

Labowi Promotions' 20th Anniversary: The Laborie Pan Project, a Community Experience

As Labowi Promotions celebrates its 20th anniversary, it also marks the 5th anniversary of one of its flagship projects, a project that Augustin Barthelmy, one of the members of Labowi Promotions, describes as “something that will have a lasting cultural and economic impact on the community”. In 2006, the Cultural Development Foundation and the Poverty Reduction Fund (now the Saint Lucia Social Development Fund) made available to Labowi Promotions a set of steel pan instruments and covered the cost of fees to a trainer for an initial period of one year.

This start-up support from CDF and PRF was enough to launch a project that is fully managed by the community and, now in its sixth year, has matured into an initiative that is bringing many benefits to the community. There are currently over 60 children and young adults who train and perform with the band, with the opportunity to engage in a meaningful social activity and to gain pride and self-confidence in the process. The pan project has already performed on a number of stages, and several of its members clearly see the income generating potential of their new talent and skills.

The success of the project has been due, in very large part, to the dedicated and generous leadership provided by band leader Quill Joseph Barthelmy, who, week after week, has worked consistently with the members, has encouraged parents to send their children, has organised the practice sessions and the performances, and has made the Laborie Pan Project the success that it has become. “I love pan”, says Joseph Barthelmy, “and this project gives me the chance to share that love with people in my community. I want to see the Laborie Pan Project reach far, very far”.



Quill Joseph and Andy Narell (credit: Labowi Promotions)

Indeed, the project is going far, and it reached new heights last year thanks to the support it received from pan maestro Andy Narell, who first came to Laborie in February and spent hours working with the pan project, especially its younger members. “I love these kids” said Narell, “they are so talented, and so keen, this is a great project”. In May, Narell returned to Saint Lucia for his patronage of Jazz in the South and his performance with Relator and the University of Calypso project, and he again worked with the band and performed with them at Jazz in the South.

Over the past four years, the project has been very generously supported by a local business, Wilrock Ltd., which has seen the value of an initiative that brings community members together, that reveals and nurtures local talent, and that creates economic opportunities for its members. Other valuable support has come from community organisations, including the Laborie Development Foundation, which sponsored a pan shed, and the Laborie Boys' School, which hosted the rehearsals during the first two years.



Mr. Wilson of Wilrock Ltd.
presents sponsorship to Laborie Pan Project
(credit: Cadley Peterson)

“The project has been successful”, says Len Leonce, another member of Labowi Promotions, “but there are many other things we want to do. We want to reach more people, we need more instruments, we want to make the project financially sustainable, and we want to document our experience and share it with other communities. This is why we are currently in discussions with SSDF and, as we mark the 20 years of Labowi Promotions, we can look with confidence at the future of the Laborie Pan Project”.

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