable Land and Housing:** Compared to the more established urban centres, Chaguanas offered more affordable land and housing options, especially in the early stages of its growth. Developments like Lange Park, Orchard Gardens, and Woodford Lodge emerged, catering to a growing middle class and those seeking to escape the higher costs of living in other areas.

- **Entrepreneurial Spirit and Vibrant Market Culture:** Chaguanas has long been known for its bustling marketplace, a hub for bargain shoppers and a reflection of the strong entrepreneurial drive within

## THE RISE OF CHAGUANAS

its community. This inherent commercial energy fuelled the growth of shopping plazas, malls, and independent businesses along the Chaguanas Main Road and beyond. Major retail hubs such as Centre City, Mid Centre, Price Plaza, and Xtra Foods Plaza have cemented its reputation as a shopping destination.

The fastest growing borough, expansion is evident:

To the North: Sun Plaza, Heartland Plaza, Pennywise Plaza, Xtra Foods Plaza, M6 Plaza

To the East: Brentwood Mall and Home Development. This shopping areas includes one of the largest Massy Foods and Hakka flagship restaurant.

To the West: Roopnarines

- **Cultural Heart:** Chaguanas is deeply rooted in culture, which has played a significant role in shaping its unique character and vibrancy. This cultural richness, evident in its festivals like Divali, Phagwa, Carnival which all contribute to its dynamic community spirit and attracts visitors from across the island.

- **Infrastructure Development (and its challenges):**

The establishment of the Chaguanas Borough

Corporation in 1991 brought a new era of local governance, leading to investments in roads, drainage, and public services. The construction of new health facilities and educational institutions has further supported the growing population.

### Population Boom and Shifting Demographics

While precise population figures for Chaguanas specifically over the entire 30-year period are difficult to isolate from national census data, the general trend indicates substantial growth.

In 2000, the population of Chaguanas and its surrounding communities was estimated to be over 90,000, with the borough itself at approximately 19,000.

By 2011, the borough population reached 83,489. Current estimates suggest the total population within the borough's influence is well over 128,000.

This influx has significantly altered the demographic landscape, transitioning Chaguanas from a largely rural agricultural area to a diverse and densely populated urban centre.



# THE RISE OF CHAGUANAS



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# THE RISE OF CHAGUANAS

## Chaguana Today: A Dynamic Future

Chaguana continues to thrive.

It remains a dynamic commercial and cultural hub, attracting investment and fostering a vibrant community. The CCIC along with the Chaguana Borough Corporation is actively pursuing local economic development initiatives, supporting SMEs, and working on infrastructure improvements. The ongoing growth of its retail and service industries, coupled with a robust real estate market, points to a continued upward trajectory.

Chaguana stands as a powerful example of organic urban expansion in the Caribbean. Its journey over the last 30 years showcases the immense potential that lies in central Trinidad.

The "pendulum" may have indeed swung towards the plantation, and Chaguana is now poised to become a true central City for Trinidad and Tobago.



*Busy Corner 1960s/70s*



*Busy Corner present day*

# FROM QUEUES TO CAPACITY: UNLOCKING T&T'S FOREIGN EXCHANGE TRAP

Trinidad and Tobago's foreign-exchange (FX) constraint is, at its core, a supply problem. We earn FX primarily through exports, with energy commodities accounting for roughly 80% of those earnings. Over the last decade, oil production fell by about 36% and natural gas output by roughly 33%, curbing export volumes and tightening FX inflows.

The macroeconomic picture reflects this: the current account surplus averaged more than US\$4.1 billion per year during 2011–2015, but only US\$1.5 billion per year from 2016–2024. As the surplus narrowed, gross reserves declined from roughly US\$10.7 billion in June 2016 to about US\$4.61 billion in August 2025. This reduced the system's FX buffer and heightened competition for limited US dollars (USD). With FX inflows from LNG and petrochemical exports declining—and an import-driven economy deeply dependent on foreign goods—shortages and long queues are no longer occasional. They are now a deepening crisis that threatens to choke businesses, disrupt supply chains, and destabilise livelihoods.

In this context, calls to devalue the TTD surface whenever shortages intensify. But devaluation is not a cure-all for a supply-constrained, import-reliant

economy. Our consumption and production depend heavily on goods that cannot be easily substituted domestically—pharmaceuticals, food inputs, clothing, machinery, electronics, and technology services. If the exchange rate weakens sharply, importers must still procure these essentials, and higher landed costs will cascade into rising consumer prices, squeeze real incomes, and raise operating costs for firms. These dynamic risks triggering wage-price pressures and undermining competitiveness rather than improving it.

The argument that a weaker currency would turbocharge exports is also weak when applied to our economic structure. Energy exports—crude, LNG, and gas derivatives such as methanol and ammonia—are priced in USD at global benchmarks. A cheaper TTD does not make these commodities more attractive to foreign buyers. The only way to raise FX from energy is to increase local production or benefit from higher world prices.

In the non-energy economy, many manufacturers quote prices in USD and depend heavily on imported inputs, equipment, packaging, logistics, and overseas marketing—all denominated in USD. A sharp devaluation, by raising the TTD cost of every USD obligation, would compress margins and discourage the very expansion we need. Smaller firms would be hit hardest, amplifying concentration and weakening the base for diversification.

The durable solution is to expand FX supply by building productive capacity in both energy and non-energy sectors, while improving private-sector conditions. On the non-energy side, we must remove obstacles to doing business that raise costs and slow throughput. Priorities include:

- Digitising customs with risk-based “green-lane” release and non-intrusive scanning to cut clearance times.
- Modernising port equipment and crane scheduling to reduce dwell times and freight variability.
- Enforcing a mandatory 24-hour window for releasing manufacturing inputs at the port.
- Rolling out true e-government services for permits, VAT refunds, and company filings to shorten cycle times and ease working-capital stress.



Dr Vaalmikki Arjoon

## FROM QUEUES TO CAPACITY: UNLOCKING T&T'S FOREIGN EXCHANGE TRAP

- Publishing statutory service-level agreements (SLAs) for approvals.
- Expanding serviced industrial spaces (factory shells, cold-chain warehousing, and logistics parks) to speed investor set-up.

Complementary measures—such as time-bound investment allowances for export-oriented machinery, export credit insurance for SMEs, and technical standards support—would boost non-energy output, improve reliability, and strengthen FX-earning capacity.

On the energy side, we must rebuild deliverability. In the last decade, policy focused on mature fields while aggregate gas output declined, and few new fields reached first gas. No blocks for exploration were offered between 2015 and 2022, and the discontinuation of accelerated capital allowances after 2017 dulled exploration appetite.

The priority now is a coherent upstream reset:

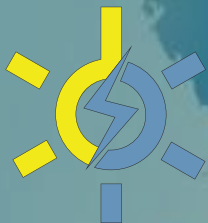
- Reintroduce modern fiscal allowances calibrated to risk and depth.
- Streamline approvals across the value chain.
- Create targeted incentives for marginal fields

that are sub-scale for majors like Shell and BP but viable for smaller upstream independents.

- Attract a wider slate of global energy companies into bid rounds, including small and mid-sized players, to widen the exploration funnel and make the sector more competitive.

Fast-tracking the final investment decision (FID) on the Calypso development and compressing the time from discovery to first gas are critical. Stability and clarity in fiscal terms, coupled with performance-based bonuses for deliverability and reliable offtake, would lift confidence and accelerate capital deployment. Because LNG and gas-derivative exports dominate FX earnings, restoring upstream volumes is indispensable. It is equally crucial that transfer-pricing legislation take effect to prevent billions in potential USD energy tax revenues from being shifted abroad.

