

Tribute on the retirement of 15 First Division Officers

Speech delivered by Leela Ramdeen on November 25, 2005

It is my distinct pleasure to address you this evening at this 'Dine Out' Ceremony. I wish to pay tribute to the people of the moment: the 15 former First Division Officers who have retired from the Police Service and who have given long and meritorious service to the PS and to our nation. I don't know if you had a 'Dine In' Ceremony when you joined the PS, but we will certainly be 'Dining Out' this evening.

You have retired from a noble profession. In spite of all the 'licks' that rains down almost daily on the Police Service from various quarters, let us not forget that Policing is a noble profession. Have you ever stopped to think about the awesome responsibility that goes with your motto: "To protect and serve"?

Each of you retirees will have memories of the contribution you have made in seeking to achieve the mission of the PS to make TT safe for all the people it serves; to make our communities safer; to reduce crime and the fear of crime and to uphold the law. In your retirement you can look back and feel proud of the part you have played in seeking to build a culture in the PS that reflects the values that underpin the Service – values such as:

- pride in delivering quality policing
- building trust by listening and responding
- working in partnership with citizens. The strength of the PS stems from its partnerships with all sectors of the community
- respecting and supporting each other – working as a team
- learning from experience and finding ways to be even better
- treating everyone fairly
- being open and honest.

Sadly, you have retired at a time when your services are needed more than ever. While some level of crime may always plague our society, crime and violence is at an unacceptable level at this juncture in our history. The success of the PS will be decided not by bland statistics, but when everyone walking our streets believes it to be so; when the Service has won the confidence and respect of the wider community. The reward of the Service will be community support for the work it does.

While society owes a debt of gratitude to those members of the PS who retire having performed their duties faithfully, it will be remiss of me not to highlight the need for this noble profession to rid itself of those of its members who bring the PS into disrepute.

As a member of the PSC, I often leave meetings with a heavy heart having had to deal with cases where police men and women have been involved in wrongdoing. But I am determined, with every breath that I breathe, to work with others to build a service of which we can all be proud.

If we are to police TT properly, then we must meet the demands of the 21st Century. New challenges require new ways of thinking and acting. We need

- a Service that provides strong leadership, planning and priority setting, clear direction, monitoring systems, meaningful data collection and analysis, and effective communication systems within the Service and with those it serves;
- a Service that considers the development of a fully formed culture of performance management to be critical and provides for on-going professional development for its staff at all levels;
- a Service that provides quality service with the highest possible degree of excellence, based upon the principles of fairness, integrity, honesty, and respect for human dignity;
- a Service that can respond to constantly changing needs because it is pro-active, has the tools and resources to do the job – not only in terms of modern technology, but more importantly, in terms of highly trained professional women and men who are rigorous in ensuring the integrity of their actions;
- a Service that is accountable, is determined to forge genuine and successful community partnerships and achieves its goals through dedication, devotion and determination;
- a Service that responds right first time, every time, while anticipating the needs of the needs of the future and never losing sight of the Service's central priority of creating and maintaining safety in TT.

I always encourage people to draw up a retirement plan. Interestingly, one of my friends, whom I am assisting in drawing up such a plan, told me that a number of people in her office have already started their retirement while still on the job!

A retirement plan ensures that you don't simply retire from something but that you have something to retire to. You have retired from work. You have not retired from life. You still have value and worth. Your work brought you a sense of purpose. A retirement plan will ensure that you forge ahead with a revised sense of purpose.

Such a plan is not to be cast in tablets of stone, but can provide a framework to assist you in moving forward with your life. Too often people are so tired by the time they retire that they are just happy to lie around and do nothing for a while. The question arises: "What do you do when you are tired of lying around?"

Retirement does not mean that you are put out to pasture until your number is up! Indeed, there is some truth in the words of Malcolm Forbes that "Retirement kills more people than hard work ever did." Often this is because those without a retirement plan become bored, depressed, unwanted etc. and lose their zeal for living.

I agree with Gandhi who said that “Men and women approaching retirement age should be recycled for public service work... We can no longer afford to scrap-pile people.” On a lighter note, you may have heard the joke by George Burns’, the US comedian: “Retirement at 65 is ridiculous. When I was 65 I still had pimples.”

In many ways life begins at retirement. By today’s standards, you are all young men and women with a lot to offer to your immediate communities and to the wider society. I can feel your zeal and enthusiasm filling the room. I urge you to reflect on how you are going to use your wealth of experience, your special God-given talents and gifts for the common good.

As Bernard Baruch said: “Age is only a number, a cipher for the records. A man can't retire his experience. He must use it.” Therefore, I am sure you will not follow Gene Perret’s example. He said: “I enjoy waking up and not having to go to work. So I do it three or four times a day.”

You retirees have a head start on many others who retire because you have been involved in a culture of service. I am sure you will agree with me that a key dimension of Policing is service to the community. You may have read my article in yesterday’s Guardian about this issue. I hope that now that you are retired, you will view ‘Service’ as a key aspect of whatever field of endeavour you choose.

We need to build a culture of volunteerism in TT. Do not underestimate the power of voluntary service and civic participation to help address key issues in your communities. I urge you to volunteer your service with an organization of your choice.

