

**T**HE INFECTIOUS enthusiasm of Kathi Constanzo, graduate of the prestigious Annenberg School for Communications (University of Southern California), is partially responsible for her amazing track record in charitable fund-raising.

Her sincerity is apparent and her love for what she does shines through as she speaks. But, even more effective has been her strategy of showing sponsors the 100 per cent proof that their donations will reach the children for whom they have been made.

Constanzo, the wife of Dennis Constanzo – the president of Palmyra Resort and Spa, one of the newest condominium complexes on Jamaica's gold coast – is the chairperson of the Palmyra Foundation, which has already donated over 15,000 textbooks to approximately 2,000 infant age school children in Jamaica, with the objective of supplying 100,000 Jamaican students with their textbooks within five years.

"One hundred per cent of children in rural areas have no textbooks. Even in Montego Bay, children only have two or three textbooks at the most," Kathi explains.

#### **PALMYRA FOUNDATION LAUNCH**

The Palmyra Foundation was launched in June 2007 and, in three months, raised the \$4.4 million which was needed for students in St. James.

In December, using the presence of the world-famous Arturo Tappin as a drawing card, the foundation raised over \$100,000, which is intended to reach even more basic school children in western Jamaica.

Mrs. Constanzo admits that her ambition is to provide books for every child in every Jamaican basic school, in time.

Her foundation has also just become the official charity of Turn Key Productions, which produces the 2008 Jazz festival. Turn Key will also be linking the organisation to artistes sites.

How did Kathi manage to do all of this in less than a year?

It all began, she says, when soon after arrival in Jamaica with her husband and children to establish Palmyra resorts, she attempted to donate toothpaste and toothbrushes to some children. Kathi was shocked to find out that the gift did not reach the intended recipients at all.

"You are tempted to stop after you are burnt a couple of times," she reflects on how she felt when this happened. But, instead of yielding to discouragement, Mrs. Constanzo decided to develop a system with which large companies and individuals could know that their dollars would reach the individuals for whom they are intended.

The first plank of this effort was to make sure that what was being purchased with donated dollars was really needed.

With her team of volunteers, Kathi visited schools in St. James and interviewed principals, collecting booklists and

information on other school supplies which were needed.

The process is hair-raising, as they then have to wait to find out which students actually turn up at school during the first week of September before they buy. But, the orders are placed contingently – after shopping around, of course – for the book dealer who will give the biggest discount for the mammoth order of books and school supplies.

After sourcing, each child receives a bag of books and supplies with their name on it. The supplies are handed over personally by Kathi and her assistants. From beginning to end the resources are slowly monitored and those who

support the charity are thereby assured that their money does not go to waste.

The process can be a very exhausting one, especially at schools like Montego Bay Infant School with its population of over 1,000 students. Distribution there lasted for days.

Kathi told **Outlook**, "In my 36th year, I have found my purpose. When I was 35, it seemed as if I would never find that thing which would make me wake up with joy. Now, I go to some schools and I feel as if I can run for miles. There are days when all you want to do is cry, but I just feel blessed that I am doing this thing."

Considering her previous achievements – which were not minuscule – one can appreciate how much her new job of providing the basic needs of kindergarten-age children means to this mother of two.

#### **EXPERIENCE**

Kathi has more than 15 years of experience on a wide range of projects and businesses. These include mentoring and teaching children in South Central Los Angeles to providing marketing and communication expertise to one of the large accounting firms in the United States.

She has also filled the role of president of a number of small businesses, including a jewellery store and a small chain of coffee shops with sales in excess of US\$2 million.

Kathi came to Jamaica with her husband to establish Palmyra Resorts. As a businesswoman who is used to working hard in the family's business, she was faced with the challenge of creating something new in Jamaica.

She thought carefully about it and eventually the idea of the foundation took root.

"Children are my passion, so I went that route. We are developers of land, but we are also developers of people," Kathi explains.

She believes that this investment in education by corporate Jamaica will bring them valuable returns in the future, as the human resources around them are developed.

After providing books, Kathi states that the foundation will move on to uniforms and lunches. She will remain focused on children as she believes that their welfare is closely tied to a comfortable future for all.



**ANDREW SMITH/  
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