Exchange-rate policy should remain anchored in the managed float, with any adjustment gradual to avoid triggering uncontrolled inflation, undermining small businesses, eroding business confidence, and destabilising the financial system. The exchange rate



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## CARIBBEAN TERRITORY



## FROM QUEUES TO CAPACITY: UNLOCKING T&T'S FOREIGN EXCHANGE TRAP

must be a tool that supports real economic activity—not a substitute for structural reforms and supply-side policies.

Because capacity takes time to build, near-term FX liquidity measures are warranted. The Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago (CBTT) could explore a time-bound currency or liquidity swap line with a credible foreign central bank to bolster confidence and supplement market USD. Such a swap would allow the CBTT to exchange TTD for a partner's foreign currency (such as USD), temporarily boosting reserves and providing short-term liquidity.

In parallel, authorised dealers can help by redeploying balance-sheet FX. Some maintain net-long foreign-currency positions—holding foreign assets in excess of foreign liabilities, around US\$1 billion. Portions of these positions, including marketable securities such as equities and US Treasuries, could be liquidated to increase FX allotments to the private sector.

Finally, transparency matters. In a constrained setting, FX becomes not just a means of payment but

also a store of wealth. Many with access to FX hold it in foreign accounts or use it to generate higher returns. This diverts scarce liquidity away from trade, investment, and essential imports, widening inequities and distorting access.

A more transparent framework prioritizing productive uses—such as exporters, SMEs, critical imports, and capital goods—would help restore confidence, ensure fairness, and keep FX circulating in ways that support broad-based economic activity. Coupled with business-environment reforms and an upstream reset, such a framework would shift the system from rationing to growth.

The ultimate objective is straightforward: restore energy volumes, expand non-energy exports, and strengthen the current account so that reserves rebuild and FX ceases to be a bottleneck to investment and living standards.

**Dr. Vaalmikki Arjoon is a current Board member and Vice- President of the CCIC**

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# TRADE MISSION TO GUYANA



*April 2024: President of Together We Win Guyana/Suriname, Marlon Joseph, left, Guyana's Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, Oneide Walrond, CCIC President Baldath Maharaj, T&T High Commissioner to Guyana Conrad Enill and the CCIC's trade mission to Guyana coordinator Kevin Ramgoolie.*

Chaguanas Chamber of Industry and Commerce (CCIC) spearheaded regional economic expansion with a pivotal Guyana Trade Mission.

In a decisive move to drive regional growth and foster enduring business linkages, the CCIC of Trinidad and Tobago orchestrated a significant four-day trade mission to Guyana in April 2024. This initiative, framed by Guyana's burgeoning economy marked a strategic commitment by the CCIC to facilitate cross-border collaboration and create new avenues for its member companies.

The mission, led by CCIC President Baldath Maharaj, and coordinated by CCIC Treasurer Kevin Ramgoolie, comprised a delegation of 16 companies spanning diverse sectors, including construction, manufacturing, services, and agriculture. The goal was

clear: to forge strategic alliances, explore the rapidly increasing opportunities in the Guyanese market, and establish a framework for mutual economic prosperity that would ultimately benefit the wider CARICOM community.

### **Value-Added Production and Innovation**

President Maharaj outlined a vision centred on leveraging the complementary strengths of the two nations. A primary area of focus for the CCIC was the agro-processing sector. Mr. Maharaj stressed the importance of partnering Trinidad's expertise in manufacturing and agro-processing with Guyana's abundant agricultural produce and arable lands. This synergy, he noted, is crucial for creating value-added products, which can significantly increase trade,

## TRADE MISSION TO GUYANA

generate employment, and enhance food security and economic resilience across the region.

Beyond agriculture, the CCIC's expansion strategy included a keen interest in technology and innovation. Mr. Maharaj identified immense potential for collaboration in this space, suggesting that Trinidad's vibrant tech start-up ecosystem could serve as a valuable partner for Guyanese entrepreneurs. Through knowledge exchange and mentorship, the mission aimed to catalyse the growth of Guyana's tech sector and position both countries as regional hubs of innovation.

### SMEs and Investment Climate

The CCIC's strategy was focussed on Small and Medium-sized Enterprises which Mr Maharaj highlighted as the "backbone of our economies." This focus is timely and strategic, recognising the global economic signal for a reduction in reliance on fossil fuels and the need for growth outside of the oil and gas sector.

By supporting SMEs, the CCIC seeks to drive inclusive growth and diversify the economic base of

both nations.

On the Guyanese side, the mission was met with governmental assurance. Minister of Tourism, Industry, and Commerce, Oneidge Walrond, reinforced Guyana's commitment to building an attractive, reliable, and diverse economy by creating an enabling environment that ensures the safety and security for investments to thrive.

The trade mission stands as a testament to the CCIC's proactive effort to lay the groundwork for enduring partnerships and to be a key driver in regional economic growth. By directly facilitating discussions and exploring opportunities, the CCIC is positioning itself and its member companies at the forefront of the Caribbean's emerging economic landscape.

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*Congratulations to the Chaguanas Chamber of Industry and Commerce on it's 30th Anniversary!*



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# SONS OF THE SOIL

## IAN ALLEYNE

### Shaping Media, Community, and Business Growth in Chaguanas

As the host of Crime Watch and founder of the Ian Alleyne Network, I've had the privilege of witnessing firsthand the evolution of Chaguanas, not just as a borough, but as a symbol of national progress and entrepreneurial strength. Through my platform, I've reported on the pressing issues that affect our people daily, from crime to bureaucracy, while also celebrating the innovation and resilience that define this dynamic business hub.

#### Changing Business Landscape in Chaguanas:

From my vantage point, the business environment in Chaguanas has undergone several major transformations over the past decade, but three stand out as the most significant.

#### Explosive Commercial Expansion:

Chaguanas has experienced an unprecedented boom in business activity, becoming one of the most vibrant and diverse commercial centers in the Caribbean. Every week, new businesses emerge, ranging from retail and services to manufacturing, making the borough a magnet for investors and consumers alike. However, this rapid expansion has also created traffic gridlock, with limited infrastructure struggling to keep pace with the borough's growth.

#### Integration of Security Technology:

In response to growing security concerns, more businesses are investing in technology to safeguard their operations. Smart cameras, digital surveillance systems, and integrated monitoring tools have become the new norm. This shift not only enhances safety but also reassures customers and employees that Chaguanas is evolving into a more secure and modern commercial space.

#### Rising Bureaucratic Challenges:

While business growth is strong, entrepreneurs face persistent challenges with bureaucratic inefficiencies. Agencies such as Customs and Excise often take weeks to process imports, leading to increased costs. Many business owners now face port rental fees that exceed the value of the goods themselves. This unnecessary red tape continues to frustrate business operators



Ian Alleyne

who simply want to grow, contribute, and employ.

#### The Challenges Facing Chaguanas:

Two key issues continue to undermine the borough's potential, traffic congestion and crime.

The borough's success has ironically become its biggest obstacle. Chaguanas' population and economic activity have grown beyond what its road network can handle. On any given day, hours are lost in gridlock, impacting productivity, delivery schedules, and overall quality of life. It's time for serious infrastructural intervention, new road network or overpasses that reflects Chaguanas' modern reality.

Crime remains another major concern. While law enforcement has made strides, the business community still faces risks that deter investment and affect day-to-day operations. We also have to bear in mind that the population increased by 50% over the last 12 years with the increase in manpower not keeping up with the pace. A greater police presence, community policing, and collaboration with media and civic bodies are essential to restoring confidence and safety in public spaces.

#### Collaboration:

The Ian Alleyne Network has long maintained a good relationship with the Chaguanas Chamber of Industry and Commerce (CCIC) and the Borough through philanthropic and community based initiatives. I have attended every major function over the past 5 years and was honored to receive the Chamber's award for Philanthropy, a recognition that symbolises our

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## IAN ALLEYNE

shared mission to uplift the community. Beyond that, my platforms facilitate anonymous reporting, allowing citizens to share information safely, which in turn supports the efforts of both the Chamber and local authorities to improve safety and accountability across the borough.

