

2008: ANTHONY N. SABGA (h.c.)

Anthony Norman Sabga was born in Syria in 1923, the second of three sons of Norman Sabga and his wife. They were among the last of the Christian immigrants from the former Ottoman Empire, fleeing from religious persecution to come to Trinidad in 1930. They lived on Duncan Street in Port of Spain where young Anthony attended Nelson Street Boys R.C. School. At age 14, when his father was ailing and had returned to Syria, he joined his two brothers in running the family haberdashery business, N.S. Sabga and Sons at No. 73 Queen Street. At that time he found a promissory note signed by his father for \$1,500, and, still in short pants, and having just learnt to speak English, the young man had the integrity and temerity to go to the bank's manager to negotiate its repayment.

By 1945, he found it impossible to continue working in the small family business with his two brothers. He considered the elder more intellectual than himself and the younger had completed his secondary education at Queen's Royal College. Accordingly, he decided to strike out on his own and, against his father's wishes formed the company of Standard Distributors. On his return from a trip to North America the same year, sales from the merchandise he imported were disappointing, but being determined to succeed he made a trip to England which turned out to be very successful, thus putting him on a firm footing on his commission agency business. In September, 1948 Anthony Sabga married Minerva Sabga and the six children of this union are Linda, Norman, Jo-Ann, David, Donna Marie and Andrew.

Encouraged by the positive results of his small company in the early 50s he attended an exhibition and trade fair in Hanover, Germany that gave him an insight into the many possibilities that could be pursued, especially after his visit to the booth of Robert Bosch, the well known manufacturer of refrigerators and other appliances. He was taken with the idea of selling appliances as this was an enterprise in which he saw the potential of crafting a legacy for his family. He ordered from Mr. Bosch a modest selection of products which was shipped to Trinidad and to Anthony Sabga's pleasant surprise, they were an overwhelming success, so much so that Bosch themselves could not believe it. This wonderful result was in no small measure due to the shrewd marketing ability of Anthony Sabga and represents the initial diversification from a commissioned agency to that of a marketing and retail business. To boost sales and recognition for Standard Distributors, he focused on creating a demand for a small 5-cubic-foot Bosch refrigerator and would put five or six units on offer them for a week on demonstration to prospective clients throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago. Less than 5% of the units were returned and he took the country by storm advertising "A refrigerator for \$2.50 a week!"

In the government's effort to industrialise Trinidad and Tobago after Independence in 1962 legislation was passed which made it impossible to continue importing refrigerators. Bosch, however, refused to allow any of their products to be manufactured outside of Germany unless it was under German supervision, which led in 1966 to the beginning of ANSA Industries. This company was established to locally manufacture refrigerators, cookers and other electrical appliances through licensing agreements with Admiral Corporation of the USA. This also included Hitachi radios from Japan, Blaupunkt and Bompani cookers from Modena, Italy.

ANSA Industries put exports on the front burner, selling not only to the CARICOM countries but also to other countries in the region in advance of the establishment of the CARICOM treaty. So successful was it, that it went on to win the first Prime Minister's Award for Export Performance in 1968. Anthony Sabga's other companies were also very profitable. Standard Distributors had become a household name in Trinidad with six outlets nationwide, and Farmhouse Industries, a dairy product company was thriving. ANSA's subsidiaries in other Caribbean islands, later added to the success of the group. ANSA Industries eventually became Consolidated Appliances Ltd.

During the 1970's, Anthony Sabga became very involved in printing and publishing which was a largely untapped market in Trinidad. He acquired the lucrative agency for the Heidelberg printing press and began selling printing presses across the Caribbean. ANSA sold 280 of the machines and trained printers to use them, effectively revolutionizing the printing industry in the region. ANSA also established an automated printing operation at the Trinidad Guardian which allowed the newspaper to increase its printing capacity.

In the decade of the 80's following the passing away of Eric Williams and the end of the oil boom, Trinidad and Tobago entered a fresh reality. The new elected Prime Minister, George Chambers, warned of a global recession of inflation, monetary instability, high interest rates, growing unemployment and a pending crisis of indebtedness. The financial difficulties of the ailing McEneaney-Alstons group grew to crisis proportions and by 1986 the value of the stock diminished from \$3.88 in 1982 to .35 cents; a significant equity infusion was required to avoid the entire group going into receivership. In the eyes of Anthony Sabga, McAl's prime companies' were

possessed of sufficient potential for him to made an offer of a \$40 million cash injection into the ailing conglomerate and provide the expertise to turn the entire group around.

At that time, ANSA' corporate development strategy recognized the need for broad-based diversification through investment in enterprises which possessed strong operations management personnel. Its directors were also of the view that the Trinidad and Tobago Economy was adjusting to realistic unit cost and efficiency levels, which with other required resources, would serve to re-establish competitiveness in the new industrial activities. ANSA saw this opportunity to invest significant new equity funds in McAl as an excellent vehicle for the pursuit of its corporate philosophy and development strategy. This marriage of three of the most successful businesses in the Caribbean – ANSA, McEneaney and Co. and Alston's Ltd., has made ANSA McAL a regional leader in manufacturing, distribution, services, packaging, automotives, media, shipping, travel, banking, insurance, real estate and most recently, energy.

At 85, Anthony N. Sabga, continues to be recognised for h is entrepreneurship started some 63 years ago and for his present-day contribution to the business life in Trinidad and Tobago, and is fondly labeled the man with the "Midas Touch". He has relentlessly emphasised the need for integrity and humility in the conduct of one's life, and has sought to make certain that the Executive of various group companies reflect those qualities in their respective business activities. He has consistently taken the lead in asserting the critical contribution of the private sector to economic and social well-being and has also stressed the importance of the preparation of our youth for their entry into the field of work.

Today Anthony N. Sabga's family is very involved in the business – his three sons holding key positions in the group. This is something he had not envisioned but of which he is very proud. Norman is the group Chairman and Chief Executive; David, Deputy Group Chairman; and Andrew, Chief Executive Officer of Caribbean Development Company and Carib Brewery; and his wife, Mrs. Minerva Sabga is a non-executive Director of the ANSA Group. His daughter, Mrs. Linda Sabga-Hadeed is a Director on the Board of the ANSA McAl Foundation.

Always one for putting down landmarks, Anthony N. Sabga's vision and drive saw the completion of ANSA House, Regent's Park, Maple House and Bayside Towers in the west and the City of Grand Bazaar in the east.

He has been the recipient of many honours for his brilliant contribution to the growth and welfare of Trinidad and Tobago among which are:

- Prime Minister's Award for Innovation and Invention, Lifetime Achievement Award Manufacturing Sector 2004
- The American Foundation for the outstanding contribution to the Caribbean 2004
- The Hilton Trinidad and Conference Centre Award for devoted and valued contribution towards the industrial and financial development of Trinidad and Tobago and Internationally, 2003
- Trinidad and Tobago Icons of the Nation in the category: Thinkers, Movers and Shapers 2002
- The Chaconia Medal Gold 1998
- The UWI Doctor of Laws Honoris Causa 1998

- The Ernst & Young Master Entrepreneur of the Year 1998

Indeed, it is the hope that those who aspire for success in their chosen fields across the Caribbean, will be inspired to apply the same commitment, discipline and integrity that have characterised the incredible career of Anthony N. Sabga.

The Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce is indeed honoured to Anthony N. Sabga into the Business Hall of Fame on this 11th November, 2008.