

Big change in store for Jamaica

BY J. ALAN HAMILL

Several initiatives were announced at this year's meeting of the Greater Jamaica Development Corporation (GJDC). The biggest of these includes a focus on developing a town/gown relationship between York College and corporations that may be attracted to doing business on the campus.

"This is a year of importance, we took several steps forward," said Chairperson Lamont R. Bailey. Bailey also spoke about the development of the AirTran village, and of a vibrant downtown Jamaica that would attract corporate interests, fine dining establishments and more retail shopping.

The focus of the meeting was a panel of experts who discussed a way in which York College could become an urban renewal center that attracted growth, corporations and jobs. The panel consisted of Marcia Keizs, President of York College, Flores A. Forbes, Assistant Vice President for Strategic Policy and Program Implementation at Columbia University, and Michael A. Weiss, Executive Director at MetroTech Business Improvement District in Brooklyn.

Forbes shared his insight on how Columbia University has been so successful moving into Harlem. "Universities have an economic development interest in the local community," said Forbes. He also said graduate students along with professors that have business ideas should be encouraged to start business or work for business in the local area.

Weiss agreed, "We as a college are posed to help small business." He elaborated that university business schools have the perfect tools to help small business owners maximize their profit by looking at how their business is done. In the late 1980s MetroTech combined Polytechnic University with New York City's Public Development Corporation. Together they changed downtown Brooklyn from financial crisis into the vibrant business and shopping district it is today.

York College is already stepping into the arena of corporate/college partnerships. The Federal Drug Administration (FDA) has its northeast regional office on its campus. York business students are offered exclusive internships with the FDA.

York also offers a Bachelors degree in Aviation Management, which Keizs described as a niche that had growth opportunity and was popular at the school due to its proximity to JFK airport.

The GJDC treasurer, Arthur Benjamin, Jr. reported that 2007 had been extremely successful. "There was a significant turnaround for 2007 with revenue increasing," said Benjamin.

F. Carlisle Towery, President of the GJDC highlighted three projects for development in the coming year. First, they plan to create a signature park at the corner of Sutphin Boulevard and 95th Avenue.

Towery stressed that parking had become a huge issue in Jamaica so he said that the next project would be the creation of a new 500 spot, parking garage. Lastly, he said to combat the negative perception of Jamaica the organization would look into getting new streetlights in the area.



THE COURIER/PHOTO BY J. ALAN HAMILL
Lamont R. Bailey, Chairperson of Greater Jamaica Development Corporation with the guest panel of the GJDC annual meeting including, Flores A. Forbes of Columbia University, Marcia Keizs, president of York College, and Michael Weiss, of MetroTech.