Our collaboration represents the type of private-public synergy that can truly transform communities, where business, media, and civic leadership come together to address real issues head on.

### Road Ahead for Chaguanas:

Looking to the future, my hope is that Chaguanas continues to evolve through smart, inclusive, and sustainable development. The first priority must be infrastructure, specifically, expanding and upgrading the road network. This is not just a convenience issue; it's an economic necessity. Without improved mobility, business efficiency and investment will continue to suffer.

Secondly, there must be continued investment in security, both human and technological. Surveillance systems, smart city technology, and greater law enforcement visibility can transform the perception and reality of safety in the borough.

Lastly, I would like to see streamlined government processes. Reducing bureaucracy in agencies like Customs and Town and Country would significantly boost business confidence and productivity.

### Vision for the Ian Alleyne Network:

Over the next five to ten years, my goal is to see the Ian Alleyne Network continue to expand its reach across the region and globally, connecting Caribbean people from Trinidad to the diaspora in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and beyond. Our mission remains the same, to bring critical issues "Straight to the Point", to be a voice for the voiceless, and to help those in need.

Since its inception, Crime Watch on Synergy TV has grown into one of the longest running and highest rated programs in the Caribbean. The Ian Alleyne Network now boasts over 40.1 million YouTube views, 6.6 million watch hours, 253,000 subscribers, 784,000 Facebook followers, 200,000 app users, and 400,000 website followers. Our audience spans Trinidad and Tobago, the wider Caribbean, and even regions as far as South Africa and Asia.

### Advice for Entrepreneurs:

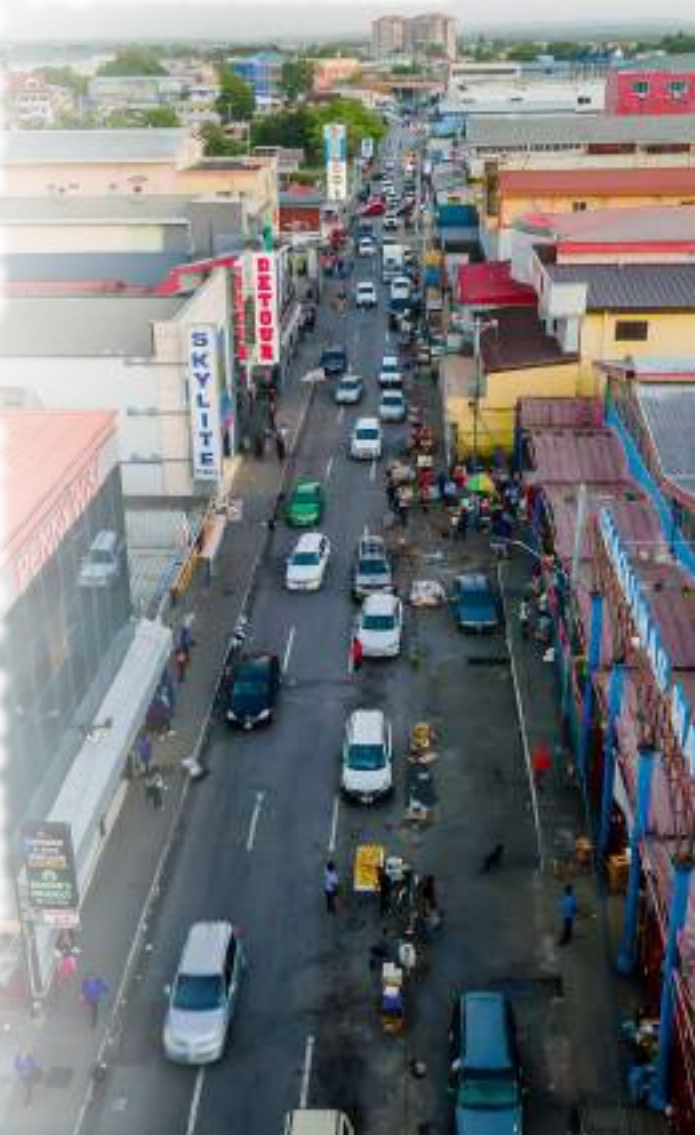
To those starting their journey in business, my advice is simple but powerful:

Know your community's needs. Understand the environment in which you operate, its challenges and opportunities and tailor your business accordingly.

Embrace technology early. Use digital tools for marketing, operations, and especially security.

Be relentless. The road to success is never smooth. You must push through bureaucracy, competition, and adversity with determination and purpose.

Chaguanas is indeed the "Power Chamber" of Trinidad and Tobago, a borough defined by resilience, innovation, and opportunity. Together with strong leadership, bold policy reform, and unwavering community spirit, we can continue to make it not just the commercial heartbeat of Trinidad, but a model of progress for the entire Caribbean.



# SONS OF THE SOIL

## THE LEGACY OF DIPNARINESINGHS

### The Journey

Our story begins with Dipnarinesingh's Travel, which my mother, Sumintra Dipnarinesingh, inspired us to start in 1989. It was a challenging time; my father had passed away a few years before when I was just 11. My mother brought my sister Ramona and me into the business. We've been building on that foundation ever since, expanding with Dipnarinesingh's Busy Corner Mall in 2001, the Dipnarinesingh's Mini Mall in 2009, Dipnarinesingh's Minty's Court in 2016, and our contracting company, Railcon Ltd. It's truly a family legacy.

### What was Chaguana like back then, and why did you choose to get into the travel business?

Chaguana was a much slower, quieter place with less traffic. It wasn't the bustling, vibrant town it is today. That transformation really began after the attempted coup in 1990, when many Syrian business owners started buying property here and developing the malls we see now.

In 1989, there were very few travel agencies in Central Trinidad. We saw a clear need, especially with all the "suitcase traders" traveling to places like Margarita, Panama, Curacao, New York, and Miami. They needed a reliable place to book their travel. I had just finished school, and the opportunity was right



there. Of course, this was before online bookings, so it was all about providing that personal, physical service. To this day, some of my older clients still prefer to come in and get a printed ticket in their hand for peace of mind.

### What changes have you witnessed in the Borough?

The growth has been phenomenal. The Chamber has come a long way. I've seen Chaguana transform with a massive increase in businesses and the rise of malls and plazas everywhere—not just on the main roads but in the surrounding areas as well. With all this expansion, we've also seen an increase in traffic and crime, which is a common byproduct of rapid growth and economic activity. The Chamber has done tremendous work in rallying the businesses in Chaguana and recognising hard work. My mother Sumintra, who passed in 2023, was honoured recently by the Chamber.



Rajive Dipnarinesingh

## THE LEGACY OF DIPNARINESINGHS

### What do you hope to see next for Chaguanas?

My biggest hope is that Chaguanas finally attains city status. There have been discussions with previous governments, and I hope the current administration will make this a priority. Chaguanas is arguably the fastest-growing commercial area in Trinidad and the wider Caribbean. Granting it city status would be a fitting acknowledgment of its economic importance.

