

A Force Forward: NGC Sanfest

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The launch today of NGC Sanfest is a celebration of the Arts as a channel for collaboration, expression, education and performance. For over 45 years this Junior Arts Festival has brought to life the learning of the classroom in the areas of Visual Arts, Creative Writing, Dance, Drama, Speech and Music. The National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited is extremely proud to have been a benefactor to this key event on the schools' calendar for 13 years, and to have taken up the mantle of sole sponsor or, as we like to call it, "investor", in 2009.

Kudos to the San Fernando Arts Council and its committed members and stalwarts for having had the foresight to initiate an event like this, and to persevere with it over the decades. Under their guidance, the Festival has flourished! NGC Sanfest now lasts a month, takes place at several venues,

involves hundreds of talented participants and attracts thousands of citizens from around Trinidad and Tobago who come to learn, to be inspired and amazed, and to cheer on their friends, families and students!

Among all its other positive attributes, NGC Sanfest is the epitome of what affirmative community-building is all about. And that...is priceless.

Let's consider—just briefly—this year's theme: *Empowering Our Youth Through the Arts*. The dictionary will tell you that 'empower' means 'give power or authority to'. When you educate young people and believe in them, you empower them to dream imaginatively, and to pursue those dreams confidently.

As a result of events like the NGC Sanfest, young people nurture their creativity. They strive for the highest standards of performance because they are in a competitive environment, which ignites passion and spirit. Young people can connect with their sense of purpose and develop their leadership skills. They also learn ways to become active in their communities and to speak out about issues that matter to them.

These are the qualities that define 'empowerment'. It occurs when there are teachers, mentors and parents to motivate, equip and mould the raw talent.

As we will be spending a great deal of time with the Arts over the next several weeks, let's draw on an example from Science to talk a little about the relationship between student on the one hand, and teacher and parent on the other. It's also fitting because this year's Festival is dedicated to Joyce Kirton, first Director of NGC Sanfest, and an extraordinary educator, leader, innovator and influencer...

There is a concept in Physics that in order for an object to move forward it requires an equal and opposing body to push against it. That kind of dynamic movement always occurs in pairs. For instance, Usain Bolt, or NGC's Hasely

Crawford, are considered the fastest men on earth in their day. When they run a 100m race, their feet push against the ground, the ground pushes back, and they are propelled forward. (If there is a cameraman on a Segway nearby they may not get too far, but we hope for the best!) Even though gravity pulls you down against the ground, the ground pushes up against your feet and you must advance. Put simply, one cannot touch without being touched.

Joyce Kirton touched and is still touching thousands of lives and empowering thousands of students. On the one side are the young minds, eager to learn. On the other, is the force created by educators and parents. The result? Students who move forward and upward, as creative, productive and confident members of society.

We will encounter many of these young people during NGC Sanfest 2015 and we will not remain untouched.

On behalf of NGC, we are deeply appreciative of the efforts of Arts Council Chair, Sherid Mason, Festival Director Winston Bramble and his hardworking team.

Thank you all for being here today: enjoy the experience ahead.