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John Bell, CHTA's first executive director

Caribbean Mourns the Passing of John Bell, CHTA's First Leader

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (April 29, 2024) – The Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA) is mourning the passing of John Bell, its first executive director, and the guiding force of the association (formerly CHA) for close to three decades.

Under his dynamic and pioneering leadership, the association framed the key role of tourism in the economies of the Caribbean and elevated the organization from its status as a traditional trade association to being the premier tourism organization for the Caribbean's private sector.

In addition to establishing a comprehensive footprint for the association and bringing together the hotel and tourism associations across the region, Bell is credited with driving membership of, and interest in, the work of CHTA.

He guided the creation of Caribbean Travel Marketplace, the region's premier marketing and networking event, which brings together buyers and sellers of the region's tourism products and services; the Taste of the Caribbean culinary event; the Leadership Conference for National



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ASSOCIATION

Hotel and Tourism Association executives; the Caribbean Hotel & Tourism Investment Conference; the Caribbean Hotel Industry Conference (CHIC); Caribbean Gold Book; Caribbean Alliance for Sustainable Tourism (CAST), the region's pioneering environmental organization; Caribbean Hotel Training Institute (CHTI); as well as what is now known as the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Education Foundation (CHTAEF). Bell's vision and leadership were instrumental in developing these programs, each of which was a pioneering initiative at the time and helped to shape, strengthen and grow the industry and the association's membership.

Most of these initiatives continue to benefit the industry today, serving as a lasting legacy to Bell's work, according to CHTA President Nicola Madden-Greig, who asserted that it was on the shoulders of giants like John Bell that the CHTA grew to be seen as a key player in the sustainable development of tourism in the region and around the world, as evidenced by his election as President of the International Hotel & Restaurant Association for 2003-2005.

John Bell (left) was an integral member of the Caribbean Hotel Association team in its earliest days. Also pictured here are Pat Shillito, CHA's first employee (center), and Tony Mack, 1980 CHA President and Executive Director of CHTI.

Vanessa Ledesma, Acting CEO and Director General of CHTA, remembered Bell, who was honored with CHTA's Icon of Hospitality Award in 2019 and the 2022 CHRIS Lifetime Achievement Award, as harboring a passion for the development of national hotel and tourism associations along with membership.

"During his tenure, visits to member destinations were key, and he made connections with members on the ground. He was a true association executive but foremost he was a leader who laid out the vision and path leading to the establishment of CHTA as the regional voice for the private sector," said Ledesma, who described Bell as an effective leader and Caribbean ambassador.

Frank Comito, CHTA's former CEO and Director General, pointed to Bell's contribution to his own development, describing him as a visionary who made pioneering contributions in areas from sustainable tourism and marketing to education and training over the decades. "We have lost but we have gained," said Comito, who noted that "if I can name the top five most influential people in tourism, public or private sector and its development in the Caribbean over the last 50 to 60 years, John Bell is in there unquestionably."

The Trinidad-based Bell, prior to his leadership of CHTA, was President of the Trinidad and Tobago Hotel and Tourism Association (1971-1974); General Manager of Bel Air Hotel in Trinidad (1967-1974); and Assistant Manager of Blue Lagoon Hotel, St. Vincent (1964-1967). He



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HOTEL & TOURISM
ASSOCIATION

began his tenure at CHA in 1974 as the first executive director and chairman of the Small Hotels Advisory Council. About the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA)

The Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA) is the Caribbean's leading association representing the interests of national hotel and tourism associations. For more than 60 years, CHTA has been the backbone of the Caribbean hospitality industry. Working with some 1,000 hotel and allied members, and 32 National Hotel Associations, CHTA is shaping the Caribbean's future and helping members to grow their businesses. Whether helping to navigate critical issues in sales and marketing, sustainability, legislative issues, emerging technologies, climate change, data and intelligence or, looking for avenues and ideas to better market and manage businesses, CHTA is helping members on issues which matter most.

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