

CONDOLENCE MOTION

Moved by: Councillor Michael Thompson

Seconded by: Mayor John Tory

The Mayor and Members of Toronto City Council are saddened to learn of the passing of legendary Jamaican entrepreneur and philanthropist Gordon “Butch” Stewart on January 4, 2021 at the age of 79 years.

Butch Stewart was one of the hospitality industry’s most vibrant personalities and founder of Sandals Resorts International, the world’s leading all-inclusive resort company. An irresistible force with a relentless focus on exceeding expectations, Butch Stewart defied the odds to build a prestigious vacation brand with more than two dozen distinct destinations throughout the Caribbean.

At the time of his passing, Butch Stewart's Jamaica-based empire included a diverse collection of companies that form Jamaica’s largest private sector group, the country’s biggest foreign exchange earner and its largest non-government employer.

Butch Stewart was born in Kingston on July 6, 1941 and grew up along the island country’s North Coast. Certain from his childhood that he was destined to run his own business, Butch Stewart first stepped into the hospitality industry at age 12, selling fresh-caught fish to local hotels.

After finishing his education, Butch Stewart joined the Dutch-owned Curaçao Trading Company, quickly rising to the position of sales manager. His success fueled his desire to start his own company, and in 1968, he took his chance. Although he had no collateral, Butch Stewart recognized that air conditioning would soon become an essential service in the travel industry. Butch Stewart convinced American manufacturer Fedders Corporation to allow him to represent their brand in Jamaica, and launched Appliance Traders Limited (ATL), his foundational brand.

But ATL was just the beginning. In 1981, recognizing an opportunity to expand into the hospitality sector, Butch Stewart purchased Bay Roc, a rundown hotel on a magnificent beach in Montego Bay. Seven months and \$4 million in renovations later, Sandals Montego Bay opened as the first “luxury all-inclusive,” launching what has become the world’s most prestigious and popular all-inclusive resort chain.

Where traditional all-inclusive resorts offer meals and rooms at a set rate, Butch Stewart's resorts bundle everything from gourmet dining and premium brand drinks to gratuities, airport transfers, taxes and all land and watersport activities into their packages. While competitors offered buffet-style meals, Butch Stewart created on-property specialty restaurants with white-glove service. Sandals Resorts was the first Caribbean hotel company to offer whirlpools, satellite television,

swim-up pool bars and king sized beds in every room. Butch Stewart's obsession with exceeding expectations demonstrated that a Caribbean company could successfully compete with any organization in the world, and earned him a reputation as the “King of All-Inclusives.”

Butch Stewart's passion and innovative approach helped rejuvenate Jamaica’s travel industry and earned him the respect of his peers and the admiration of his country. He was elected President of the Private Sector Organization of Jamaica in 1989 and was inducted into its "Hall of Fame" in 1995. In the mid-1980s, he served as a Director of the Jamaica Tourist Board for a decade and as President of the Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association.

Butch Stewart was more than a successful business leader. He was also a true Jamaican patriot. In 1992, the Jamaican dollar was faltering, putting the country’s economic stability in jeopardy. Butch Stewart launched the “Butch Stewart Initiative,” pumping US\$1 million a week into the official foreign exchange market at below prevailing rates to help halt the slide of the Jamaican dollar.

In 1994, Butch Stewart led a group of investors to take control of a struggling and demoralized Air Jamaica, the Caribbean’s largest regionally-based air carrier. Butch Stewart instituted a “passenger-focused” approach including on-time service, reduced waiting lines, better trained staff, free champagne and better food. He also opened new routes in the Caribbean, added new airplanes and established a Montego Bay hub for flights to and from the United States. The formula succeeded and in late 2004, with its revenues increased by over US\$250 million, Butch Stewart gave the airline back to the government.

Butch Stewart was a generous philanthropist, supporting a wide range of environmental initiatives and donating millions of dollars to charitable causes such as those honouring the bravery of veterans and first responders, and others helping those suffering in the wake of devastating hurricanes. In 2009, he created The Sandals Foundation, which supports initiatives ranging from building schools and paying teachers, to bringing healthcare to the doorsteps of those who cannot afford it.

Butch Stewart's achievements earned him more than 50 local, regional, and international accolades including Jamaica’s highest national distinctions: The Order of Jamaica (O.J.), and Commander of the Order of Distinction (C.D.). In 2017, Butch Stewart was honoured with the inaugural Lifetime Achievement Award at the annual Caribbean Hotel and Resort Investment Summit (CHRIS) for his impressive contributions to the hospitality industry.

The City Clerk is requested to convey, on behalf of the Members of Toronto City Council, our deepest sympathy to Gordon “Butch” Stewart’s wife Cheryl, their seven children, 12 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren on his passing.

February 2, 2021