

## PROMOTING QUALITY HEALTH JOURNALISM FOR MORE THAN A DECADE

The Pan American Health Organization Caribbean Media Awards for Excellence in Health Journalism (PAHO Media Awards) would surely still exist without Sagicor, but it would not be the entity that it is today.

When the PAHO Media Awards were launched back in 1995, the first coordinator, Tony Deyal, a “born” publicist, went directly to the then Barbados Mutual Life Assurance Society (The Mutual) for sponsorship. He reasoned that an enlightened insurance company with intrinsic concerns about health and the quality of life would be a natural ally for a competition that sought to raise the quantum and quality of health journalism in the region.

Of course The Mutual responded positively and generously, with a donation of BDS\$25,000. And a marriage born of common interests has flourished ever since. This generosity has been the mainstay of the cash prizes up to US\$1000, the trophies offered in the competition, and has also helped in meeting some of the operating costs of the programme. Since that initial contribution, The Mutual maintained its support on an annual basis, so that by the time the second coordinator of the Media Awards came along in 1998, the support of The Mutual was practically a given.

But it hasn't only been the money! No organization, regardless of the amount of money it has to spend, is anything without its staff. Sara Odle, the then Corporate Communications Specialist, was the frontline contact. Sara could be tough and would make sure she got ‘bang’ for the Mutual's advertising ‘buck’, always being supportive and anxious to see the Media Awards succeed.

Over the years, several Mutual employees came into contact with the staff at PAHO ... some became friends, some remained loyal workers in the background, perhaps acting as ushers at various Awards Presentations. But every single staff volunteer contributed to the growing success of the programme and altogether The Mutual, now Sagicor, has become one of the English-speaking Caribbean's very closest allies of health journalism.



**Clockwise - Steve Stoute, Senior Executive Vice President and General Manager for Sagicor's Barbados Operations speaks at the PAHO Awards; PAHO Award Winners after the ceremony; Orwyn Sandiford Assistant Vice President, Group Life & Health, presents one of the PAHO Awards.**

As with all successful relationships, the PAHO-SAGICOR partnership started out on one plane and rapidly developed into others. Here I must mention Mr. Steve Stoute. When Dr. Karen Sealy departed the Caribbean office in 1999, she left Steve Stoute as a firm ally of PAHO. His presence has generally been felt quietly in the background, frequently offering to assist wherever necessary. The present coordinator, Mrs. Veta Brown, quick to recognize his passion for health and the extent to which he ‘walked the walk’, lost no time in bringing him on board with several other activities, all of which he embraced in his quiet and unassuming but effective way.

Sagicor's reach across the region, reflected in the multi-country responsibility of the PAHO office, has been another tremendous boost to the level of cooperation between the organizations. As PAHO sought support for programmes across several countries, Sagicor has recognized both

the public and the corporate good, and has needed little encouragement to become involved.

This year, the PAHO Media Awards Competition moves into its ninth – and what promises to be its biggest – year. In that time it has gained and lost allies as other organizations, including other UN agencies, have either seen the value of the competition, or have decided that limited budgets did not allow for further support. The first coordinator has left, as has his interim replacement, David ‘Andy’ Taitt, and the current coordinator, Ms. Clare Forrester, has settled in and is working to encourage the involvement of additional journalists from even more countries in the region who are committed to higher standards. Through it all, The Mutual, now Sagicor, has been there - a key partner and a very special help in every need.