

Mrs. Paulette Hylton is one of over thirty-seven office attendants the National Works Agency (NWA) employs at its fifteen Corporate, Regional and Parish offices across Jamaica. Mrs. Hylton along with her teammates report to work an hour and a half earlier than the general staff complement to ensure that our workspaces are clean, orderly and ready to receive us. Our office attendants give quiet, yeoman service to the rest of the staff. We offer them our gratitude, particularly during the current times, which highlight even more, the significance of their role.



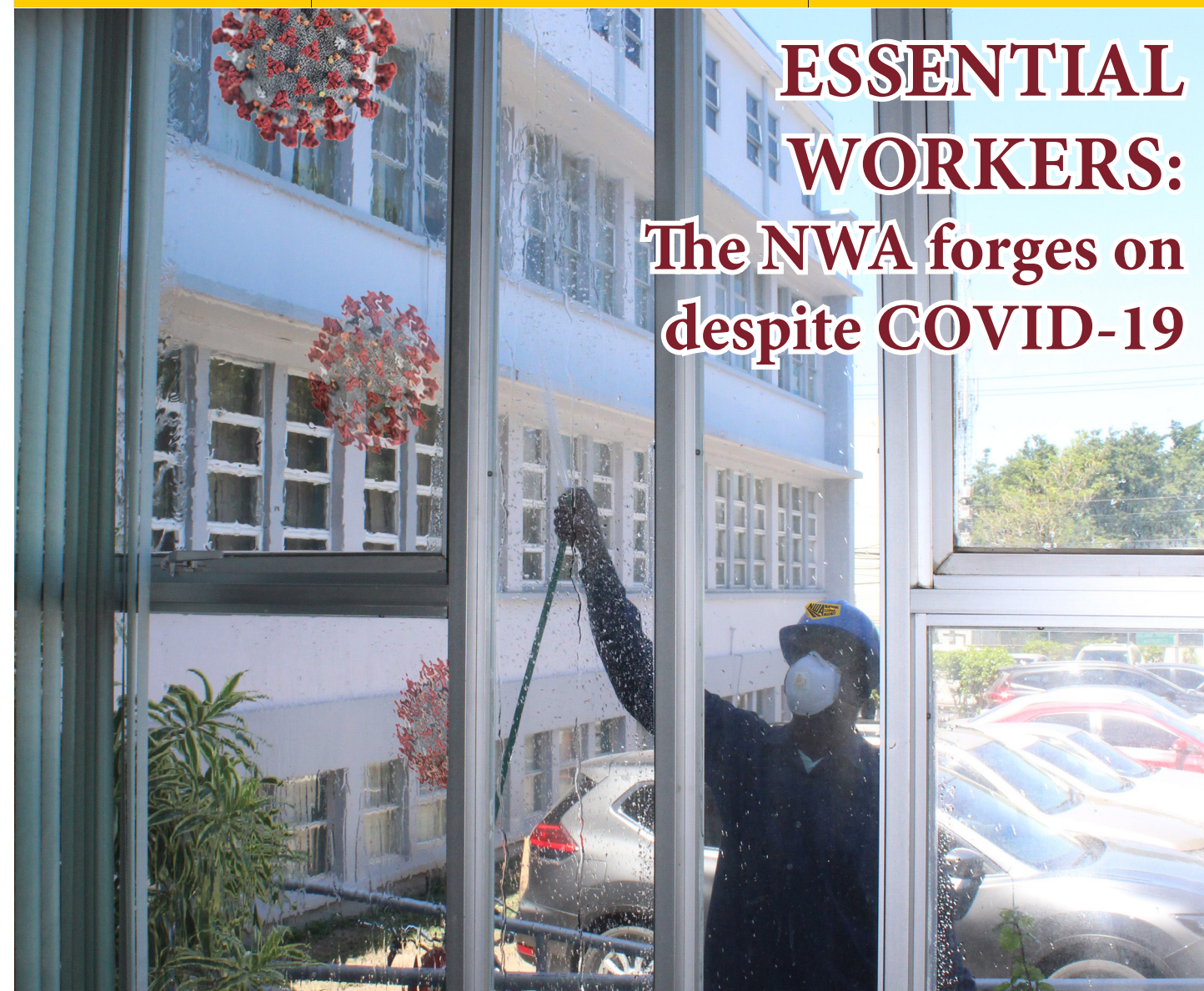
ROADSTER

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"Paving the Way"

ESSENTIAL WORKERS: The NWA forges on despite COVID-19



The mandate of the National Works Agency (NWA) has not been put on hold even amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Work goes on at the Agency as we continue to serve our customers. The necessary steps have been taken to implement the requisite safety protocols and efforts made to ensure that these are adhered to in order to protect staff and customers alike. Photographed is Mr. Antonio Harris, one of the Agency's groundsman and frontline staff, who are involved daily in the continued sanitization of the Corporate Office and all regional and parish offices. [See their story on pages 4 & 5](#)

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Avoid getting hit by COVID-19.
Maintain the requisite physical distance.

