

## **Learning Logistics in Panama**

Forty Jamaicans representing a wide cross section of industries and professions, recently visited Panama for five days, for an educational initiative designed to strengthen their knowledge of logistics in a logistics centred economy.

The group, comprised primarily of students of the Masters in Logistics and Supply Chain Management at the Caribbean Maritime Institute (CMI), also included representatives of the Council of Community Colleges of Jamaica (CCCJ). The Colleges are working towards partnering with the CMI and other institutions to offer logistics based courses as Jamaica seeks to prepare the workforce for the logistics hub. This was also the COPA Airlines sponsored prize trip for Charolette Gentles and Poye Robinson, winners of the Ministry of Industry, Investment and Commerce's inaugural Logistics Hub Essay competition. The Mission was headed by Director of Academic Affairs at the Caribbean Maritime Institute, Dr. Ibrahim Ajagunna.

Activities included a presentation at the Manzanillo International Terminal (MIT) one of the world's ten most efficient ports, recognized three times as the 'Best Container Terminal in the Caribbean' by the Caribbean Shipping Association. This allowed the Masters students a prime opportunity to understand port logistics and pose questions about best practice and port efficiency. At MIT Dr. Ajagunna was presented with a replica of a vessel traversing the Panama Canal, made from basalt retrieved from the excavation and dredging activities involved in the Panama Canal Expansion. An entire cottage industry for craft and other items made from basalt, has been supported and promoted by the Panamanian Government, and provides employment to hundreds of inhabitants of the Colon region.

The group also participated in a presentation at the Universidad Marítimo de Panamá, an institution which offers a wide variety of courses from the certificate to the doctoral level, in maritime and naval disciplines. The courses of the University are globally certified and 95% of its graduates are hired in the global logistics industry, prior to graduation. The University, situated on the former US Allbrook Air base, is next to the impressive Bridge of the Americas, which spans the Panama Canal. Additionally, classes covering areas such as Port Policy, Port Performance and Port Management were conducted at the International University of Panama by CMI lecturer Karen Adair.

A high point of the trip was the visit to the Miraflores lock of the Panama Canal, which afforded an opportunity to see engineering at work in one of the seven wonders of the modern world. The group witnessed the filling up of the lock, the raising of the ship, the emptying of the lock, and the lowering of the ship before it continued across the Canal, towards the Atlantic Ocean. Inside the Miraflores museum visitors had the chance to check the computer database for the names of relatives who worked on the Panama Canal. Thousands of Jamaicans were involved in the construction of the Panama Canal. Many stayed and started families and there is a strong Jamaican population in Panama.

Executive Director of the CCCJ, Dr. Donna Powell-Wilson described the trip as informative, educational, and productive, and added that the community colleges are strategically placed and prepared to provide educational training in areas directly related to the logistics hub, as well as in ecotourism and engineering technology.

The immersion in Panama allowed members of the group to practise their oral Spanish and there was even an unofficial football activity on the waterfront with a group of young Panamanian female footballers. The trip offered an opportunity for learning from an established logistics-centered country, as well as opportunities for networking and institutional sharing between Jamaican higher education stakeholders on the transference of this knowledge within our own national context.