

## **2010: ROBERT THEOPHILUS YORKE (h.c.)**

Robert Theophilus Yorke was born in humble circumstances on 4th May 1932 in Tobago. His parents Adam and Jane Yorke came from Buccoo and Patience Hill respectively. He was the second of eight siblings.

He would often walk across the Mt. Irvine Sugar Estate to get from his home to Black Rock, Grafton or Buccoo where he would go fishing. If he were caught he and his friends would be severely chastised by the estate manager. Indeed his father was once admonished for cutting open one of the estate coconuts without permission. These incidents became a strong motivating factor in Bob's desire to educate and better himself and inspired him to become successful. Even in those formative years, he was looked up to and regarded as the leader in his family.

After leaving school he took an apprenticeship in Tobago before moving to Trinidad to begin work at the Longdenville brick factory where his cousin was the general foreman. During this time Bob became restless and resolved to seek new pastures as soon as possible, and eventually with the money he had saved, he left for London in 1951.

Bob Yorke arrived in England with no real engineering ambitions but he worked with several engineering consultancies in the London area. This decided his choice of studies in structural engineering at Hammersmith College. He met his Barbadian-born wife Greta in London where she was a nurse, and they have one daughter who was born there in 1965. Bob then decided to leave the U.K. to take up the position of Design Engineer with the Public Works Department in Antigua. After two years he returned with his family to Trinidad in 1967 and assumed the position as Chief Engineer at Sanders and Foster, a British steel fabricator that

operated a small shop in Arima. Five years later in 1972, when Sanders and Foster pulled out of the Caribbean, Bob started Yorke Structures Ltd., with just ten employees. Under his prudent and responsible leadership, it was the first and only local structural steel company for a number of years and developed into the premier structural engineering and steel fabricating company in the Caribbean region. It specialises in the design, fabrication and erection of structural steelwork for apartment buildings, office complexes, airports, university campuses and petrochemical plants in Trinidad and Tobago and the rest of the Caribbean, and now employs in excess of four hundred persons.

Robert Yorke has very quietly and without fanfare contributed to the development of the engineering industry. He is a Chartered Structural Engineer registered with the Board of Engineering in Trinidad and Tobago, a Fellow of the Institution of Structural Engineers and the Institution of Civil Engineers U.K., as well as a Life Fellow of the Association of Professional Engineers of Trinidad and Tobago. He is the Patron of the Institution of Structural Engineers (Caribbean Division) and is also the recipient of the Association of Professional Engineers of Trinidad and Tobago's highest award - "Career of Excellence" which he received in 2003. In 2004 he was awarded the "Service Award" from the Institution of Structural Engineers and subsequently the " People's Choice - award" by the Institute of Structural Engineers in the U.K. In November 2005, Robert Yorke was awarded an Honorary Doctorate Degree in Engineering and Entrepreneurship from the University of Trinidad and Tobago.

Because of Mr. Yorke's commitment to the development of further education in our citizenry, several students have been afforded scholarships, not only in engineering, but also in many different fields at local, regional and foreign universities. Over the last fifteen years, he has, through his company, donated on

an annual basis two prizes to the Faculty of Engineering for the “Best Level 2 Civil Engineering Student” and the "Most Outstanding Level 2 Student". In addition, for many years engineering students have been given vacation and permanent employment.

He has also contributed to the building, restoration or repair works to churches, schools and private residences. Over the years several charities have received donations on a regular and on-going basis. He has also served in the past as Property Advisor to the Anglican Diocese of Trinidad & Tobago.

Robert Yorke has devoted most of his life towards building a high level of competence in the structural engineering industry that is highly regarded locally, regionally and internationally. He has been instrumental in the development of the energy industry in Trinidad and Tobago as a result of his company's deep involvement in the construction of the methanol, urea, ammonia, steel, iron carbide and liquefied gas plants in the country.

Whilst structural engineering is his first love, he has also found time to engage in other productive industries and most importantly has given back to society in many different ways.

In 1985, Robert Yorke purchased the Mt. Irvine Bay Hotel and Golf Course from the then Malaysian owners who were divesting their interests in Trinidad and Tobago. This was notable as he was the first Tobagonian to purchase a hotel of that size. It was remarkable as he was able to buy the very estate that he himself had been forbidden to enter as a young boy and to return to the area where he grew up in humble surroundings, now as a successful and wealthy businessman; a truly rags to riches story.

The Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce is indeed honoured to induct Mr. Robert T. Yorke into the Business Hall of Fame on this 24<sup>th</sup> of November, 2010.