Stay Safe Jamaica

1.8 metres (6 feet)



MINISTRY OF
**HEALTH &
WELLNESS**

**CORONAVIRUS DOESN'T
HAVE A FACE**



**CUT THE HATE
DON'T DISCRIMINATE**

Let's Unite to Beat COVID-19

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ROBERT SARGEANT STAY HOME JAMAICA

However, one of the most captivating song this season is the mento-style Stay Home Jamaica written and performed by Robert Sargeant, a comedian from Manchester. He advises Jamaicans to "Stay home/we ah guh get coronavirus outa di way/Stay home Jamaica /the worst can happen when all ah wi ah stray." He is also discouraging Jamaicans from moving to his hometown, Mandeville but to "stay ah dem yard".

Silver Cat's Corona Song is perhaps the most creative and playful of the list as he employs a cunning metaphor of a girl called Corona, the veteran artiste warns his friends to not come into close contact with her: "Corona a look me but me no want har, so anybody see har tell har stay far". Other very hilarious hits have made it onto the airwaves and online platforms. Some with poignant messages, most just intended to make us smile through all the uncertainty, worry and stress.

It is with decisive and practical strategies that we will overcome the present crisis but a little humor can't hurt. Whether we are on the roads or in our home, good music with a message can be therapeutic. Just like "Wild Gilbert" by Lovindeer 1986 is now a classic, couple years from now when we look back on this crisis there will be a song that will be the signature soundtrack of our collective COVID-19 experience.



Robert Sargeant

CAPITALISING ON THE LULL: Work's still being done... Continued from page 6

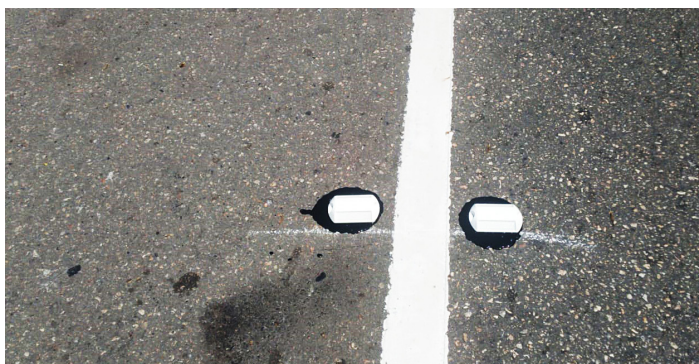
targeted areas in the Corporate Area. The works which will be carried out by the Agency's in-house team involves the remarking of lane lines, stop bars, lane arrows and importantly, pedestrian crossings.

Altogether some 1.5 kilometers of roadway will be freshly remarked along Constant Spring Road from the Red Hills Road intersection to the Half Way Tree clock tower and all around Papine Square's roundabout. Some road markings will also be done along Sutherland Road, South Odeon Avenue, Upper Hagley Park Road as well as between West Kings House and Shortwood Roads. Upper Waterloo Road was recently done.

The team intends to complete most of the work during the daytime. However, more extensive projects such as the continuation of the North Coast road marking exercise from Falmouth, Trelawny to Rose Hall, St. James will involve some weekend work.

These works are currently underway and represents phase

two of a combined 57 kilometer-long road remarking project, the first half of which wrapped up earlier this year and saw some 37.3 kilometers of roadway from Runaway Bay to Glistening Waters, Falmouth receiving new thermoplastic center and edge lines, hatchings, stop bars, directional arrows, pedestrian crossings and Raised Pavement Markers. This latest effort is valued at approximately \$22.5 million.



Newly-placed raised pavement markers along a section of the North Coast Highway near Martha Brae, Trelawny.

COVID Prescript.

The National Works Agency (NWA) was quick out of the blocks in its response to the announcement of the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Jamaica on Tuesday, March 10, 2020. The news set a series of things in motion to inform, guide and ensure safety protocols were observed by staff and our stakeholders.

The efforts were coordinated through the Human Resource Management and Administration Department and was supported by all other heads of department. However, its effectiveness relied heavily on the cooperation and adherence of all team members.

Below is the pertinent excerpt of a memo circulated to all staff members by Director, Dr. Jennifer Henry (right) in the early stages of strategizing how to treat with various situations that may pose a possible threat in a bid to prevent the spread of the virus in the workplace.



The Office Management department is spearheading efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19 throughout the NWA's offices. The department falls under the Directorate of Human Resource Management and Administration, which is headed by Dr. Jennifer Henry.

Kindly note that the Agency has taken the following initial steps in managing the efforts to reduce the coronavirus effects within the Organization:-

1. Placement of hand sanitizer in key locations across the organization
2. Increase cleaning of door handles and stairwell rails and bathrooms
3. Release internal security press button on office doors
4. Reduce visitors on building (not customers)
5. Increase communication to staff to include the placing of information and updates on Intranet and desktops
6. Convene departmental meetings with staff to update and to garner information
7. Sick bay to be designated as quarantine area in the event that a staff member shows symptoms of the virus

Please give your full support to these initiatives as we endeavour to keep our environment safe.