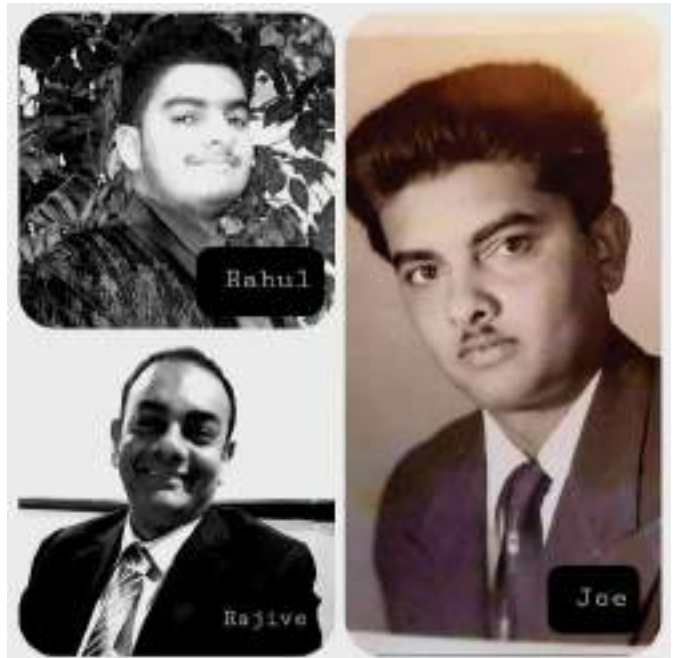
### What are some of the biggest challenges you faced in your early years?

I was born in Mamoral No. 2, without electricity or running water, in a cocoa house. I attended Mamoral RC School. What many people don't know is I used to dance the cocoa, that was a part of my life then. And we only had outdoor plumbing.

My family and I moved to Chaguanas when I was seven, occupying the exact spot where the travel agency is located. I was then transferred to Montrose Vedic. My dad Patrick Joe worked as a manager at Montrose Food Basket for several years. But the year 1980 was a life changing one for me.

A few days after I got my Common Entrance results for Presentation College, my dad fell ill and passed away at age 44.

I will never forget, I got my results on a Wednesday in June 1980, my dad fell ill on the Thursday and died on Sunday morning; just 3 days after my Common Entrance results. That was hard.



On the day of the funeral, I was supposed to head to the College to register. My aunt took me two days after. It was very, very difficult when I started college cause you know starting there a couple of weeks after in September without a father was very difficult.

That's also when I started my very first business venture.

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## THE LEGACY OF DIPNARINESINGHS

At just 11 years old I managed a small car park on the same spot where our travel agency is now. I used to work weekends, tending to the cars on market days, while my friends were out playing. I learned the value of hard work early on, sweeping up and cleaning the lot. My mother, sister, and I worked together to build the businesses you see today.

### What values have guided you as a businessman, and what advice do you have for young entrepreneurs?

The core values that guide me are determination, punctuality, and, above all, honesty. We have a lot of “fly-by-night” businesses, and I believe that being a prompt, honest businessperson with steady hours builds trust and ensures longevity. You have to be determined and stick with it—you won’t always make a profit in the first year. You also need to find an edge, whether that’s through better prices or more prompt service.

My advice for young entrepreneurs is to be brave and tenacious. Once you commit to something, you must stick with it. Put in the time and effort, and you will eventually succeed.

### What do you hope your legacy will be?

I hope my son Rahul will continue to build on the family name and brand. He is the company’s general manager.

Helping to provide employment and other business opportunities especially to the smaller business people out there. In our malls, we have many small tenants—hairdressers, nail techs—and I see them as family. It’s not just about collecting rent.

During COVID when everything was shut down I didn’t charge rent for months. When things improved, I gradually reintroduced it. I started with 25% , then 50% then I went on to 75% for more than 2 years until they got back on their feet. When I see my smaller tenants struggling, I try to assist.

My wife Gail and I have been married for 26 years and we both share the same philosophy: It’s not only about money. I would like my son to continue this path to help smaller businesspeople find success.

I have an open-door policy and believe in remaining humble. That humility, I’ve found, is what truly wins the world.



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# SONS OF THE SOIL 'SMALL BOY'

## From small boy to auto electrical icon: The Extraordinary Journey of Boodoo Simboo

Small Boy (Boodoo Simboo) born on May 8th to such humble beginnings that childhood photos of him do not exist.

When asked about them, his mother stretched out her arms, gesturing a tiny amount "There are no photos of him—we barely had food to eat at that time!"

After completing primary school, young Boodoo asked to be sent to learn a trade, a decision that would shape the rest of his life. In keeping with the local tradition of nicknaming people by their appearance or role, he became known simply as "Small Boy."

Over the next three decades, Small Boy honed his craft as an auto electrician with tireless dedication and a relentless pursuit of mastery, so that today he has earned his doctorate. No longer a tradesman—



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## 'SMALL BOY'

he has become a medical doctor in auto electrical, an engineer of alternators, and a neurosurgeon of a vehicle wiring harnesses.

What began as survival has transformed into legacy: the story of a man who rose from scarcity to become a true specialist in his field. With clients ranging from police commissioners, businessmen, to the average Joe, from all corners of Trinidad.

From his modest garage—which, on most days, spills over to the street in front of his home—you would find not the chaos one might expect, but an impeccably maintained workspace that reflects discipline and care.

There are no heaps of greasy spare parts or cluttered corners, every tool seems to have its place, and every surface wiped clean. His expertise is so respected that schools frequently request him to teach. But with clients lining up at his door from 7 am and often staying past 6 pm, there simply isn't time. When asked if any job has ever stood out as especially difficult or as a notable triumph, he responded humbly, "No. Every day is like that for me, because most of the jobs have been recommended to me by someone who could not solve it".

His greatest passion isn't just the technical side of the work.

"Making the customer happy makes me happy," he says. By offering service to several customers each week without demanding payment, Small Boy has built a reputation not just for his skill, but for his heart.



He prefers to let his customers decide what they can afford. At the end of the week, he finds contentment with earning enough to pay his staff.

With a heart as big as his smile, his compassion and reverence to anyone who enters his institution, is nothing short of amazing. According to him, success in this field depends on just three things: "Patience, discipline, and love of the customer." The sentiments echoed by all his clients are the same: much more than an expert, he is an amazing human!





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# FROM COUNTY TO BOROUGH

## HISTORICAL SITES

### A market that built a borough

The Chaguanas Market has a rich and dynamic history that mirrors the evolution of the town itself. While there are varying "founding date" for the market, its origins are deeply intertwined with Chaguanas' transformation from an agricultural hub to a bustling commercial centre.

#### Early Roots:

- The area was prime agricultural land, with sugarcane and cocoa flourishing. This agricultural background naturally fostered a local market for produce.
- The arrival of indentured East Indians in 1845 to work on these estates further contributed to the diverse agricultural landscape and the need for a marketplace.

#### Catalysts for Growth:

- The Trinidad Government Railway (1880): The construction of a railway line into Chaguanas in 1880 was a crucial development. It greatly facilitated the transport of agricultural produce and passengers, transforming Chaguanas into an important market town in the area.
- Princess Margaret Highway (World War II, 1960s): This highway connected Chaguanas to other commercial centres in north-west Trinidad, further solidifying its role as a key commercial and transportation hub.
- Decline of Sugar and Urbanisation: As the demand for sugar declined, the economy of Chaguanas began to shift from rural to urban-based. This led to rapid urbanisation and



the growth of retail and commerce.

#### Evolution into a Major Market:

- 1980s and Beyond: Chaguanas experienced significant growth in the 1980s, attracting people due to its bargain shopping and moderately priced housing. This period saw the growth of businesses and the market's expansion.
- Borough Status (1990): Chaguanas was elevated to borough status in 1990, a significant milestone that set the stage for continued rapid urbanisation and economic expansion.

- "Largest and Most Popular Outdoor Flea Market": By 2002, Chaguanas was recognised for having the largest and most popular outdoor flea market in Trinidad.

Today, the Chaguanas market remains a vibrant centre of commerce and a reflection of Trinidad's multi-ethnic and multicultural community. It is a testament to the town's resilience, its agricultural roots, and its successful transition into a thriving commercial and cultural centre in Trinidad.

