



Games people love to play...and more

Speaking Notes for Paul Hoo
Chairman – Supreme Ventures Limited
Installation Dinner – Sunset Optimist Club of Kingston
October 29, 2006

Past Governors, Lieutenant Governors, Optimists, Ladies & Gentlemen...good evening.

I am very happy to be here this evening, to share in this prestigious event – the installation of the new President for your club – my friend and colleague Lorna Gooden, who is also an Assistant Vice President of Supreme Ventures Limited.

Whilst welcoming Lorna to serve in this capacity, I also want to congratulate the outgoing Club President for a job well done.

I have always admired the Optimist Club and the genuine care displayed by its members towards our communities and their strong desire to make a difference in the lives of young people.

Indeed, your clubs are making a real difference, through your conduct of positive service programs for children, many of whom face enormous challenges on a daily basis.

Your motto "Friends of Youth" echoes a message which must ring not only in this room amongst your membership, but in the wider society – in communities all cross Jamaica, in corporate boardrooms, in charity organizations, political parties and all civic bodies.

If Jamaica is to have the bright future that all of us want, then there is no option but to promote the kinds of programmes that are carried out by the Optimist Clubs.

The Police statistics show that the majority of major crimes committed in Jamaica are carried out by young men under the age of 25, with some as young as 12 and 13 years old. This is where we have to focus our energies. We ignore the youngsters at our peril.

It is therefore timely that I share with you on the topic "Corporate Social Responsibility – PR Stunt or Necessity in these times".

Corporate Social responsibility (CSR) refers to the idea that a company ought to be sensitive to the needs of all of the "stakeholders" in its business operations.

A company's stakeholders are all those who are influenced by, or can influence a company's decisions and actions. These can include, but are not limited to: employees, customers, suppliers, community

organizations, subsidiaries and affiliates, joint venture partners, local neighborhoods, investors, and shareholders.

CSR is also closely linked to the principles of Sustainable Development, in proposing that enterprises should be obliged to make decisions based not only on financial and economic factors but also on the social and environmental consequences of their activities.

Yes, I agree that we must crunch the numbers, stay away from the red on the books and return value to our shareholders, but we cannot turn a blind eye to the ills facing our society.

Indeed, it is that act of ignoring the blatant problems facing the society that will and has returned to haunt many businesses and corporations. That's why today's heightened interest in the proper role of businesses in society has been promoted by increased sensitivity to, and awareness of environmental and ethical issues. Issues like environmental damage, improper treatment of workers, and faulty production leading to customers' inconvenience or danger, are highlighted in the media.

In some countries Government regulation regarding environmental and social issues has increased and some consumers have become increasingly sensitive to the CSR performance of the companies from which they buy their goods and services. These trends have

contributed to the pressure on companies to operate in an economically, socially and environmentally friendly way.

Tonight, I want us to distinguish Corporate Social Responsibility from charitable donations and it being just a PR stunt to highlight the "good works" of a company.

When we spend money on community projects, the endowment of scholarships, and the establishment of foundations, we are making a huge difference. When we encourage our employees to volunteer to take part in community work and thereby create goodwill in the community, and to partake in mentorship programmes – we are making a difference in the lives of real people with real problems.

This far supersedes the reputation of the company and the strengthening of a brand. For whilst these are important, we must also be cognizant of the impact we have on the well-being and development of others, especially those who are less fortunate.

A widely quoted definition by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development states that, "Corporate Social Responsibility is the continuing commitment by businesses to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families, as well as of the local community and society at large."

In short, we have to look at the big picture.

We have to move away from seeing our customers as just a step ladder to profits, but also we have to find a way to be engaging and to say to customers, we are here to serve your needs as well.

Jamaican companies must strive to reach a place where corporate social responsibility is not just a deliverable of the PR department but a concept fully embraced by all the employees.

There is now increasingly a wider acceptance of the idea that corporations do have ethical obligations to serve the interests of the wider society. This is not just to earn the much sought after tag of having a good corporate character or being a good corporate citizen – but as I said before – to make a real difference in real lives. It definitely cannot be a PR stunt but a necessity – something we have to do.

This is why Supreme Ventures Limited, since we began operations in June 2001 embarked on a programme of corporate social responsibility, that has seen us make enormous contributions to Jamaica, taking the term “corporate citizen” to a new and more meaningful level.

What we have utilized, is an excellent decision-making policy through a teamwork approach by the management, to spot areas where we can make a difference.

Our company makes contributions from our lottery gaming revenue to the Culture, Health, Arts, Sports and Education, (C.H.A.S.E.) Fund set up by the Government, as well as donations to worthy institutions and needy persons, through our corporate public relations budget.

The monthly contributions to the C.H.A.S.E. fund of \$2-3 Million by Supreme Ventures, is assisting the nation's future leaders such as artistes, sportsmen and women to achieve their goals.

I think it is important that I point out at this time that Supreme Venture has been making a number of donations to various charities and associations, most of which are done without the knowledge of the general public – but making a huge impact on the lives of the recipients.

Some of the larger initiatives include the ten million dollar donation between the Jamaica Red Cross Society and The Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM) to purchase relief supplies, immediately following Hurricane Ivan.

We also signed a 3-year, 10-million dollar partnership in 2003 with the Ministry of National Security, to support a scholarship fund in order to facilitate a Youth Initiative Programme against Crime.

We are very proud of this association, because the initiative provides scholarships to needy students 12-18 years old, across all 14 parishes, to assist them in their back to school expenses. The commitment was renewed for the period 2006 – 2008, at a value of \$4.5M annually and this year the programme assisted over 110 students with scholarships and grants.

SVL is also a major contributor to youth development through sports. We have in place, a mentorship programme for sponsored athletes, including monthly stipends to meet immediate financial needs. Our staff members work closely with select sports clubs. In fact, our Business House Football team shares the facilities and community activities with a Premier League team. Our netball programme with the Jamaica Netball Association assists two players each year, with scholarships for furthering their education at a tertiary level.

And my friends, the list goes on...making a difference in people's lives in so many ways, not just for the PR value but in a similar way to the Optimists, that is, being 'Friends of Youth.' There can be no future for this our lovely nation, without concentration on love and development of our young persons.

Therefore, we need more organizations that take corporate social responsibility seriously, like the Optimist Clubs. We need those who will not just sit on the fence or on their verandahs and bemoan the ills of society, but who will actually get up and do something about it.

I won't use the phrase "balancing people's lives" because that's well documented elsewhere but I want us as well-thinking Jamaicans to explore every opportunity to make somebody's life better each day.

Lorna, I am sure you and your incoming team of executives will continue to uphold the highest principles of the Optimist movement, as you live up to the Optimist's creed.

I urge you and your team to continue to aid and encourage the development of youth, in the belief that the giving of one's self in service to others, will advance the well-being of mankind, community life and the world.

Thank you.