It is said that the only true retirement is that of the heart and I know that your hearts have not retired; that they are in the right place. Like me, I know that you love your country and will allocate time during your retirement to engage in worthwhile activities that will enhance the quality of life for all in TT. There are many reasons to serve e.g.

- Build networks and connections with individuals

- Make new friends and have fun while helping your community.

- Expand your perspectives by working with and learning from people of different ethnicities, ages and life experiences.

- Broaden your understanding of community issues.

- Make a difference in your community.

- Help solve or address a social issue that personally impacts you, your family or your community.

- Learn new things that are of interest to you personally or professionally.

Challenge yourself to experience new things outside of your comfort zone.

I believe that because of the current crisis in our country in relation to crime and violence, opportunities should be made available to those of you who wish to return – even on a part-time basis – to share your expertise with the PS e.g. by lecturing to recruits and on training programmes for members of the PS. Together you form a reservoir of knowledge, skills and experience that should be tapped into at this critical time.

Your retirement plan should take into consideration your physical, emotional and mental needs and should enable you to have some time for yourself. Don't do like me. In my retirement plan I never get a day off! I retired from my position as Deputy Director of Education/Head of Quality Assurance in a London Borough in the UK and changed my career to Law. I had planned to retire to TT, open a retreat center, do some pro-bono legal work and travel the world. I was going to get on the treadmill and lose some weight. Instead, I now get about 4 hours sleep each night, flop out of bed on mornings, rush from one meeting or event to the next, and eat junk food on the hoof. No chance of my wearing a bikini in the near future!

As the saying goes, man/woman proposes and God disposes. He had other plans for me. I must say though, that when I was thinking of the best retirement place to live, TT was at the top of my list – no contest. And I still believe this to be true.

Carve out some time for yourself. Pamper yourself; love yourself; find time to play with your grandchildren, to meet relatives and friends whom you have not seen for a while, to go to the beach and so on.

Retirement is the time of life to continue being productive in areas in which you have an interest. You may decide to take up employment elsewhere, but try and find some time for yourself also. I find it useful to keep in touch with colleagues with whom I had worked.

It can be difficult to suddenly wrench yourself away from an institution such as the PS where you have worked for so many years of your life. You will have spent so many working hours with colleagues, that it will be unnatural for you to forget that they were/are a part of your life. True colleagues will value the opportunity to maintain contact with you.

I want to throw out a challenge to the PS. May I suggest that the PS reviews the facilities that are available to retirees? Is there a Police Officers' Retirement Employee Handbook? Does the PS run pre-retirement courses for prospective retirees? Is there an Association of Retired Police Officers? (see UK). Would this be a good idea in TT? Does the PS keep a Register/Database of the skills and experience that retirees possess so that they can be called upon for specific initiatives if necessary? (see NROD).

Does the PS have a Newsletter that can be circulated to retirees to keep them in the 'loop'/informed? Are retirees allowed to contribute to this Newsletter – if it exists? Is

there a Club to which retirees can retain membership in order to socialize with colleagues who remain in the service? Are there opportunities for networking e.g. sharing of e-mail addresses, social events to which retirees are invited?

Should the PS initiate Projects involving retirees on a voluntary basis e.g. Youth Programmes in Youth Clubs, schools, in high-risk areas etc? Some of these suggestions will require changes in employment practices within the PS, but they are worth considering.

You may find that Companies that are committed to promoting Corporate Social Responsibility may be willing to sponsor certain initiatives that will draw on the experience and expertise of retired Police Officers if an Association is formed and creative proposals are put forward to such Companies.

A study by retirement specialists, AIG Sun America 2002, states that “There is a new vision of retiring emerging. For many, retirement no longer means to ‘withdraw’, ‘disappear’, ‘wind down’ or ‘stop’. It now means new beginnings, continued productivity and personal reinvention.”

Further, this study identified that there are certain distinct types of people when they reach that stage, some who are living their dreams and some who feel trapped. The 4 categories identified in the study are:

- Ageless Explorers (27%);
- Comfortably Contents (19%);
- Live for Today's (22%); and
- Sick and Tireds (32%).

Approx. 95% of the pre-retirees expected to work in some capacity during their retirement, either by choice or necessity. Nearly half (49%) said they would work in retirement even if they were paid little or nothing at all.

I believe in the words of the writer Hugh Wiley who said: “In every change there is an opportunity.” Retirement is fun. It can be rewarding. This can be an exciting, dynamic phase of your life that provides an opportunity for further growth.

I am sure that none of you belong to the ‘Sick and Tireds’ group! Life is to be lived with fulfilling moments hour after hour, day after day. Carpe diem! And in whatever you choose to do, continue to strive to be the very best that you can be. And remember, as the comedian Phyllis Diller said: “If you don’t have wrinkles, you haven’t laughed enough.” Take time to laugh.

May your life be full of satisfying, meaningful, challenging experiences. May you be able to say in time to come: "The world is different because of my contribution."

Good luck in your retirement. Remember, the secret of longevity is to keep breathing. Enjoy these golden years. God bless you and give you long, healthy and joyful lives.

Thank you.