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# FROM COUNTY TO BOROUGH

## HISTORICAL SITES

### Chaguanas rails

#### Arrival of the Rails (c. 1880)

- The Trinidad Government Railway (TGR) branched out to Chaguanas around 1880, linking the Southern Main Road corridor to the broader rail network

When the railway reached Chaguanas in 1880, the area was still predominantly sugar estates and swamp—train stations transformed it into a bustling market crossroads. This connection catalysed Chaguanas' urban growth by enabling faster movement of sugar, cocoa, and eventually, people

#### Key Junction on the Network

Chaguanas wasn't just a stop—it became a strategic junction: trains heading south to San Fernando and Rio Claro, west to Couva, and east to Sangre Grande all passed through here

Chaguanas' alignment along rail tracks later influenced the Princess Margaret/Uriah Butler

Highway, meaning the town's growth followed its transportation networks. Its junction status made it a commercial and logistical hub during the sugar era.

#### Crossing Guardians & Railway Houses

Some original railway infrastructure remains—including the gatekeeper's quarters near Endeavour. A History by the Trinidad & Tobago Association of Ottawa notes these structures housed operators who manually managed road crossing gates along the highway

#### Timetable of Progress

By 1888, timetables highlighted Chaguanas as a stop between Curepe and Couva, reflecting its rising importance. Stations like Montrose Junction, just outside Chaguanas, were key transfer points

#### Decline of Rail

With the rise of motor vehicles

post-World War II, TGR lines began shutting down: Siparia and Sangre Grande in the early '50s, Southern lines by the mid'60s.

- The last passenger train from San Fernando ran on August 30, 1965—the full closure of the railway system came on December 31, 1968

#### Tracks Left Behind

- Though trains ceased, the physical traces remain: old station houses, disused rails, and guard quarters visible along Railway Road and near AMCO.

- These relics are tangible reminders of Chaguanas' role in an island-wide transport system that shaped its early development.

**The story of Chaguanas' railway station is more than transport—it's a narrative of transformation. From cane field crossroads to transport junction, its legacy endures—not only in old structures and local road names but in the pulsating urban heart of today's borough.**

*An early photo of the rails at Woodford Lodge Sugar Estate in Chaguanas. Courtesy Angelo Bissessarsingh Virtual Museum*



# FROM COUNTY TO BOROUGH

## HISTORICAL SITES

### Woodford Lodge

Woodford Lodge holds significant historical importance in the development of Chaguana, primarily due to its deep roots in the sugar industry and its evolution alongside the growing town.

#### Woodford Lodge: A Pillar of Chaguana's Past

Woodford Lodge, as a name, resonates deeply with the history of Chaguana, representing a crucial aspect of its foundational economy and social fabric. Its story is inextricably linked to the rise of Chaguana from a mere sugar estate to a bustling commercial and cultural hub.



Woodford Lodge Factory, Chaguana in 1953. Image by A.D. Porter taken from Woodford Lodge by D. Hutchison and M.S. Taylor. Courtesy Angelo Bissessarsingh Virtual Museum

#### The Sugar Estate Era: Roots in Indentured Labour

The origins of Woodford Lodge trace back to the British conquest of Trinidad in 1797. The area, with its fertile plains in the County of Caroni, was deemed ideal for

sugarcane cultivation. Woodford Lodge was established as one of the early sugar estates in the British period.

Notably, Woodford Lodge was one of the destinations for indentured East Indian labourers

## O.E. WILLIAMS

### History 1950-2025



WILLIAMS PLAZA

### BEGINNINGS

Oliver E. Williams began selling bicycles in the late 50's and by the 60's included a variety of goods, offering items ranging from Clothing to China Sets to Traditional Indian Cookware.



(New O.E Williams Plaza)

### FAMILY MANAGEMENT

Mr. Laurence Felix Bartholomew and his daughters, Wilma Bartholomew and Kathleen Beckles née Bartholomew, continued the legacy from the 80s onward.

(Ribbon Cutting Ceremony for the new O.E. Williams Plaza)



1950



Oliver E. Williams

1980

### NEXT GENERATION

Upon the passing of the late Mr. And Mrs. Williams, their nephew (Laurence Bartholomew) and his wife (Alien) inherited and operated the new O.E Williams Premier Building.

1990



(Laurence Bartholomew and Daughter Kathleen)

2025

### CONTINUING A LEGACY

Today Mr. And Mrs. Bartholomew's daughter, Kathleen Beckles, and family now run Williams Plaza Mall, striving to serve Chaguana and the wider community for many more years to come.

# FROM COUNTY TO BOROUGH

## HISTORICAL SITES

who arrived in Trinidad starting in 1845. These labourers were instrumental in the success of the sugar industry, and their presence on estates like Woodford Lodge profoundly shaped the demographic and cultural landscape of Chaguanas. In fact, some sources indicate that the ancestral home of the prominent Capildeo family, the famous "Lion House," was built by Pundit Capildeo, who himself came to Trinidad in 1894 as an indentured labourer attached to the Woodford Lodge Sugar Estate.

Early records indicate ownership by individuals like Joseph Graham and Henry Graham, with the estate cultivating sugar and employing

enslaved people in the early 19th century (e.g., 1828 records show 17 enslaved people, and by 1831, 56). This highlights the brutal legacy of slavery in the estate's early operations before the advent of indentureship.

### The Woodford Lodge Sugar Refinery: A Central Hub

Over time, Woodford Lodge evolved beyond just a sugar estate to include a significant sugar refinery. This refinery became a central point for processing sugarcane from the surrounding agricultural lands. The presence of such a key industrial facility adjacent to the growing settlement of Chaguanas was a major catalyst



*Sir Harold Robinson (1905-1979)  
Owner of Woodford Lodge  
Estate, Chaguanas.*

for the town's development.

The refinery was eventually owned by H.E. Robinson before being sold to the now-defunct Caroni (1975) Limited, the state-owned sugar company



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# FROM COUNTY TO BOROUGH

## HISTORICAL SITES

that dominated the industry for decades. This transfer of ownership signifies Woodford Lodge's continued importance within Trinidad's sugar economy.

### From Agricultural Centre to Urban Sprawl

The growth of Chaguana was significantly influenced by Woodford Lodge. What was once a village at the end of the Princess Margaret Highway transformed as the sugar industry, though its lifeblood for many years, eventually declined. The area shifted from a rural, agriculture-based economy to an urban-based one.

While the sugar industry has ceased to be its primary economic

driver, the legacy of Woodford Lodge as an estate and refinery remains etched in the landscape and the memory of Chaguana.

The area continues to be identified with the "Woodford Lodge" name, with various modern developments and initiatives still referencing it.

For instance, the Chaguana Borough Corporation's administrative building is situated in Success Street, Woodford Lodge, and there have been residential developments on former Caroni (1975) Ltd Woodford Lodge factory lands.

### The Woodford Lodge Recreation Club: A Social Landmark

Another notable aspect of Woodford Lodge's history is the Woodford Lodge Recreation Club. This club served as a significant social hub for employees and socialites associated with Caroni (1975) Limited during the height of the sugar industry. Its "old colonial feel" reflected the era it was designed in (the 1950s).

Sadly, in recent years, this historic building, marked as significant by the Sugar Heritage Village of T&T, was destroyed in a fire after being abandoned since Caroni's closure in 2003. This loss serves as a poignant reminder of the physical vestiges of the sugar era fading with time.

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## HISTORICAL SITES

### Chaguanas Prison Depot

Most people associate Chaguanas as one of the best place to get bargains, the most hectic with a bazaar-like setting, and "fruitful" market town in Trinidad.

But did you know that the first Convict Depot in Trinidad was established in the Chaguanas forest?

This convict settlement according to author J.F. Collens (1888) was located about six miles from the Chaguanas Station (San Fernando line). The facility was designed to accommodate 150 prisoners and the food grown at the Depot was used within the prison network to feed inmates. Inspector of Prisons Lionel Fraser in 1871 described the Chaguanas Convict Depot as a place of hard labour, much dreaded by convicts and a profit to the colony.