You may contact the Personnel and Industrial Relations Unit for any personal concerns.

NWA'S OFFICE ATTENDANTS:

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) was first identified in Wuhan, China, in early December 2019 and Jamaica recorded its first confirmed case on March 10, 2020. As the virus wreaks havoc across the globe, there are many heroes, some of them hardly ever recognized. We have seen the well-deserved lauding of the health care professionals, and frontline hospital staff, across the world – a poignant example is United Kingdom residents applauding their National Health Service (NHS) workers at the change of shift each day. We have seen some state leaders step up and make hard decisions in a bid to protect the health and lives of their constituents, amidst complaints and criticisms, not always deserved, and we have seen citizens adhere to new rules and restrictions, even while mentally shaken or traumatized.



Chanecia Thomas diligently cleans glass louvre windows at the Manchester Parish Office

There are many "workers" in this pandemic, all at risk in one way or another, and there are workers whose function might seem insignificant but who, especially in these uncertain times, are the most vital to the function of hospitals, agencies, parishes, and to a larger extent, countries. These are the persons whose daily function is the sanitization of the spaces and places in which we work, the persons whose jobs help to keep us healthy. It is in this thread that we recognize the unsung heroes at the National Works Agency (NWA), our Office Attendants.

There are thirty-seven (37) 'office attendants' and 'part-time cleaners' employed to the National Works Agency (NWA), catalogued as 36 females and one male – Clevan Dennis, who is the part-time cleaner / attendant assigned to the Black River office. They are employees of the Office Management Unit and, as such, are assigned to regional and parish offices,

as well as departments of the Corporate Office. In the grand machination that is the NWA, our office attendants are persons whose duties might appear miniscule, but their jobs help to ensure that the rest of the staff can perform as efficiently as possible in the work spaces provided.

Office Attendants are tasked with the cleaning and sanitisation of work spaces and work implements. They assist in the preparation of beverages and refreshments, as well as other duties assigned by supervisors, which may or may not be associated with aforementioned functions. For example, Maureen Hanson, who works in the Major Projects and Information Technology departments, also assists in the NWA's after school childcare facility where she helps the children with their homework.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, they have increased activities as they now have to clean more frequently, especially those areas that are used often. In some departments these



Juline Campbell, aka "Cutie"

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Corona Soundtracks



Sizzla Kalonji

One can just imagine what might have happened that day in early March, here in Jamaica, many drivers, at various points in their commute halted at traffic lights along highways, Avenues and Boulevards and even dirt tracks when the news came over their car radios that Jamaica now had its first confirmed case of the novel Corona virus. From half-way across the accounts of how the pandemic had ravaged the city of Wuhan China and was fast making its way to the west barreling through Italy, Spain, Germany, Great Britain, France and closer home in New York City where hundreds were dying daily.

One of the great features of Reggae and Dancehall music and why we love the art form so much is its incredible topicality and its swift reaction to both global and local events. To our knowledge, no other genres of music can unequivocally claim to contribute as many songs about subjects that have moved the world, be it black liberation, world politics, race relations and now - Corona! The virus that holds countries all over in a scare-mongering grip now informs the lyrics penned to the rather infectious Reggae and dancehall rhythms.

HERE ARE A FEW OF THE ROADSTER'S PICKS (WHICH WE RECOMMEND YOU LISTEN, OR NOT):

Probably the first to draw attention to the virus was Zagga

with his New Hail, a tune that suggests alternative ways of greeting each other amidst the pandemic. The artist cautioned "No lion paw, no big finger nah rub, no fist no thumb no hug... New Hail when you see me, New Hail, stretch out you foot when you see me and a hail!" The song was officially released on March 13 and is accompanied by a demonstrative music video.

Ras Strika released what we believe to be another outstanding track Coronavirus via his YouTube channel. Croons the artist: "The dreaded virus spread rapidly and is proven to be the most dangerous. Please protect your family, friends and most of all yourself and remember to wash your hands." Frequent handwashing for at least twenty seconds is one of the personal hygiene practices promoted to combat the virus.

Sizzla Kalonji too has added his voice to the growing catalogue of COVID-19 soundtracks. His too is also Corona Virus recorded on the Far East Riddim. In his song, Sizzla calls for awareness about the virus' spread and, above all, for cleanliness and prevention: "Dem a chat bout Corona Virus de about, better be careful, no better make it go in a your house protect the little children, don't put your hand inna your mouth..."



