



Hon. Moses Kirkconnell, JP
Deputy Premier of the Cayman Islands
Minister of District Administration, Tourism & Transport

Update on the School of Hospitality Studies
17th September, 2014: Legislative Assembly

Madam Speaker,

Earlier this month, after a long and sometimes challenging journey, the Cayman Islands School of Hospitality became operational by welcoming 25 young Caymanians into its hospitality programme.

For the avoidance of doubt, the school is not a new facility that has been constructed, but rather, is a programme that has been undertaken in collaboration with the Ministries of Tourism and Education, along with the Department of Tourism, various private sector partners and the UCCI, that has graciously provided the use of its Campus facilities and lecturers.

At various points along the way throughout the school's development, my Ministry issued statements and releases to keep the public informed of its progress. On that basis I would also like

to take this opportunity to provide Members with an update on the programme, and the impact it will have on the lives of our people; particularly in relation to employment and employability.

Madam Speaker, on Monday the Members of this honourable House debated reforms to the immigration accreditation system, and Government agreed to consider a model whereby a percentage of work permit fees would be paid into a segregated fund for the sole purpose of training our people to take up positions that they are currently unskilled or unqualified to pursue.

In my opinion Madam Speaker, that is a fair and reasonable proposal intended to level the playing field between local and expatriate workers, and I am pleased to report that the School of Hospitality Studies is already a game changer in that regard.

For the first time in Cayman, tourism's public and private sectors have worked more closely together than ever before to jointly create a programme that is industry driven and internationally accredited. It has been specifically designed to provide Caymanians with the necessary training and skills to not only take

up front facing positions in the hospitality sector, but to prepare them to become qualified professionals, with a clear path for employment and advancement within the tourism industry.

Tourism is vital to our economic well-being and has the ability to greatly impact the daily lives of our people. To understand just how profound a role it can play we must be mindful that the hospitality sector is comprised of more than waiters and waitresses serving in restaurants; and front office staff at Hotel reception desks; and taxi drivers; and housekeepers and tour operators.

As with every type of business, the hospitality sector does have lower-waged positions, but it also has a large number of highly paid, highly skilled roles which are filled by highly qualified professionals. Consequently, the goal of the hospitality school is to develop and inspire future professionals, who based on market demand, can play a greater role in the future development of the industry.

While employability is central to the hospitality school program and we are keen to increase the number of Caymanians in the

industry, the primary goal is to provide each student with a solid foundation on which they can build lucrative and rewarding long-term careers in the tourism industry right here at home.

Consequently, the courses offered will enable students to define the different components of tourism, such as: transportation, lodging, food and beverage, attractions, and public tourism businesses, so that they can be better placed to discover career opportunities that align with their personal aspirations.

Additionally, the course will include field trips and placements to a variety of hotels, restaurants and attractions to acquaint students with the full scope of the industry. I can attest that the response from the private sector has been extremely gratifying and commencing next week, meetings will be held with various participating establishments to solidify how many students can be accommodated at each location, and their precise expectations from the students.

At the end of the course, the students' final grades will be calculated based on a combination of examinations, class projects and written assignments.

Madam speaker, the Cayman Islands is experiencing a massive upswing in visitor arrivals and with more and more tourists crossing our borders than ever before, service quality and excellence are no longer mere expectations, they are non-negotiable requirements simply must be met.

The programme therefore introduces students to the background and fundamentals of service excellence. Given that customer expectations are constantly evolving and what we regard as excellent today will quickly become the standard of tomorrow, students will be taught how to evaluate tasks and figure out how to enhance the customer experience.

Using a systems based approach, learning components will focus on people, processes and environments; as well as their inter-relationship within the customer service function. The concepts presented will then be reinforced through a series of practical applications that again, have been designed to benefit students, not just throughout their internship in the programme, but also during their subsequent careers.

Prospering in the dynamic hospitality and tourism environment requires a combination of flexibility, creativity and training.

Having been closely involved in its development over this past year, I am confident that the hospitality school is equipped to provide the best possible practical and technical training – which are the essential ingredients for operating in today’s international tourism environment. I am also assured that the students who avail themselves of this training will be able to hit the ground running when they enter the industry, and will have the best possible chance for a future career in tourism.

Madam Speaker, outside of its contribution to the economy, for tourism to be truly impactful on the lives of our people it must be used far more conclusively as a tool which generates employment, drives businesses, and keeps revenue multiplying throughout our communities.

I am on record for saying Madam Speaker that our people are our most valuable asset and while it is undoubtedly gratifying to consistently achieve great tourism performance and exceed monthly targets, if the effects of our record breaking statistics are not trickling down to small business owners, and craft vendors

and taxi drivers and the like; and impacting their lives in a positive and tangible way, then we are merely skirting round the edges of opportunity and our efforts are seriously missing the mark.

The School of Hospitality Studies will go a long way towards rebalancing and redistributing the pieces of the proverbial pie, by ensuring that Caymanians – particularly our young people – will finally be in a position to contribute to, and benefit from, the industry's success to the extent that they should be. Their participation will also help to infuse the distinctly local flavor into the tourism sector that is reflective of our national identity, and is in keeping with what visitors expect when they come to our shores.

Madam Speaker, the collaboration that has taken place between the Ministries of Tourism and Education, the UCCI, the Department of Tourism and private sector partners has been nothing short of exemplary. I would like to publically thank and acknowledge the myriad of dedicated individuals – particularly those on the Hospitality School Advisory Council – for their invaluable guidance, support and commitment to driving this initiative forward.

I would also like to wish the first cohort of students the very best of luck as they follow their dreams of being a part of our thriving and vibrant hospitality industry.

I would like to acknowledge these individuals:

- *The Hon. Tara Rivers, Minister of Education,*
- *Mr. Roy Bodden, President of UCCI,*
- *Mr. Wayne Jackson, Hospitality School Director,*
- *Mrs. Rosa Harris, Director of Tourism and her team at the Department of Tourism,*
- *Mr. Ken Hydes and the Cayman Islands Tourism Association*
- *The School of Hospitality Studies Advisory Council whose membership includes:*
 - *Marcus Mueri, from Abacus Restaurant,*
 - *Marc Langevin from the Ritz-Carlton Grand Cayman,*
 - *Valerie Hoppe from the Grand Cayman Marriott,*
 - *Rod Mc Dowall from Red Sail Sports,*
 - *and many others too numerous to mention,*