Unlike today, convicts of yesteryear were made to EARN THEIR KEEP.

The Borough of Chaguanas

began life as a Convict Timber Depot. The Convict Depot was located in the forested area of Longdenville. J.H. Collens (1888) in his book A Guide to Trinidad in traveling through Chaguanas to San Fernando made this observation to get to the Convict Depot you had to pass the Montrose Cacao Estate (Hon. G. Fitt), and Mr. Latour's Sugar Estate in Edinburgh. A tramway connected the Chaguanas Prison Depot with Montrose Estate property.

Around 1875 when the Chaguanas Depot was established groups of convicts were forced to labour at tasks such as cutting and hauling timber, road construction, ditch digging, "bussing stones" or farming while chained together. This was done on a starvation diet of a few biscuits and tea twice daily and a midday pint of soup. It was the harshest form of incarceration for in those days: prisoners did not enjoy holidays at taxpayers' expense as they now do, but rather they were forced to operate in chain gangs

According to J.H. Collens

(1888) prisoners who worked in the forested areas were made to cut and haul heavy timber, load it onto tramway trucks and cut tracts through the forest to make roads. Those assigned to the quarries were involved in breaking and hauling stones for making and repairing roads.

At the Chaguanas Convict Depot prisoners tasks also included cutting firewood to make coals and cutting bundles of Para grass, which grew in abundance in Chaguanas to send daily to Port-of-Spain and San Fernando to feed the police horses.

In addition the convicts were made to plant 3,000 mahogany trees in the neighbourhood of the depot, but Collens (1888) states that only one-third of the trees survived, and those that survived did not flourish well.

While the large majority of prisoners were put to work in quarries and the forest, there were some who displayed remarkable creativity and craft skills. These prisoners were involved in manufacturing items that could



# FROM COUNTY TO BOROUGH

## HISTORICAL SITES

be sold. The skilled convicts made excellent mats and blinds made from the cocorite palm, and beautifully polished tables of locust, roble, and other native woods and shingles for roof. Clare Anderson (2022) further adds that the convicts wooden tools and implements such as axe-handles, felloes and spokes were displayed in the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibitions held in London South Kensington.

The Chaguanas Convict Depot was also viewed as a model farm and the food grown at the Depot was used within the prison network to feed inmates.

Additionally, labour for the

maintenance and upkeep of public infrastructure such as cemeteries, road verges, etc. was also supplied by the convicts. The improvements the convicts made to the infrastructure of public roadways not only saved the Colonial Government money, but it resulted in significant impact on rural areas, allowing planters to more quickly and more easily transport their crops to market.

The 30th of June, 1887, was a red-letter day in Trinidadian gaol life. In honour of her Majesty's Jubilee, his Excellency Sir William Robinson visited and discharged 24 prisoners on free pardons, 10 more on convict licenses,

besides considerably reducing the sentences of several others.

Chaguanas Prison Depot was closed in 1894 because of its open compound from which prisoners constantly escaped. Though most were recaptured it was constantly a source of inconvenience for the Prison Inspectors. The prisoners were transferred to Carrera Island along with their barracks

### Credit to following sources:

*Convicts: A Global History* By Clare Anderson (2022)

*J.H. Collens . A Guide to Trinidad* (1888)

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# FROM COUNTY TO BOROUGH

## HISTORICAL SITES



### Carlsen Air Force Base: Trinidad's Wartime Hub

Carlsen Air Force Base, originally known as Edinburgh Field, was a crucial United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) airbase constructed in Trinidad during World War II. Its presence in the Chaguanas area was a direct consequence of the Destroyers for Bases Agreement signed in September 1940, where the US transferred fifty destroyers to Great Britain in exchange for base rights on British possessions in the Americas, including Trinidad.

#### Construction and Purpose

- **Rapid Development:** Construction began swiftly in 1941, and Edinburgh Field was opened in 1942. Initially, it was intended as an

overflow facility for Air Transport Command aircraft that were headed for the larger Waller Field (located further east in Trinidad).

- **Strategic Importance:** However, as the war progressed and the threat of German U-boats in the Caribbean intensified (the "Battle of the Caribbean"), Edinburgh Field rapidly expanded. It grew into an enormous, sprawling complex with three parallel paved runways of significant lengths (two 5,000 x 150 ft and one 2,000 x 300 ft). This made it a principal combat base for USAAF bombers and even became home to US Naval airships (blimps) and Navy fighters, as well as Royal Air Force aircraft.

- **Anti-Submarine Warfare:** Its primary role became vital in anti-submarine warfare, protecting

Allied shipping lanes in the Atlantic and safeguarding critical routes to the Panama Canal and Venezuela's oil supplies. Various bombardment and anti-submarine squadrons were stationed there, operating aircraft like the B-18 Bolo and B-25 Mitchell bombers.

- **Supporting Naval Operations:** In late 1943, with the arrival of US Navy lighter-than-air operations, the 80th Seabees were brought in to further develop the station. They built a large, steel blimp hangar, mooring circles, paved runways, and a helium-purification plant to support the blimps that patrolled the seas.

#### Renaming and Transition

- **Renamed Carlsen Field:** On November 3, 1943, Edinburgh Field



*Images courtesy Angelo Bissessarsingh Virtual Museum*

# FROM COUNTY TO BOROUGH

## HISTORICAL SITES

was officially renamed Carlsen Field.

- **Post-War Reduction:** With the end of World War II, Carlsen Airfield was significantly reduced in scope. It operated with a skeleton staff and was placed under the command of the 24th Composite Wing based in Puerto Rico.

- **Transfer to US Navy:** In March 1948, it was officially redesignated Carlsen Air Force Base. However, just two months later, in May 1949, it was transferred to the United States Navy and renamed NAF (LTA) Carlsen Field, continuing to function as a naval fuel annex and airship base.

- **Decommissioning:** Carlsen Field was formally disestablished

and decommissioned on January 10, 1950, bringing an end to its active military service.

### Legacy and Present Day

- **Disappearance of Infrastructure:** Today, the former air and naval airship base is largely unrecognisable. Much of the land has been converted into agricultural areas (farmland) and residential developments. National Flour Mills owns a significant portion of the former airfield area.

- **Lingering Names:** The most prominent remnants of the base are the names of areas and streets. The "Edinburgh" and "Xeres" areas in south Chaguanas derive

their names directly from the two primary landing strips of the WWII-era base. Edinburgh 500, a major housing development, now stands on part of the land that once housed the runways.

- **Impact on Chaguanas:** The presence of Carlsen Air Force Base, along with other US bases in Trinidad, had a considerable impact on the island's economy and social landscape during the war, bringing jobs, new infrastructure, and exposure to American culture.

While its physical footprint has largely vanished, its historical significance as a critical wartime asset remains a notable chapter in Chaguanas' story.

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# FROM COUNTY TO BOROUGH

## HISTORICAL SITES



### Lion House

The Lion House, or Anand Bhavan (Mansion of Bliss), is much more than just an old building; it's a profound symbol of Trinidad's history, culture, and literary heritage.

Here's a deeper dive into its story:

#### 1. A Vision Born from Indentureship:

- **Builder:** The house was conceived, designed, and constructed by the late Pundit Capildeo between 1924 and 1926.

- **His Journey:** Pundit Capildeo was an indentured immigrant who arrived in Trinidad in 1894 on the ship "Hereford" from Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh, India. He was born in 1873 in the village of Mahadeva Dubey.

- **Breaking Bonds:** He broke free from the bonds of indentureship

to become a highly respected and successful Pundit (Hindu priest), ministering to Trinidad's Hindu community. He also became a successful landowner, businessman, and cane farmer.