Silver Cat

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Multi-Million Dollar Bridge for Paradise Westmoreland

Residents are now expressing a sigh of relief as the long-awaited construction of the Paradise Bridge in Westmoreland is finally over. Works to construct this bridge got underway in June 2019 and was completed in early 2020. The new bridge replaces the centuries-old traditional Arch Bridge which served the area for a very long time and had overtime become compromised and deemed unsafe prompting its closure by the Government.

The Paradise Bridge, which lies along the stretch of roadway leading from Savanna-la-Mar to Ferris Cross, Westmoreland serves hundreds of commuters daily. It is

located in the small community of Paradise known for its beautiful scenery and the Sweet River which runs through a section of the community and flows under the Paradise Bridge. It is a popular spot, for many, who visit the River daily. In 2019, news of the bridge's planned reconstruction was met with a bit of apprehension for many road users as this was the main route in and out of the town of Savanna la Mar. However, those fears were quickly allayed when the NWA constructed a detour route adjacent to the bridge which was used for the duration of the contract.

With the construction now complete, commuters are now enjoying the benefits of the new structure which is also equipped with sidewalks for pedestrian safety. Westmoreland native and bus operator, George McKenzie who says the bridge project has had a positive impact on commute as there are no more delays and persons are able to freely traverse the area without any impediments. "Despite the delays we experienced, looking back it wasn't so bad and we now have the benefit of the new bridge which is a positive for the area," McKenzie said.

Similar sentiments were expressed by vendor, Paul Langley, who sells in the area. Initially he feared the dislocation that would have been caused by the closure of the bridge and was not fully on board but is now happy with the construction and the fact that his business was unaffected by the works. The project involved the demolition of the older structure and the construction of a reinforced concrete Box Culvert, river diversion, the construction of retaining walls and sidewalks, as well as the reinstatement of the roadway using Asphaltic Concrete Overlay.



A bird's eye view of the recently completed Paradise Bridge in Westmoreland.



Paradise Bride, Westmoreland
A view of the recently completed box culvert

The Agency's Unsung Heroes in the Fight against COVID-19

activities are carried out every two hours which, undoubtedly, creates additional pressure for some persons. In addition, most, if not all, use the public transportation systems which, due to restrictions associated with the virus, make the daily commute increasingly risky and much longer, especially as their work time usually starts at 7:00 a.m. For at least one member of staff, Ms. Veronica Grey, who is assigned to the Montego Bay office, just getting to work is a monumental feat as she takes six taxis in her daily commute from her residence to work and return.

Many office attendants, such as Dawnette Porter (Westmoreland) have admitted to being fearful about the virus, especially with the emergence of new information that some COVID-19 patients may be asymptomatic. Malvia McPherson, affectionately called "Katty" (Southeastern Region), confesses that the daily news make it scarier, especially as she has grandchildren who live at home with her and she is worried that she is endangering them. Juline Campbell, aka "Cutie" (St. Mary), also admits to taking extra precautions at home to ensure that her grandchildren are kept relatively safe. Others, like Mrs. Isola Campbell-Spence (Western Region) depends on her faith to keep her grounded even while she ensures that she follows instructions of health authorities about social distancing and using sanitizers and masks.

For the most part, though, office attendants have attested that, even with the increased frequency of their assigned duties and the personal sacrifices, there is not much difference between how they tackled their tasks before the virus and since. In fact, they believe that this pandemic has made them more appreciative of just how important the tasks that they complete are, and as aptly stated by Oreca Gottshalk (Clarendon), "more careful to not touch her face". Valerie Gordon (St. James) says she tries to "maintain a positive outlook" and makes the effort to "ensure that her surroundings are clean and properly sanitized".

According to their supervisor, Mrs. Desmarie Barnett, "our office attendants and cleaners have risen to the challenge, still making it to work on time to sanitise work areas before the start of the work day." She says it is commendable that she has not recieved any complaints about the increase in activities although there is admittedly some amount of fear of the virus because there is so much that is still unknown.

Undoubtedly, the office attendants play no small role in the maintenance of our health in the workplace. They get to work before the rest of us to ensure that we start the day in a clean and sanitized environment. It is with all of these adjustments and personal sacrifices being considered that we applaud our office attendants and in the words of Mrs. Desmarie Barnett, Assistant Office Manager, "we must say a big thank you to the (office attendants) team who have been asked to perform their duties in spite of, and even to go further in making sure staff members and the environment we work in are kept safe with the sanitization of the departments or units twice per day."



Isola Campbell-Spence



Dawnette Porter



Althea Irving-Thomas wipes
the walls in the stairwell at the Corporate Office

CAPITALISING ON THE LULL: *Work's still being done.*



Newly-marked hatchings near the Martha Brae underpass, Trelawny.

Congested roadways are not only a commuter's worst nightmare, they can also wreak havoc on all sorts of planned roadworks especially road marking, asphaltting, trenching and pipeline installation. Often times these activities have to be carried out in the dead of night to avoid the disruption of moving traffic and the ire of inconvenienced motorists.

