

Remarks
Ambassador D. Brent Hardt
Guyana Shines Education Launch
Friday, February 1, 2013, 10:30 a.m.
at St. Joseph's High School, Georgetown

Chief Education Officer, Olato Sam, (TBD)
St. Joseph's Head Teacher, Mrs. Gail Primo,
Miss India Worldwide, Alana Seebarran,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Students,
Members of the media.

Thank you very much for the lovely introduction Alana.

We are very excited to have you on board as part of our Guyana Shines team. As Miss India Worldwide, you are already a wonderful role model for girls and women in Guyana. We commend you for taking your work a step further to give back to your country by becoming a volunteer and an inspiration to others.

It is a pleasure to be at St. Joseph's this morning, together with students, teachers, volunteers, and the representatives of the diplomatic and civil society organizations that form a part of Guyana Shines. Guyana Shines was launched on Earth Day last year, and our work has never really come to a stop. The main purpose behind Guyana Shines is to encourage and mobilize citizens and communities maintain a clean environment to address the serious littering problem and return Guyana to its glory days of being known as the Garden City.

This is an important objective, because maintaining a clean environment is necessary for good health, it supports biodiversity, it encourages tourism development and increases property values, it ensures waterways are kept unclogged which makes flooding less likely, and it generally improves the quality of life of everyone.

Guyana Shines really encourages Guyanese people to embrace civic activism and work to find a solution to the litter problem at the community level. So far, under the umbrella of Guyana Shines activities, we have also supported a number of hands-on, clean-up projects within specific Georgetown neighborhoods, to bring communities together in common action. Our team worked together with local communities in Lodge, Tucville, East La Penitence, and Festival City to clean up these neighborhoods and make them shine.

Perhaps our most successful clean-up yet was last November when the Festival City Youth and Parent Organisation (FCYPO) organized a community clean-up day in their historic neighborhood. Guyana Shines partners joined the effort, donating a few tools, including a rake, hoe, wheelbarrow,

broom and gloves, and all the volunteers spent the morning getting to know each other while picking up trash. The almost 40 volunteers hailed not only from Guyana Shines organizations, but we also had representatives from Habitat for Humanity, the University of Guyana's EcoTrust Society, Scotia Bank, Youth Media Guyana, Marian Academy, and the Rotaract Club of Georgetown Central.

Through Guyana Shines, we have also reached out to schools across Georgetown to deliver presentations to increase awareness of the harmful effects of littering and pollution and encouraged students to make environmentally friendly decisions and take action to be a part of the solution. Last year, we reached about 15 primary schools, and this time around, Guyana Shines is aiming to reach 50 more schools in the Georgetown

area. My visit to St. Joseph's High School today marks the official launch of the second school tour for Guyana Shines.

We have modified our school presentations this year to make them even better. Students will be left with concrete information about opportunities for recycling in Guyana and where they can send their waste in return for money. They will be taught some great methods to reduce and re-use materials. Students will learn how easy it is to make a compost heap, at school or at home. And most importantly, students will learn about ways to spread awareness and inspire others to care about the environment.

Another special feature of Guyana Shines is that the U.S. Embassy will be hosting two separate contests for the environment. The first one is known as the *2013 Innovation and*

Creativity Contest: Looking for New Ways to Reduce our Ecological Footprint and it is open to students ages 12 to 16 in all of South America. We are inviting students to submit research proposals offering innovative solutions to environmental problems, such as waste disposal, recycling, pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, renewable energy, water conservation, and biodiversity.

The contest will focus on innovation and creativity, fundamental traits in the application of science to the world's environmental challenges. The rules and information about the contest are now posted online, registration opens on February 25, and applications are due by April 30. Winners of the contest will be announced on June 5, World Environment Day.

The second contest is our 2013 Wildlife Drawing Contest, where students ages eight to 11 can draw a picture of the beautiful wildlife in Guyana and explain to us why wildlife conservation is important. The 12 best drawings will be featured in a wildlife calendar for 2014, to help promote awareness on protection for wildlife. The contest opens today and all drawings are due to the Embassy by April 30. Winners will also be announced on World Environment Day in June. Additional information for both contests can be found on our official Embassy website and our Facebook site.

This time around, as part of our Education tour, we have also built up our Guyana Shines corps of volunteers. Just this Tuesday, the U.S. Embassy hosted a training session for volunteers interested in being a part of Guyana Shines. We were incredibly pleased to see over 50 volunteers sign up from

different organizations, including the EcoTrust Society, students from our Youth Ambassadors Program, Lions Club members, UG students, private sector representatives, the diplomatic corps, and community organizations. These volunteers will really help us to reach as many schools as we can in Georgetown and I would like to thank them for their service. Volunteers are such a valuable resource to schools, workplaces, and communities, and we really appreciate their help to get this message of environmental awareness out.

The U.S. Embassy is always eager to promote volunteerism and work to help Guyanese citizens cultivate their own natural inclinations to improve their community and their country. Sometimes, where government may fall short, there is a strong need for civic action and for civil society to help in manifesting the interests and will of citizens. We have witnessed the

limitations of the government in dealing with littering and waste management issues, to the detriment of Guyana's citizens.

Therefore, there is a great need for civic action in order to help remedy the problem.

What makes matters more difficult is that Guyana has not held local government elections since 1994, and the institutions and practice of local governance have withered on the vine since that time. While Guyana has made great strides in strengthening its democracy, the continued absence of democratically elected and effective local government remains a persistent drag on Guyana's national development and its attractiveness as an investment destination.

It is time for Guyana to seize its great potential by affording its citizens strong and effective local governance to

build safer, more prosperous, and more democratic communities. Local government institutions bring government closer to the people, fostering greater inclusion, civic responsibility, empowerment, and participation. Effective and efficient public administration coupled with healthy local governance can drive development efforts.

All of the partners of Guyana Shines and our amazing volunteers are extremely pleased to be a part of such an important initiative that lends support to the cleaning up and restoration of communities in Guyana. We look forward to visiting each and every school so that we can instill in our youths the importance of taking care of our environment.

Educating young people can transform the attitudes of an entire generation, as well as how they think about the future.

With that thought, I would like to thank the staff and students of St. Joseph's for hosting me this morning. As a token of my appreciation, I would like to leave behind with the school a copy of this book *Garbage: Investigate What Happens When You Throw It Out*. This is an engaging and informative book that touches on the history of garbage, where garbage goes, and the recycling process. It also has fun facts and hands-on activities, so young readers are able to discover firsthand how our actions affect the world around us. What you do with your garbage is about choices, and changing individual behavior is the first step. This book helps teach kids that they can make a difference now, and for the rest of their lives.

Thank you.