- **A Cultural Gift:** The Lion House stands as a testament to one indentured immigrant's success and his bequest to the nation. It serves as a symbol and memorial to the over 120,000 indentured Indian immigrants who arrived in Trinidad between 1845 and 1917.

#### 2. Architectural Significance:

- **Unique Design:** The Lion House is regarded as the only building of its kind in the Western Hemisphere.

- **Indian Influence:** It was designed based on Pundit Capildeo's memory of a city dwelling in Gorakhpur, India, where his family had lived for generations. Its architectural style, with "brutally stark pillars forming an arcade in

front, plain walls and flat roof," mirrors the early Gupta style of the 5th century A.D.

- **Hand-Built:** Pundit Capildeo constructed the house largely with his own hands, even making the bricks in his backyard.

- **Four Storeys:** The building was originally four storeys high, with the ground floor serving as a store, the second floor as living quarters for the family, the third floor housing a Puja (prayer) room, and a small, almost unused fourth floor above.

- **The "Lions":** The house gets its popular name from the representations of lions at either end of the front wall. These are seen as non-religious symbols of strength, common on many buildings in India.

#### 3. Literary Immortalisation:

- **V.S. Naipaul's "A House for Mr. Biswas":** The Lion House achieved international fame as the

# FROM COUNTY TO BOROUGH

## HISTORICAL SITES

inspiration for "Hanuman House" in Nobel Laureate V.S. Naipaul's renowned novel, *A House for Mr. Biswas*. Naipaul, the grandson of Pundit Capildeo, spent time living in the house during his childhood. While he took artistic liberties (like transforming the lions into representations of the monkey-god Hanuman), the essence of the house and the family dynamics within it are strongly depicted.

- **Birthplace of Minds:** It was also the childhood home of Naipaul's uncle, Dr. Rudranath Capildeo, a brilliant mathematician, physicist, and politician who led the Democratic Labour Party. The house fostered a lineage of intellectual and cultural figures.

#### 4. A Community Hub:

- **Meeting Place:** In its early history, the Lion House was a significant meeting place for travelers from all over Trinidad passing through Chaguanas.

- **Community Centre:** It served as an early community center for residents of Chaguanas and surrounding areas, a home for Hindu pilgrims, and even a venue for panchayats (village councils) to resolve disputes.

- **Commercial Activities:** The ground floor housed a store that sold various items, including haberdashery, puja materials, and even ganja (which was legally sold and consumed there at the time). Later, it also housed a chemist.

#### 5. Current State and Efforts for Preservation:

- **Deterioration:** Unfortunately, after the family eventually moved to Port of Spain for better educational opportunities, the Lion House was rented out or stood vacant and fell

into disrepair. It has suffered from neglect and deterioration over the years.

- **Restoration Attempts:** There have been several attempts at restoration, notably in the 1990s and early 2000s, spearheaded by Surendranath Capildeo (Pundit Capildeo's grandson and V.S. Naipaul's cousin). However, these efforts have faced challenges, and the building has continued to decline.

- **Private Ownership Challenges:** A major hurdle for official restoration is that the Lion House is privately owned, and getting permission from the various family members who now have a stake in the property has been difficult.

- **Ongoing Advocacy:** The Chaguanas Borough Corporation, the National Trust of Trinidad and Tobago, and various heritage advocates are deeply concerned about its degradation and are actively working to find ways to secure its future. There are recent reports of discussions between the Capildeo family, the Mayor, and the National Trust to initiate restoration efforts.

The Lion House remains a crucial, though currently fragile, landmark that tells a powerful story of Indian indentureship, cultural preservation, and intellectual achievement in Trinidad and Tobago. Its preservation is seen as vital for understanding the nation's rich and diverse heritage.



Lion House c1940s  
Image courtesy Angelo Bissessarsingh Virtual Museum

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- 12 Sweet Items (Mix & Match Lemon Pound Cake & Blueberry Scone)



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# DIVALI NAGAR

Divali Nagar, meaning "City of Divali," is a truly iconic site in Trinidad and Tobago, renowned as a major annual exposition of Hindu and Indo-Trinidadian culture, specifically associated with the celebration of Divali, the Hindu Festival of Lights.

## 1. Origins and Evolution:

- **Visionary Concept:** The Divali Nagar was born from a concept by Hans Hanoomansingh, then President of the National Council of Indian Culture (NCIC), in the mid-1980s. His vision was to create a national, and eventually international, focus on Diwali.

- **Humble Beginnings:** The first Divali Nagar was staged in the Mid Centre Mall car park in Chaguanas in late 1986. It was a massive success, attracting huge crowds on its opening night.



- **Permanent Home:** Due to its overwhelming popularity and growth, the National Council of Indian Culture (NCIC) was granted a permanent site by the Trinidad and Tobago government in 1989. This dedicated site is located on John Peters Road Extension off the Uriah Butler Highway in Chaguanas.

- **Growth and Recognition:** Over the decades, Divali Nagar has grown significantly, becoming the most significant Indian cultural event in Trinidad and Tobago, and possibly the wider Caribbean and North America. It has even inspired similar "Divali Nagars" in places like South Florida.

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# DIVALI NAGAR

## 2. Significance and Purpose:

- **Cultural Preservation:** The Divali Nagar is a powerful symbol of the resilience and perseverance of the East Indian community in Trinidad and Tobago in preserving their rich cultural heritage, which was brought to the islands by indentured laborers from India.

- **Promoting Unity and Awareness:** While rooted in Hindu traditions, the Nagar is designed to be inclusive, attracting a wide cross-section of the population, including government officials, diplomats, and people of all ethnicities and faiths. It aims to foster an awareness of the religious, social, and cultural dimensions of Divali and Indian culture as a whole.

- **Showcase of Talent:** It provides a vital platform for local Indian artistes, from musicians



and dancers to classical singers, to showcase their talents, often serving as a "rite of passage" for aspiring performers.

- **Economic Catalyst:** It's as a bustling marketplace, providing opportunities for businesses to

showcase products, from traditional Indian clothing and jewelry to Divali supplies and a vast array of delicious vegetarian Indian and Indo-Trinidadian food. It's a dynamic platform for both cultural exchange and commerce.





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## THE MAGIC OF FELICITY'S DIVALI LIGHTS

Each year, Felicity transforms into a breathtaking landscape of light, drawing visitors from every corner of Trinidad and far beyond.

Along streets like Cacandee Road and Pingla, thousands of flickering deyas illuminate the night, arranged on intricately crafted bamboo frames and shaped into arches, temples, stars, and dazzling geometric designs.

The community's creativity shines even brighter as traditional displays blend seamlessly with modern touches: colourful string lights draped over PVC pipe arches, glowing pathways and vibrant patterns. Together, they create a spectacular fusion of heritage and innovation.

Whether driving or strolling through the neighbourhood visitors, both local and foreign, are welcomed into an atmosphere filled with warmth, pride, and celebration. The thousands of lit deyas, and the warmth of families gathered outside, create a spirit of unity that makes Felicity's Divali one of the most enchanting experiences on this island.

More than a visual wonder, the Felicity lights are a testament to community devotion! *Images courtesy Lisa Rampersad*



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# ROBOTICS

## World-Class Wired: Presentation College, Chaguanas Places Third in Global Robotics Challenge

In a world increasingly driven by technology, it's not every day a group of teenagers from a small Caribbean nation rise to global prominence—but that's exactly what the robotics team from Presentation College, Chaguanas did.

Last year September 26th to 29th, the team clinched third place at the 2024 FIRST Global Challenge in Athens, Greece, outperforming teams from over 190 countries. Their success, achieved through innovation, sleepless nights, and cross-continental collaboration, marks a proud chapter in Trinidad and Tobago's STEM journey.