Measures introduced by the Government of Jamaica in recent times to contain the spread of the novel Corona virus (COVID-19) including stay-at-home orders, curfews and no-movement days in some parts of the country have forced motorists to relinquish the road network at odd, but critical hours of the work day.

The Agency has capitalized on this unique scenario which has arisen out of the COVID-19 containment measures and has been making headway with implementing planned works that, for one reason or another, had to either be previously shelved or rescheduled, right across the island. Here are some major and some important works being done during the lull.

STATIONARY MOTORISTS HELP TO ADVANCE ROAD MARKING ACTIVITIES ISLANDWIDE

For months the NWA's Network Managers have wanted to correct a number of deficiencies in existing road markings along critical sections of the island's road network. Fading edge and center lines and missing Raised Pavement Markers have been posing a challenge for motorists using some major roadways especially at night.

Interestingly too, road marking is traditionally night work as the NWA's team and contractors try by all means necessary to avoid the steady flow of peak traffic and undisciplined motorists who often times smear freshly-laid thermoplastic material by operating their vehicles in work areas, foiling the Agency's best efforts to improve the safety of corridors.

Now that a lot of motorists, rogue and otherwise, are practically stationary, plans to remark some roadways have been revived and works are to be implemented, at last. Constant Spring Road and Papine Square are two of those

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Migrant Bikers use newly Paved Manchester Roadway for stunts

The National Works Agency (NWA) has just completed rehabilitative work along the Downs to Alligator Pond road in Southern Manchester which was started on February 19, 2020. This busy roadway which is the main access to Mandeville and St Elizabeth from Alligator Pond was littered with potholes. In late November 2019, public transport operators plying the route from Alligator Pond to Mandeville protested the deplorable state of the road. Member of Parliament for Manchester South, Michael Stewart told the commuters that he made appeals to the Prime Minister and the NWA would assist with fast tracking the rehabilitation of the busy roadway.

This 1.3 kilometers of road rehabilitative work was completed at a cost of over \$21 million dollars. The scope of work along the corridor included bushing and site clearance, the cleaning of side and earth drains, scarifying, grading, prime coat, shaping, rolling and compacting, base course, sheet patching and asphaltic concrete overlay. The work on this main road will allow for the easier movement of residents travelling to and from communities such as Kingston, Santa Cruz, Plowden, New Forest, Junction, Lititz, Mandeville, Spring Ground and Prospect.

The completion of the road has had both a positive and negative impact on the Alligator Pond community. Maurice Harrison, a recent returning resident is extremely happy about the improvement. He explained that he is currently constructing his house and he had spoken with the Member of Parliament about the poor road condition. He was surprised at the quick response and the professionalism exhibited by the contractors. He felt comfortable exchanging ideas with the supervisors.

However with the COVID-19 lockdown there has been an influx of young visitors from outside of the community, flocking the area's many pristine beaches. Among them are migrating bikers who are now using the recently-completed roadway as a racetrack. They normally engage in daredevil stunts on the newly-paved area however the local police has been regulating the practice.



Prime Coating



Scarification



Asphaltic Concrete Overlay

What's in name?

The curious case of Rat Trap, Westmoreland

"What's in a name? That which we call rose, by any other name would smell as sweet." These words from William Shakespeare's famous play, Romeo and Juliet, muses about the significance of names. For some, names have a significance, for others not so much. But it is undeniable that names can be as interesting as they are sometimes meaningful or meaningless and this can be seen in the kaleidoscope of place names right across Jamaica.

The **ROADSTER** sat out to find Rat Trap, a small rural community nestled in the serene hills of Eastern Westmoreland.

The community is located along the winding stretch of roadway leading from Struie to Lambs River, communities with names that are also quite interesting. But, we didn't have the time to stop and ferret out the significance of those labels for this article, perhaps next edition.

Rat Trap is located in close proximity to the Belvedere and Kew Park communities. Many residents were unaware of the genesis of their community's name, some opining that it was probably named because of the abundance of rats in the area. Other, older residents rubbished this claim, arguing that there were no more rats located there than in any other community. Well, of course, no one would want to have their communities associated with what could be perceived as a public health concern. (This is quite evident in how many Jamaicans are treating their neighbours who have been suspected as having COVID-19, but that's a different story. Back to Rat Trap.)

The name is said to have been around since the 1800s when a popular shop keeper, who operated the only shop in the area at that time, claimed that such was the importance of his shop that everyone, regardless if they were in favour of him or not, were drawn to his shop like rats to a trap. Hence the name Rat Trap. (Ooooooh, of course, that has to be it).

The name originally referred to just the small square, but over the years has been expanded to include areas in the vicinity of the square. The neighbouring communities of Struie, Belvedere, Lambs River and Kew Park are said to be derived from the names of plantation owners who held extensive properties in the area. These areas are still predominantly farming communities.



A traditional concrete sign post welcoming the intrepid visitor, perhaps to Rat Trap. Snap!

