

2011: CONRAD ERROL O'BRIEN

Conrad Errol O'Brien was born on 6th October, 1925 and is the son of Errol O'Brien, a lawyer of Irish descent and Élmire, daughter of Gaston and Sophie de Gannes of La Compensation Estate, Arima. He was the youngest of three children, preceded by Terence and Patricia and received his education at St. Mary's College. He started his business career as an accounts clerk at B.W.I.A., and then joined the staff of Barclays Bank, starting at \$40.00 per month.

In 1948 the O'Brien family resided at Picton Street in Port of Spain and their neighbour Harry Merry, then Sales Manager of Charles McEneaney & Co. Ltd., approached Conrad and suggested that he apply for the job as salesman with his company as they were increasing their sales force. At ten o'clock the following morning he was interviewed by the Managing Director Mr. Melville de Nobriga, who, impressed with Conrad's forthrightness and affable nature offered him the job. As banking was not his forte, he gladly accepted the position thus starting an association with the company that spanned over 50 years.

Conrad O'Brien was very successful in the sales of motor vehicles, and was appointed Manager of the Tobago branch that was established in 1950. After a period of three years in Scarborough he intimated to Managing Director, Mr. Ralph Gibson, that he would like to return to Trinidad. Three months later he was appointed assistant to the Sales Manager of Port of Spain, Hervé de Verteuil, upon whose resignation in 1959, he replaced as Sales Manager. In recognition of his dedicated service to the company, he was made a Director the following year, and in 1969, Managing Director. In 1975 he was appointed Chairman and Managing Director of Charles McEneaney & Co., Ltd.

Keenly interested in civic affairs, Conrad O'Brien was a founding member of the Junior Chamber of Commerce of Trinidad and Tobago. He was elected President in 1957, the West Indies President in 1960 and World President of the Junior Chamber International in 1964 when he was given one year's sabbatical, visiting 55 countries during this period. In 1969 Trinidad and Tobago hosted the World Congress of the JC International that was attended by over 2,000 delegates from over 80 countries. Conrad served on that committee as Chief Advisor.

The Junior Chamber of Commerce is a worldwide organisation which adopted its name in 1916. Mr. Edwin Duval, who on returning home from a business trip to England where he had met a member of the London Chapter, assembled 21 vibrant young businessmen, including Conrad, who eagerly brought this idea to fruition and so the Trinidad Chapter of the Jaycees was born in 1949. At that time, the business community was not very vocal and hardly got involved in national issues, but as members of this new team they created trade fairs, Carnival queen contests and a number of projects of that sort, which were a huge success. The glamour that Conrad attracted was undoubtedly beneficial to Charles McEneaney & Co. Ltd. In his personal capacity he also organised Carnival bands that were looked forward to with much enthusiasm. These included Toy Soldiers; Flag Wavers of Sienna; Siamese Dancers; Beefeaters; Fantasy of Chess; Greek Guards, etc., which won many prizes at the various competitions.

Conrad O'Brien represented Charles McEneaney in all aspects of their business enterprise. His incomparable ability as a salesman and his astute business acumen contributed to the expansion of the motor vehicle industry. He was passionate about public service and public life and had risen quite naturally to be the driving force of the company. In 1966 His Excellency Sir Solomon Hochoy appointed Conrad to the Upper House (the Senate), as the business representative - one of the nine Senators representing various sections of the community. He also served on the Police Commission; and on 31st August 1974 was awarded the Humming Bird Medal Gold for Public Service by H.E. Sir Ellis Clarke.

In 1969, Charles McEneaney & Co. Ltd merged with Alstons Ltd and in 1982, Conrad O'Brien was appointed Deputy Chairman of the group; and in 1983, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer. He also served as Chairman of Amalgamated Industries Ltd., Trinidad Distributors Ltd., Director of Trinidad Publishing Company Ltd., Caribbean Development Company Ltd., The Advocate Company Ltd., (Barbados), McEneaney Alstons Florida Inc., McEneaney (Barbados) Ltd., Charles McEneaney & Company Ltd. (Barbados), in 1987 a Director of McEneaney-Alstons Foundation, a Director of Fincor (Finance House), H.J. Gransauil & Co.; Hardware and Oilfield Equipment Co. Ltd.; J.D.Allum & Co. Ltd; and Amalgamated Finance Ltd.

For the first few years after the merger, McEneaney Alstons continued to be a profitable enterprise. But there was a recession in the offing and the continuing downturn in the national economy during the 80's caused a significant contraction in trading activities. These took place against a backdrop of Trinidad and Tobago's faltering fortunes as the price of oil fell on the world markets. As the motor vehicle sector, the lifeblood of the company, experienced significant challenges it became clear to Conrad that a significant infusion of capital was required to avoid their collapse, and in his wisdom, Conrad looked for a company that could provide the funds to prevent receivership and which would see the business continue to grow and reach new heights. Bold and courageous decisions had to be made and he was instrumental in successful negotiations with Mr. Anthony N. Sabga of the ANSA McAL group, who provided a significant infusion of capital.

In 1987, Conrad O'Brien, resigned from the board of McEneaney Alstons and moved to Florida with his wife Patricia née Moze and their two children Sharon and Jason. He returned to the group in 1992 as Chairman of the two Florida based subsidiaries ANSA McAL (US) Inc. and DCI Miami INC. until his final retirement in 2006.

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