### Engineering Unity

In its 7th year, the theme of this year's challenge was "Feeding the Future," spotlighting sustainable food systems and the intersection of technology with global nutrition. Teams were tasked with designing and building robots capable of simulating key processes—combining water and energy to generate food—represented by coloured spheres on the playing field.

The format of the competition was uniquely collaborative. After a series of qualifying matches, 32 teams advanced to form eight global "alliances." Trinidad and Tobago joined forces with Estonia, Singapore, and Guam to form Alliance Eight, competing in high-pressure matches where robots—and the students behind them—had to work in harmony.

### The Heart Behind the Hardware

The team of Xavier Blache, Kovid Capildeo, Xavier Edwards, Sameer



Badree, Justin Basdeo, and Sarmad Singh formed the travelling squad, with support from a dedicated ground team back home. For these students, robotics is more than a club—it's a commitment.

"There were nights we were still at school past 11 p.m., especially in the final weeks," said team captain Xavier Blache, 18, an aspiring software engineer. "The excitement came from meeting others like me from around the world. But the real power was in learning and sharing ways to solve global challenges together."

Their robot, built from parts like aluminum channels, motors, and steel rods, was a technical marvel. "We created an omni-directional base," Blache explained, "so it could move fluidly in any direction—a huge advantage on the field."

Capildeo, who served as the team's human player during the challenge, added, "We were running on caffeine and adrenaline by the end. It was tough, but worth every minute."

### From Classrooms to Global Recognition

Despite being relative newcomers to competitive robotics, the team impressed at every stage. The robot had to

place "water" and "energy" balls into goals to release a "food" ball, which then had to be retrieved and returned for points. The game was a real-time metaphor for sustainable systems, requiring speed, accuracy, and cooperation—not just within teams, but between countries.

Team head engineer Justin Basdeo didn't stop at his own robot. Noticing other Caribbean teams struggling with equipment damaged in transit, he jumped in to assist.

"Justin spent his free time helping teams from the US and British Virgin Islands, Bermuda and others," Capildeo recalled. "That's the spirit of FIRST Global—support and teamwork beyond borders."

### The Sweet Taste of Third Place

Their alliance ultimately placed third, just behind powerhouse alliances led by China and Uzbekistan. Their total: 324 points.

"I remember when we found out—we were stunned," said Blache. "We were just a group of boys who started messing around with old robot parts. And now here we were, standing on a world stage."

Their accomplishments didn't stop there. The team also secured first place in the Social Media category, showcasing

# ROBOTICS

their outreach, engagement, and storytelling skills throughout the season.

## Inspiration for a New Generation

Despite the accolades, both Blache and Capildeo stress that robotics isn't only for tech whizzes.

"There's this idea that you have to be top of your class to join," said Blache. "But that's not true. Anyone can start. You just need curiosity and a willingness to try."

Capildeo echoed the sentiment: "Some of our most dedicated teammates didn't start with any robotics knowledge. Passion is what drives progress."

## Backed by a Village

The team was accompanied by Principal Dr. Rene Wihby and mentors Collin Samaru and Tricia



Singh. Singh, who described the semi-finals as "nerve-wracking," said she couldn't be prouder.

"At one point I couldn't even breathe properly from the nerves," she said with a laugh.

"But when the boys looked up into the stands and saw the

red, white, and black—something clicked. They knew they could do it."

She wasn't alone in the crowd. Parents, siblings, and even two past principals flew in to support the team, showing the deep sense of community behind their success.



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Though our reach spans from Tobago to Erin, the heart of our work beats right here in this vibrant town. The close relationship we share with the Chaguanas Chamber of Industry and Commerce (CCIC) and its members has allowed us to deliver vital services to the community we serve. From health fairs and school outreaches to educational seminars and screenings at Saith Park and Divali Nagar, our collaboration has consistently promoted wellness and awareness.

At our Chaguanas headquarters, we host support groups, provide endocrinology consultations, operate a full laboratory, and offer affordable products such as blood glucose monitors and continuous glucose monitoring systems. This hub stands as a beacon of care, compassion, and innovation in diabetes management.

As we celebrate the Chamber's 30th Anniversary, we



applaud its vision, resilience, and leadership. Together, we continue to prove that when business and health unite for the greater good, communities thrive. We look forward to continuing our work with the CCIC and its members for a healthier Chaguanas!

**Dr Andrew Dhanoo, President of DATT**





# CRAZYLEGS KIMRON RAMPARAS

is titled as the first Vlogger or Social Media influencer in Trinidad and Tobago who started 15 years ago by posting a single video on Facebook for fun. Through this, he gathered many reactions, shares and positive comments. He passionately continued his pursuit, becoming even more creative using advanced tech and software programmes to enhance his video content.

Crazylegs' mission was to always bring smiles, happiness and spread positivity to everyone who came across his work or met in person. It was quite easy for him to be confident from the earlies as he represented his beloved country in the World Hip-hop International Competition and holds 10 local Hip-hop dance titles. Both international and local brands saw his innate value and partnered with him in the representation and marketing of their esteemed products including some well-known corporations such as Burger King, Kendall Oil and Neil Kool Air-conditioning.

Whilst building upon his success, Crazylegs has used his exploding platforms to help various charities and animal shelters. With over a decade and a half of creating and boosting massive social media initiatives, he founded his company 'Bacchanal Media', which manages the social media and production projects for major companies such as Burger King, Popeyes, Courts, Bmobile and Linda's Bakery to name a few. Bacchanal Media, under Crazylegs' direct and creative leadership has produced over 20 mind-blowing projects, the most popular being Quest to Qatar (World Cup 2022), Palace in Paris (Olympics 2024) and the hit-TV show Cravings just to name a few.



Crazylegs has always been carrying the Trinidad and Tobago national flag through his content over the years as he represents his people with the vigour and pride that our nation deserves. His goals and drive have no limits as he aims to create and boost his various productions that will soon be the most unique shows ever produced in Trinidad and Tobago and to hit the international forum.

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## END OF YEAR 2025 - ANNUAL CHRISTMAS DINNER AND AWARDS CEREMONY - 22ND NOVEMBER 2025



*Then Opposition Leader Kamla Persad-Bissessar and Treasurer of the Chamber Kevin Ramgoolie. Mrs. Persad-Bissessar was a guest at the Chamber's 2023 End of Year awards function.*

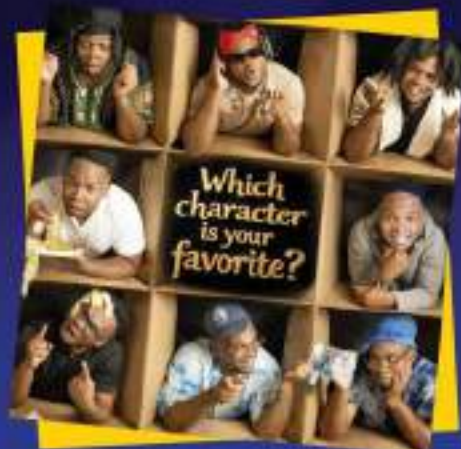
# CERTIFIED SAMPSON

## Jamel Sampson,

widely known as Certified Sampson, is a dynamic entertainer and entrepreneur who has captivated more than 3 million followers across platforms with his vibrant personality and iconic characters — including fan favorites Ezekiel, Screws, and Jackson. His sharp wit, cultural authenticity, and distinctive comedic storytelling have made him a household name throughout the Caribbean and diaspora, cementing his place at the forefront of digital entertainment.

Beyond content creation, Sampson has successfully extended his brand into the world of business with Certified Scoop, his premium ice cream company known for its handcrafted flavors and growing retail presence across Trinidad. This entrepreneurial venture reflects the same creativity, innovation, and regional pride that define his entertainment career.

Through both humor and hustle, Certified Sampson continues to elevate Caribbean culture on a global stage — inspiring audiences, driving brands, and proving that authenticity and ambition can turn local influence into international impact.



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