Many residents
were unaware of
the genesis of their
community's name

COPING WITH COVID:

Team members share their experiences



It is really sad to read and hear the news of how many persons this virus has killed in China, Italy and the United States of America. I pray for the infected persons and their affected families. My concern is what the mental and psychological impact of the virus on persons will be after the pandemic has ended.

I am very careful of how I move around and socialize. I have two children, since the outbreak sometimes they stay with my mother in St. Thomas but while they are at home I ensure that when I reach home in the evenings I remove my clothes and bathe outside before going into the house. I also leave clothes worn to work or to church outside (you may be wondering, yes, I still go to church and do missionary duties). We adhere to the Order of no more than ten persons and should additional members show up, some of us would leave to facilitate them.



The main challenge I am faced with is not having a relative at home to monitor my children's school work while I am at work.

-Meshia
Davidson,
Acting
Librarian

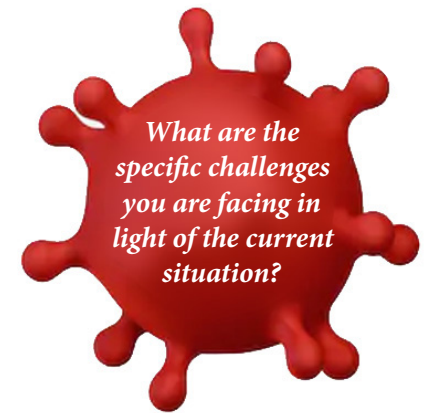


Having not been around during World War 11. I believe this has been the worst thing to affect the world since then.

It has changed my lifestyle greatly in terms of how I greet people, my movements generally. Visiting friends is now out, as well as visiting restaurants etc.

Not being able to meet with friends and relatives; the wearing of a face mask; the closure of recreational places; missing support staff from work who live in quarantined communities, as well as the general feeling of fear and panic in the society due to the virus. Not knowing when I will see relatives and friends who live abroad again is also one of my concerns.

-Richard Walker, Quantity Surveyor, Technical Services



COVID-19 Restrictions Clear the Road for the Replacement of Liguanea Avenue Bridge

The Liguanea Avenue Bridge Replacement project was put on the NWA's list of things to do in mid-August 2019, to commence in September, as the existing concrete bridge is defective. The works, though embraced by the community, was widely thought to be ill-timed as it coincided with the start of the new school year, which is normally accompanied by increased traffic flows, especially during morning and afternoon peak hours. In addition, the area in which the bridge is located is a densely-populated residential district and one of the main link roads between Barbican and the Liguanea commercial areas.



Construction of concrete footing for temporary footbridge at the Liguanea Avenue Bridge location

The logistics of the project, therefore, had to be revisited, as for a successful implementation it requires the collaboration of several entities, to include at least two utilities providers, FLOW and the National Water Commission (NWC). The alternative movement of traffic and pedestrians also had to be carefully coordinated so as to minimize the interruption to daily life as best as possible, within the timeframe that was given for the project. The implementation phase was therefore postponed.

The project though, is vital because not only is the bridge defective but, as it now stands, it can only accommodate a single lane of vehicles which, in itself, creates a traffic nightmare, so though momentarily placed on the back burner, the planning continued behind the scenes. The postponement also provided the opportunity for the entities involved to strategize and prepare for the inevitable execution of the project.

Fast forward to March 2020, when the global pandemic, COVID-19, forced the Jamaican government to implement restrictions to the movement of people in a bid to curb the spread of the disease. Though unfortunate, in many respects, this created an opportunity for the implementation of the Liguanea Avenue Bridge replacement as there is now a decrease in traffic.

As such the project officially commenced on Tuesday, April 14, 2020. The contracted period is four months, however, efforts are being made to have the project delivered in a shorter timeframe. Since the start of the project, the focus has primarily been on the rehabilitation of one of the detour routes, which includes Kings House Avenue, Sandhurst Crescent, Richings Avenue and Sandy Park Road, in preparation for the closure of Liguanea Avenue. Other roads that will be used as a detour are Hope Road, Barbican Road, Paddington Terrace and East Kings House Road. Other activities include the removal of utility service providers' assets from the structure, the construction of a pedestrian footbridge and the installation of signs along the detour route.

The demolition of the current structure is scheduled for Tuesday May 5, 2020 and in the meantime steelwork fabrication is being done off-site to prepare for the bridge's replacement. The new structure will be a two lane reinforced concrete box culvert complete with improved drainage facilities, sidewalks and approach roads paved with asphaltic concrete. The cost of the project is \$28 million dollars.

Covid Cancels Community Meeting, But Schip Sails On ...Continued from page 9



Package 4- Morant Bay Roundabout - Prospect - Concrete poured to seawall first tier at Morant Villas.

just over two of the four kilometer-long leg from Hordley to Long Road including the construction of a retaining wall and preparations for the installation of concrete U-drains. While no paving has been complete to date and an environmental permit is being awaited for the continuation of refurbishing works on a bridge located at Horse Savannah, the contractor has managed to complete 50% of his advanced works so far. This package is now 10% complete overall.

