

2011: NAZIR AHAMAD (1935-2005)

For the past sixty years Southern Sales and Service Company Limited has contributed to the evolution of this country into a modern industrial nation, shaping the character of the motoring and transport culture of Trinidad and Tobago. That Mazda, Kia, Audi and Isuzu are household names is owed to the business acumen, vision and direction of the late Nazir Ahamad.

Nazir Ahamad, who was fondly known as “Naz”, was born in Siparia on 11th March 1935 and was the son of Aziz and Zoharah Ahamad, the sixth child of a family of four brothers and five sisters. He was educated at Fatima and St. Mary's Colleges in Port of Spain, and in 1958 graduated from Birmingham University, England with a BSc Degree in Civil Engineering. He subsequently returned home and joined one of his father's companies, Aziz Ahamad Ltd., which was involved in transport and engineering services.

Three years later, Nazir Ahamad, the qualified engineer, made a life-changing decision to join another company founded by his father, Aziz. The company, Southern Sales and Services, was at its early stages of development. Inheriting his father's entrepreneurial talent, he brought his acumen to bear as he grew the company, which over the years expanded and weathered the economic fortunes of Trinidad and Tobago and the fluctuations of the local motor vehicle industry. From its humble beginnings in 1952 on Royal Road, San Fernando, with a sub-agency for Morris cars, Southern Sales' outreach is now to all of Trinidad and Tobago with services that include not only sales of automobiles, but also service, spare parts, repairs, vehicle rentals and financing.

As the company took giant leaps forward under Naz's stewardship, his career also advanced rapidly, as he was appointed Director and Sales Manager in 1964 and three years later Managing Director.

At this time, in a conscious effort to improve national self-sufficiency, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago decided that local assembly would be the future of the automobile industry in the country and in 1966 Neal and Massy Industries, an auto assembly plant was established at Morvant (which later moved to Arima), with a 25% participation by Southern Sales and Service. This sustained a work force of some 700 persons, and the plant was equipped to provide a viable source of employment to people of the area.

Naz Ahamad was an astute businessman, a dynamic leader, and a man of high integrity. In his family business he worked side by side with all employees, particularly grooming his three equally talented sons, Imtiaz, Shiraz, and Reyaz as his successors. With Southern Sales as a springboard, other business leaders in Trinidad and Tobago recognised his valuable potential, and Naz was called to serve on many Boards of Directors, oftentimes in the position of Chairman, including: Guardian Holdings Ltd.; Universal Investments Ltd.; Caribbean Finance Company Ltd.; Neal & Massy Holdings Ltd.; Caribbean Packaging Industries Ltd.; Agostini's Ltd.; The Bank of Nova Scotia; Trinidad & Tobago Oil Company Ltd. and Maritime Life Caribbean Ltd.

A quiet and unassuming gentleman, Naz never tried to impose his ideas and opinions on anyone, but in the end he always got his way, convincing his colleagues that what he said made good sense. Naz had the Midas touch: almost anything he touched turned to gold. In his role as Chairman, he always worked

closely with the chief executive officers of the respective companies, giving advice and guidance when required, and supporting them when the situation demanded it. Board meetings under his chairmanship were always enjoyable while being serious, and he invariably sought to inject some humour into the proceedings. Naz Ahamad ensured that proper governance practices were institutionalised in the companies in which he was involved.

While Naz was committed to the task of building the business and sacrificed some family time towards this goal, his wife Zahida, whom he married in November 1960, stood by his side. She was dedicated and ensured that the essential building blocks of family were instilled in all of their children. In her own way, through her sacrifices, she was also responsible for the growth of the business. Both roles seem to have come together when it came to their grandchildren. Around them the prominent, disciplined businessman, who often appeared intimidating, would become a gentle giant.

On Independence Day 2003, Nazir Ahamad was awarded the Chaconia Medal Gold for "Long and Meritorious Service to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in the sphere of business." The following year, at its awards function in July 2004, The South Trinidad Chamber of Industry and Commerce announced that in recognition of his outstanding contribution, the Nazir Ahamad Award for Entrepreneurship would be presented from 2005. Before his passing he was informed that he would be awarded with an Honorary Doctor of Laws degree at a function to be held at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus in October 2004.

In 1994, the Ahamad Trust was established by Naz Ahamad. It has made annual contributions to more than twenty charitable organisations, apart from contributions made during the year to needy cases, schools, churches, the orphanage and homes for the aged. Naz has helped persons in need and has been instrumental in "kick-starting" the careers of many young entrepreneurs whether through financial support or much needed advice.

No tribute to Naz Ahamad would be complete without mentioning horse racing. He loved horses and owned and bred them passionately. In 1971 he had his first success with "Ironside" and over the next 35 years, his famous red and black colours could always be found in the winner's circle with such famous winners as "Flag Woman", "Renegade", "Panama Pete", "Sweet Tassa" and "Actstatic". He had three Derby winners and is legendary for winning the St. Anns, St. James and Steward's cups in one day. He was Chairman of the Betting Levy Board and received a Jetsam Award for his outstanding contribution to racing. His love for the 'sport of kings' extended to England and he always fixed his annual visit around the racing at Ascot.

Racing was all about friendship, and those he had with other owners, jockeys, grooms, punters and trainers, but his most cherished friend was renowned trainer Eric "Colt" Durant. They had a bond that could never be broken and in fact, he insisted in paying tribute to "Colt" with a Memorial Race Day. We are sure that he would appreciate that his sons have continued this tradition with his red and black colours.

Naz Ahamad loved and lived life. He remembered his friend's birthdays and would call them regularly, even from his many trips abroad. A benefactor who

contributed to numerous charitable causes without public acclamation or recognition, a family man and a caring friend, Naz Ahamad passed away in 2004 after a two-year battle with cancer. His legacy will be carried on by the many people whose lives he touched.

The Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce is indeed honoured to induct Mr. Nazir Ahamad into the Business Hall of Fame on this 15th October, 2011.