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Bank of The Bahamas Launches ‘Savings Culture’

Joined by Cabinet ministers, Ministry of Education officials and students from public and private schools, award-winning Bank of The Bahamas International launched the latest in its series of innovative services Thursday, one that may reach deeper into the national psyche than anything the bank has attempted.

Called the ‘Savings Culture,’ the new program -- accompanied by an array of products aimed at specific markets -- is designed to provide rewards, incentives and impetus for spending wisely and saving more, changing the way Bahamians think about saving for the future.

“Every week we pick up the newspaper and see headlines warning us that our failure to save money when we are young will leave us without the means to support ourselves when we are older,” said Tanya Wright, Manager of Business Development, Marketing and Public Relations. “We at Bank of The Bahamas International aim to make attractive products and savings plans available that go beyond business as usual to a more ambitious and lofty goal -- to foster a national culture of savings that we hope will spread from this room to all The Bahamas, influencing generations to come.”

The bank’s initiative drew high praise from government, and two Cabinet ministers present for the launch, Vincent A. Peet, Minister of Financial Services & Investments and Melanie Griffin, Minister of Social Services, both called the campaign one of “critical importance” to the nation.

“It is essential,” Peet said, “that we as a people begin to more conscientiously reconsider our spending habits...Bank of The Bahamas rightfully describes our country as a ‘consumer nation with its citizens spending far more than they are saving.’ I wish therefore to applaud Bank of The Bahamas for not only taking note of this adverse situation but for taking the initiative in putting on this event which...is aimed at an ambitious goal, changing the spending psyche of Bahamians.” According to Peet, the lack of savings equates with lack of planning for the future, all too often leaving Bahamians ill-equipped to take advantage of investment opportunities.

Saving, declared the Minister of Social Services, “should not be an afterthought, but a part of our lives.

“Most of us would agree that our culture places tremendous pressure on us for the acquisition of material goods,” Mrs. Griffin said. The never-ending quest to buy more, own more, combined with the ease of paying for it with payroll deductions can not only leave a family or provider without funds for an unforeseen challenge or medical emergency, or unprepared for an expected event, it can lead to financial ruin, she said, citing the situation of a woman whose take-home pay slip was \$42 though she earned a handsome salary. “People over-extend themselves, they end up in dire straights, living above their means. Then they turn to others, to family, friends, the church, mostly the government. ”

Showing that her support for the initiative went beyond words, Mrs. Griffin put her money where her mouth was, plopping a pouch and a piggy bank on a table on stage with rolled coins her husband and daughter had been saving. She requested a form for an All Grown Up account for those 13 and under so her child could receive a certificate, the high interest rate associated with the account, free online banking, a personal identification number and an ATM card. Mostly, she said, she wanted her daughter to appreciate the reward of saving, having money available when she wanted something.

The challenge in getting a nation to save not just for a rainy day but to have the funds for everything from simple pleasures to marking milestones, from being financially ready for prom to taking a world cruise, led the bank to develop specific, goal-oriented savings plans for various ages and demographics with the youngest child able to open an account with \$10.

At the launch at Sandals Royal Bahamian, the unveiling of what Mrs. Wright called “an incredible journey of product development, an incredible metamorphosis from an idea into a full and all-out national initiative,” at moments felt like a national celebration than a marketing plan driven by social conscience. The Uriah McPhee Primary School Band played. Students from CR Walker and Meridian School later said they were opening accounts and one young man from CR Walker confessed he was comparing the bank’s rates with his student credit union, the very thinking Bank of The Bahamas Savings Culture “If you can plan for it, you can save for it” campaign was

designed to foster. Miss Bahamas, Samantha Carter, who was also at the launch, was invited to extend her platform of literacy to financial literacy as an ambassador in the promotion of savings culture through schools. And the bank used the occasion to announce its alliance with the Bahamas National Youth Choir to deliver the savings culture message for one of the campaign's products.