

Old Harbour Diaspora answer SOS call of local students in New York.

Article by:

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Old Harbour High School Dean of Discipline Vaughn McLaughlin (3rd left) and students pause for a photo-op. (Contributed Photo)

It is true that no matter where Jamaicans are in the world, whenever we are called upon to help a fellow 'Yardie', we will drop everything to give a helping hand. This was certainly the case recently when Jamaicans in New York and indeed other parts of the United States, rallied to assist Old Harbour High students and their chaperon teachers who found themselves in a situation that needed all hands on deck to avert what could possibly have been a crisis

When the President of the Old Harbour and Friends Association Lavern Robinson, got a call on Thursday, March 23, 2023, little did she know that it would set in motion a chain of events that turn a potentially negative scenario into one that was totally heartwarming as the outpouring of love and kindness reminds us that there are good and patriotic Jamaicans everywhere.

Last Thursday about 8:00 pm, my husband and I were home when we got a call that about nine students and three teachers from Old Harbour High had come up to New York to participate in a science convention, but because of some miscommunication, had nowhere to stay. They had just enough to pay for one night stay at the Sheraton but nothing else. I called the manager at the Sheraton in Downtown Brooklyn and found out how much they needed to cover the duration of their stay at the convention which was five nights. Initially, I wanted to give my credit card number over the phone but then we agreed that I would come and pay for their stay the next day," Robinson said in an interview with Old Harbour News.

Robinson was then able to get in touch with the Jamaican Consul General Alston Wilson, who was instrumental in getting a lot of things processed at record speed as she has the contacts.

"We got her updated and promised to meet up at the hotel to see what can be done for the children and their teachers," Robinson added.

The diaspora head then got on the phone and sent out the distress signal to Jamaicans in states near and far as she knew they had to rectify the situation.

"I then started calling the Old Harbour diaspora and the outpouring was tremendous as everybody stepped up to send money and much more as the children needed food, accommodations and transportation back and forth to the event as well as to the airport," she explained.

Bright and early the next day Lavern's husband, Hugh was there with his credit card to secure accommodation. He along with fellow Jamaicans Alrie Waite and Serah Rose Scarlett met with the Consul General to resolve all issues right there and then.



Jamaica's Counsel General to New York Alston Wilson (2nd left) shares lens time with Old Harbour High School teachers Vaughn McLaughlin (left), Kereen Davy (2nd right) and Claudine Chambers. (Contributed Photo)

Mrs. Robinson shared they could not have done it without the assistance of organizations such as Team Jamaica Bickle, the Union of Jamaican Alumni Association as well as the Old Harbour and Friends Association that all stepped up big time. Individuals such as Diane McPherson, Dorothy Scott who is a past Olympian, Charmaine Richardson and Valrie Hylton also rallied the troops and made it all happen seamlessly. The assistance received was so good they had some extra funds which they then used to buy gifts for the delegation so that they would have positive memories of their stay in New York.

“This story may have started out bad or rocky but with God’s help we managed to turn it around,” said Robinson.

These sentiments were echoed by Vaughn McLaughlin, who has been with the school for some 23 years and who was a chaperon on the recent trip. McLaughlin expressed his gratitude to the Old Harbour and Friends Association, as well as the countless other entities and individuals who made the trip overseas a successful one.

“I can tell you that the trip was a resounding success, no small part to the role that the Old Harbour and Friends Association played in seeing us through. The donations, food and accommodations that we received plus the care that they paid to us were outstanding and we are extremely grateful for all of their assistance as well as that of the other organizations that contributed without hesitation. I would really love to meet them locally sometime soon so that we can properly thank them for all that they have done,” he tells Old Harbour News.

As McLaughlin, who is the Dean of Discipline at the school explained, the Old Harbour High team went to New York to participate in the United Nations' 'Change the World' Convention held in Manhattan where over 5,000 student delegates from all over the world participated by preparing position papers on over 17 topics including climate change and gender rights and equality. Students presented on hypothetical scenarios, some of which did not personally impact their own nation. Nevertheless, they had to research and present before an audience of their peers. The entire Jamaican delegation stood over 100 strong with Old Harbour High taking four adults and nine students to the convention. The students, McLaughlin added, enjoyed the experience immensely as they got to build not only on their public speaking skills but also learnt to think quickly on their feet and take initiative in leading research tasks when required.

"Though some schools carried younger teens, we took our sixth formers who were 17 and 18 as we thought they would benefit the most. They really learned a lot and especially sharpened their critical thinking skills. Aside from the actual convention they got to meet a lot of influential people and also got an opportunity to visit and tour the United Nations building," he said.

The Old Harbour and Friends Association will celebrate its 30th anniversary this year on May 27th and are proud of all that it has achieved over the years, including giving scholarships and grants to students of six schools in Old Harbour, Free Town and Marlie Mount plus contributing to the healthcare of the citizens by having dentists and other medical personnel volunteering their services to the residents of the Old Harbour community and surrounding areas.

Hugh Robinson, who was the man on the ground coordinating and ensuring that all went well, shared that when Jamaicans put their heads together, great things occur.

"We just got together and worked everything quick and fast. What this shows us is that no matter where we are in the world, once there is a need we are going to help. It is just as the Old Harbour & Friends Association motto states: 'Together for All'."

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