The focus along the Manchioneal to Fair Prospect stretch, in this advanced work phase, is the construction of a retaining wall closer to Manchioneal as well as the extension and reconstruction of the Mulatto and Sphinx River bridges respectively. Contractors here, are currently engaged in site clearance work and has completed 2% of the project overall.

The 140 kilometer-long SCHIP project also involves works along two principal roadways in the neighboring parish of St. Thomas. A combined 35.5 kilometer of roadway is being rehabilitated under the programme, both east of the Morant Bay Roundabout to Prospect and north up to Cedar Valley.

Efforts are currently focused on completing a critical and rather imposing seawall just outside the town of Morant Bay en route to Prospect while work has started on the replacement or reconstruction of all of four reinforced



Package 14 - Morant Bay - Serge Island - Levelling and compacting of fill material at box culvert at Morant River Bridge II

concrete box culverts on the roadway leading to Georgia: two, over the Morant River; another in Seaforth and a larger culvert near Georgia itself. Works in St. Thomas is on average 8% complete, to date.



COVID COMMUTE:

Two Modes; Two Dissimilar experiences

Getting around during the COVID-19 pandemic can be different depending on who is driving or what is being driven. The morning following the St. Catherine lockdown for example, traffic was horrendous for particularly car operators in the parish. Many, including essential workers, were left with little option but to stay home. The morning commute time was simply not enough to navigate the lengthy pile-up of traffic even to meet relaxed flexi-time schedules. It was clear, from then, that essential workers would have to just meander their way through major traffic snarls in an attempt to get to work. As it later became known, their battle was not only amongst themselves but also with those motorists who were simply trying to flee St. Catherine, for reasons other than essential work.

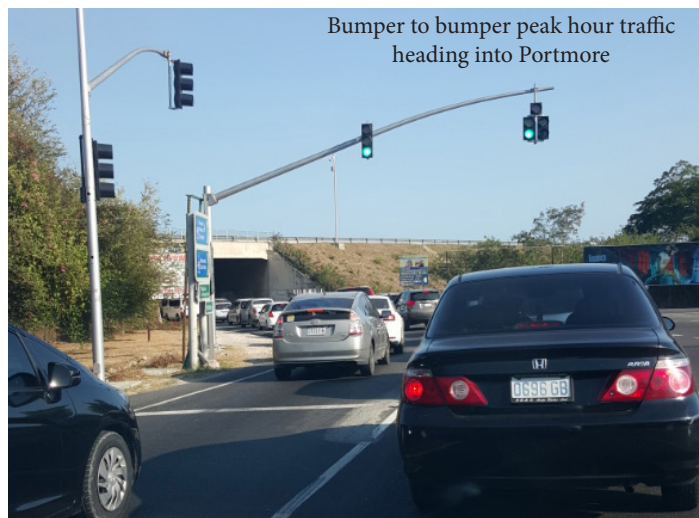
The next day, new routes had to be sought. But wherever you turned the hood of your car, even vehicles away, all one could see were long lines of traffic. Yet again, a new route had to be ferreted; let's head to the High 95, and try the newly-widened Mandela Highway. But checkpoints inevitably added at least an hour just sitting and throttling in traffic.

Car and van radios blaring at high volumes, motorists singing at the top of their lungs (car windows up of course!) soothed the frustration somewhat. But, this quickly shot back up when checkpoints were neared and inefficiencies were identified. After finally getting past these areas, it was generally smooth sailing all the way to work. Sometimes 15 minutes tops! What a relief!

Motorists are tempted to try various routes in these times so as not to be ensnared in crawling traffic. Their gamble pays off on certain random days; often times it causes regret.

It's been a 'hit or miss' with the traffic for motor vehicle operators in these times. Flexi-work arrangements aren't only favourable, they are also very practical as the roadways are usually quite free during the mid-morning hours of 9 am – 10 am, but are jammed-packed only an hour earlier.

The experience for motorcyclists is diametrically poles apart. They don't have quite the same challenges with commute as drivers of cars, buses and trucks do. They merely whisk around the sparse traffic on some routes, outside of St. Catherine. Besides, this group of motorists never normally experienced traffic snarls even during normal times. If it



Bumper to bumper peak hour traffic heading into Portmore

were even possible, motorcyclists are moving faster, scaring themselves at times with the top speeds they have been able to achieve on virtually abandoned roadways.

But slow down a minute, not shaded behind windscreens and vehicle panels, they are confronted with eerie streets along routes which were once so alive with activity: pedestrians, school children, workmen and street side vendors. Now, it's like travelling through ghost towns. Every day is like Sunday and especially on Sundays one's tempted to ride all the way to Montego Bay.

