

# From baker to Chancellor

LAST Saturday, The University of the West Indies (The UWI) installed its sixth Chancellor, Robert Bermudez, at a

special convocation held at the St Augustine Campus. As its highest office holder, the Chancellor sits at the apex of the UWI. The previous five Chancellors were Princess Alice, Sir Hugh Wooding, Sir Allan Lewis, Sir Shridath Ramphal and the outgoing Sir George Alleyne.

Apart from Princess Alice, the previous Chancellors had all been knighted by the Queen. Hailing from the private sector, the choice of Bermudez as the new Chancellor seem to hinge on his entrepreneurial acumen.

The installation was a gala affair steeped in tradition and replete with flowing academic regalia. Greetings and congratulations poured in from various quarters including Vice Chancellor Prof Hilary Beckles, staff and student representatives and principals of the Cave Hill, Mona and St Augustine campuses.

From the onset, Professor Beckles underscored that the new Chancellor's installation coincides with the academic year which ushers in the UWI's 70th anniversary in 2018. He described it as "a magnificent moment, laden with special historical and contemporary significance, a moment that cries out for change and transfor-

mation... the crossroads in which The UWI has chosen a different path... a direction to radically transform the nature of our operations and the quality of service...."

The university registrar, William Iton, stressed that Bermudez "has enjoyed a distinguished career in business, spanning more than 40 years, during which time he established his standing regionally and internationally". He successfully led the family-owned business to a manufacturing enterprise which has expanded throughout the Caribbean and Latin America.

The installation was actually a special rite confirming authority on the Chancellor. The presidents of the student guild of the three campuses had the privilege of robing the Chancellor while Prof Archibald McDonaki, representing the academic staff, placed the mortarboard on the Chancellor's head as a symbol of knowledge and wisdom. Prof Beckles had the honour of bestowing the Chancellor with the mace signifying the staff of authority.

A salient theme in the various speeches was that of change which embraces the profession of the Chancellor as an entrepreneur, making him unique with a fresh perspective from which The UWI hopes to benefit.

Johnathon St Louis Nahous, president of the student guild at St Augustine stated that "change is the

only thing that bring progress, it is the only constant".

Prof Eugene Bariteau, Principal of the Cave Hill Campus, asserted that The UWI hopes to take advantage of the new Chancellor's entrepreneurial acumen, wisdom, expertise, and penetrating insights as he is one of the most successful corporate leaders in the Caribbean.

Prof Brian Copeland, Principal of the St Augustine campus, noted that "The UWI has defined an activist agenda that targets an effective alignment with industry and government to achieve its goals". He stressed that wealth creation and maximisation of commercial activities are part of this agenda which adopts a culture of innovation.

However, it was the Principal of the Open Campus, Dr Luz Longworth, who took the cake with her allegory of the baker. She recalls her introduction to the new Chancellor who described himself as a "simple baker".

She posits that being a baker is not so simple at all but it is a task which can teach one much about the key elements of successful leadership. She also observes that the Chancellor has mastered the art of baking, "not as a simple baker but as a super baker since being a successful baker is not so simple at all".

Dr Longworth affirms that The UWI is very excited that Bermudez, as a global and regional entrepreneur,

comes to The UWI when it is "rolling out a new and energising strategic plan... He knows that stale recipes are recipes for disaster and that some things take time to be baked to perfection... he knows when and how to get to the 'crux' of the matter".

In his inaugural address, Bermudez acknowledges that he started life as a baker and still sees himself as such. He has followed three basic rules throughout his career. "Stay focused on your competence, keep your head down, and keep your mouth shut."

He noted that "in trusting its leadership to someone outside of academia, the university has made a clear statement as it enters into its 70th year - it is recalibrating itself to the demands of the future".

In pinpointing some of the changes which characterise the world around us in the 21st century, Bermudez believes that not only the University, but all of us should embrace change.

The UWI has indeed taken a bold and innovative stance in installing an entrepreneur at its helm. This has become an imperative, given the dictates of the times. It is a course which The UWI has not traditionally trodden.

Congratulations to Bermudez who brings a fresh, new perspective to The UWI. His sojourn is indeed unique, having traversed the path from baker to Chancellor.

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