An Interview with Diane Edwards, President, JAMPRO

How important has it been for the government to support public/private partnership (PPP) in Jamaica?

Jamaica is ranked number four in Latin America and the Caribbean in PPP’s. The success of our PPP program is internationally recognized due to the government’s role in moving the investment mandate of the country. They are intentional in supporting private enterprise. The Sangster International Airport in Montego Bay, for example, has been operating as a PPP by a group from Mexico and is cited as one of the most successful models in the Caribbean.

The government recognizes the importance of the private sector in being the primary mover in managing productive enterprise and, as such, embarked on an ambitious privatization program. This supports the private sector through legislation and creates an enabling and positive business environment in Jamaica. The government is therefore a huge partner of enterprise in everything we do.

Is it challenging to get the message out about Jamaica’s business prospects and what more can be done to increase awareness?

We need to understand that, in Jamaica, promoting business is like promoting tourism. We put a lot of energy and resources behind promoting tourism and it has been wildly successful – Jamaica now experiences a 6 percent annual growth rate in tourism arrivals and expenditure.

On the investment side, we don’t have the same resources, so we still need to work to gain an understanding that promotion of business and economic development is of equal importance. To get the message out requires long-term brand building initiatives. We hope that with some of the initiatives we’re now undertaking, including the development of a comprehensive country branding strategy, we will create greater business awareness for our country.

The Jamaican population is three million and we have a workforce of approximately 1.4 million. We currently have an unemployment rate of approximately 10 percent, which means that companies coming in do have a large pool of persons to choose from, both employed and unemployed. There are over eight universities and about 120 colleges, which are responsible for providing a cost effective and competitive workforce for all sectors. On an annual basis, colleges turn out around 20,000 students with secondary qualifications and the universities turn out 7,500 with tertiary qualifications.

This provides a skilled and talented workforce for businesses coming into Jamaica.

How will you highlight the history and heritage of Jamaica?

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