The street boys too have migrated to brand new areas in search of the odd bunch of motorists. Their trade has literally fanned out all throughout the city.

All categories of motorists have more time and space and less congestion and hassle to contemplate just where have all the people gone: the pedestrians waylaying public transport; school gate vendors; the itinerant and homeless; school children; the corner shop crowds. You know, balance is something quite interesting.

The sparse streets are good because you can get from work to home and home to work in a jiffy. However, seeing and interacting with people have been an integral part of our existence. Their being removed from along our usual routes make for a lonely, strange journey. Despite our fervent and collective wish previously for lighter commute, we surely miss the people. *Stay home Jamaica, so that we can quickly meet again on our roads.*

COVID-19 Cancels Community Meeting, But SCHIP Sails On



At about 1:30 in the afternoon of Tuesday, March 10, NWA's Chief Executive Officer, E.G. Hunter, informed the Communication and Customer Services Department (CCSD) that the Community Engagement session planned for Manchioneal, Portland the following day was off, indefinitely.

The highly-anticipated meeting had taken some planning. The CCSD had pulled together various resources to mobilize residents from the Hordley, Long Road, Manchioneal and Fair Prospect communities in Eastern Portland to join the NWA team at the All Age School in Manchioneal on Wednesday.

The NWA had prepared, along with the contractors and consultant, to inform residents on how the South Coast Highway Improvement Project (SCHIP) including the extensive improvement of some thirteen (13) kilometers of roadway through their communities would be implemented. The type and scope of works forming part of Portland's Packages 8 and 10 were to be highlighted, as well as how this would impact communities including the benefits to be had.

The late postponement or cancellation (as we were unable to say which just yet) was however not altogether surprising. The Government of Jamaica had only moments earlier announced the first confirmed case of the novel Corona virus in the island. It being just the second week of March, the implications were not immediately apparent.

On March 10, 2020 no one could have imagined exactly what lied ahead. The virus' far-reaching impact on scheduled events, movement, transportation and the economy would only become evident over the ensuing weeks.

Interestingly the index case (first confirmed case) was discovered in Seven Miles, Bull Bay, St. Andrew, a community which lie along the extended SCHIP project area. The meeting about Portland's packages was expected to pull a bumper crowd as the roadworks were long-awaited and much-needed. However, while a packed school auditorium was desirable for an information session, as we were learning from experiences elsewhere in the world, it was a prime incubator for the new virus.

The March 11 Manchioneal school hall meeting will possibly go down as the first casualty of COVID-19 from the Agency's perspective. But while the event had to be forfeited, physical works on the project forges on.

ADVANCES MADE

Advanced physical works have started on



Package 8 – Long Road – Hordley- Concrete poured to u-drain base 100 meters from Hector's River Bridge.

THE FACE MASK TRADE

The face mask is perhaps the most sought after commodity, no personal protective gear, article of clothing, make that fashion accessory at the moment. The rush to secure face masks by the general population represents for out-of-work seamstresses, fashion designers and tailors the welcomed dilemma pharmacists faced in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic locally when householders sought to procure all the bleach, disinfectant, hand sanitizer and alcohol they could get their hands on. Face masks are now the new 70% Isopropyl rubbing alcohol.

On Tuesday, April 21, 2020, Prime Minister Andrew Holness adjusted his order on the wearing of face masks mandating all Jamaicans to wear a form of the personal protective gear whilst in public to help prevent the transmission of the virus. This immediately gave rise to a whole new manufacturing, marketing and distribution business in face masks even while traditional goods supply and distribution trades were taking a major hit from the pandemic.

The Communication and Customer Services department's own Warren Wilson has seen an opportunity to get in on the business seizing it by the rubber bands. Here's his account of how he entered the trade:

With every crisis there presents an opportunity, and COVID19 is no exception to the rule.

While listening to one of the PM's press conferences on the protocols for COVID-19, it dawned on me that the face mask would become mandatory for public use.

Without hesitation or a second thought I called to my next-door neighbor who is a dressmaker and who was doing less business as a result of the Corona pandemic.

The pandemic being the crisis and the need for mask the opportunity, was the perfect condition for her to remain economically and financially viable during the meltdown.

She immediately began to produce masks using a surgical mask as a template. However as she continued and experimented they became more fashionable and stylish, pairing function with fashion.

As staff of the NWA are deemed as essential and we have maintained our regular work routine, the environment proved the ideal place to market the products. Seventy plus masks later the venture has proved fairly lucrative and my neighbor continues to smile as she works from home, thanks to COVID-19!



Though, he has one other article with which to play dress up Warren Wilson, one of the Agency's front desk staff, not only wears face masks, he also sells them.



Security guards have become frontline customer service personnel in the workplace's effort to stem the pandemic. Mario Gayle, contracted security guard at the NWA's Corporate office, ensures he takes all precautions when interacting with the public.

NWA STAFF COVERING UP FROM COVID-19

