

Website Launched to Highlight Jamaica's Cultural Scene

BY ISABELLE PIERRE

A&E EDITOR

In an effort to promote cultural tourism in Jamaica, York College and the Downtown Jamaica Cultural District (DJCD) held an official launch party to promote jamaicafunk.org, a new website that presents a virtual, one-stop information kiosk about what's going on in Jamaica, Queens.

In addition to its role as a cultural hut, the site was created to support artists living in the area by providing a free networking tool, a monthly calendar of events featuring the different performing and arts venues in Jamaica, and lists of available performance work spaces.

"If they have roots in the downtown, we want them to be connected and be promoted" said Max Musicant, a coordinator for the group.

Because of the DJCD's partnership with York, the website's launch was held in the lobby of the College's Performing Arts Center. Tables were set up with computers for guests to peruse the website and for artists to sign

up, while the York College Jazz Workshop performed.

According to Kerri Edge, one of the event's coordinators, interest in having an official launch party was spearheaded by an artist meet-and-greet which took place a little more than a year ago.

"I think it'll be a good opportunity for artists in the area," said Denise Robinson who has worked as a stage manger and a lighting designer at York and other venues like Jamaica Center for the Arts and Learning.

Robinson said she hoped the website would offer local artists like herself more exposure and opportunities by allowing them to log on, create profiles for themselves and feature upcoming events involving their work.

In addition to the visual arts, the group plans to use the website to highlight Jamaica's rich cultural heritage of jazz, blues, rock, rap and hip-hop artists who have come from the area.

The site will also offer visitors a list of restaurants, shops, and cultural and historical landmarks.

According to Carlisle Towery,

president of the Greater Jamaica Development Corporation which is partnering with the DJCD, there was never a place to showcase Jamaica's cultural institutions in one place.

Traditionally, places like the Afrikan Poetry Theatre, Jamaica Center for the Arts and Learning, and Cultural Collaborative Jamaica have all operated independently.

With jamaicafunk.org, the intent is for the community to have one central place to turn to for neighborhood shows and events, and tourism that will attract the attentions of major retailers and restaurateurs.

In between sets by the jazz band, Musicant presented a slide show of the GJDC's successful landmark and restoration projects followed by a preview of future projects.

"Jamaica Funk" according to Edge was given its name by the artist Tom Browne in the song "Funkin' For Jamaica."

"It really comes from his acknowledgement that Jamaica has a specific sound, a specific funk" said Edge.