



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

Thomas Gatcliffe

Chancellor, the Peschier family left us a rich and lasting legacy. Just think how difficult it would be to imagine a Port of Spain without the Queen's Park Savannah – a generous gift for all the peoples of this land from this illustrious family. But they left us another boon which was no less generous or enduring—their progeny Thomas Alexander Gatcliffe. When the Trinidad and Tobago Business Chamber celebrated its 127th anniversary, Mr Gatcliffe commented: "when one considers that 3 out of 5 business ventures fail in the first 5 years and few survive 50 years, it is easy to conclude that 127 years is an immense span in the life of any business association." If that is indeed so, what can one say of a business that has survived 180 years and what should one say about a man who has served that organisation for 60 years!

Chancellor, Angostura – a 160 year old organisation – is not only a household word, it is a global company. Siegert may have been its founding father but Thomas Gatcliffe – the first non-Siegert to lead the company – has been the

guardian angel of this legendary company. For beet may have beaten the sugar out of us but the spirits that emanate from the stills of Angostura have kept the great Caribbean tradition of rum-making alive. What is more, Thomas Gatliffe is one of only a handful of people to possess the complete recipe for the world-famous Angostura Bitters and he guards this secret jealously. And if keeping a secret is a fault then that might be his only one, for here is a man of modest stillness and humility and gentleness in success.

Born in British Guiana, he moved to Trinidad and completed his secondary education at Queen's Royal College where he would have obtained important lessons in leadership both as Head Prefect and Sergeant Major of the Cadet Corps. These early lessons were to prepare him for greater leadership at the highest levels and to prepare him for captaincy – a captain of industry.

He has chaired 11 blue chip companies and was a board member of 15 others. He has been President of the Caribbean Association of Industry and Commerce, the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce and the Trinidad and Tobago Swimming Association. He has been a member of the National Advisory Council, National Productivity Council and Tax Performance Committee. He gave new and renewed meaning to the term captain of industry and his contribution to the business sector is incomparable.

It has been said that to repeat what others have said requires education, to challenge it requires brain, but to change it requires tact. It was during his stint as an independent senator in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago from 1971 to 1976 and in the absence of a viable opposition that Mr Gatliffe tactfully argued the case that led to changes in our archaic taxation system. The changes that

ensued led to one of the most progressive taxation regimes in the region and positioned our country at competitive advantage, the benefits of which we still reap today.

It is not surprising that for all that he has contributed to nation building he was awarded the Chaconia Medal, Gold for his contribution to business. When in 2007 he was inducted into the Business Hall of Fame his citation read in part:

“Many men go through a lifetime as good people, without making a significant change or contribution to the lives of those around them. Tommy is undoubtedly a good man, but he has also improved the lives and prospects of a great number of people, both inside Angostura and within the country and region generally. His working life has been one of achievement allied with humility and courtesy which is rare in a person of his position, and the standards of behaviour which he has set, not only for himself but for everyone working with him, have been quite remarkable”.

For all his undertakings, as many and diverse as they have been, he has been a man geared not only for success but he has been a man of value. In the same way that it would be difficult to imagine the Port of Spain landscape without a Savannah, it would be equally difficult to think of what the business landscape would have been without a Thomas Alexander Gatliffe. Our University in recognising him today is living up to its pledge to honour those amongst us who have stood tall and often silent.

*It is with these thoughts in mind Chancellor, that I beg you to receive
Thomas Gatcliffe – a man of modest stillness and humility – and confer upon him
the degree of Doctor of Science, honoris causa.*

*St. Augustine Campus
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