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St. Croix Native Frederick Morton Jr. Awarded Institute of Caribbean Studies Prestigious Trail-blazer Award as Tempo Networks Turns 15

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Frederick A. Morton By. TEMPO NETWORKS

St. Croix native Frederick Morton Jr., founder, chairman and CEO of TEMPO Networks, recently received the Institute of Caribbean Studies Caribbean American Heritage Trailblazer Award during the 27th Annual Caribbean-American Heritage (CARAH) Awards Gala last month, according to a release issued to the Consortium.

The CARAH Awards Gala, held virtually on Nov. 20 under the distinguished patronage of the Caribbean diplomatic corps, celebrates the achievements of the Caribbean-American community and the contributions that Friends of the Caribbean make in support of Caribbean-American

interests.

The CARAH Awards has come to be recognized as the premier celebration of the Caribbean-American community, highlighting "all that is good about who we are and where we come from," according to the release.

Below, some responses from Mr. Morton provided in a release issued Sunday.

1. How was tempo conceived? How did the idea come about?

TEMPO was conceived in 2003 while I was the Senior Vice President, Deputy General Counsel of MTV Networks. When I look back on my life, however, it is clear to me that TEMPO was in the making for many years prior, as far back as when I was a young boy growing up in St. Croix, the United States Virgin Islands. In other words, I believe I was called to bring TEMPO forward – My Purpose. I was at MTV for about 2 years before I brought the idea to Mr. Tom Freston, one of the Founders of MTV and an entertainment industry icon, who was my Mentor. After being at Viacom/MTV for several years, I felt that my main purpose there was not just to practice law on behalf of MTV, but to ensure that a media platform focused on the Caribbean, it's extraordinary people and culture was developed. One day in 2003, I presented the idea to Tom over lunch in a Time Square restaurant and have not looked back since. It took me two years from presenting the idea to Tom to obtain the approval from MTV to launch the Network in 2005. That, in of itself is a story, but in May 2005, the Network was announced at a major event at the South Street Seaport in NYC and officially launched in the Caribbean in October 2005 with events throughout the region, including Trinidad.

2. Where is the network headquarters and are there any offices in the region?

Since 2007, TEMPO Networks has been headquartered in Newark, New Jersey. The Network was relocated from MTV Headquarters in New York City, following my acquisition of the Network from MTV/Viacom. The Network has an office in Trinidad & Tobago and affiliates in several islands.

3. You worked at MTV, in what capacity and for how long?

I worked at MTV for 4 years, prior to which I was at MTV's Corporate Parent, Viacom for 5 years. At MTV, I was Senior Vice President, Deputy General Counsel in charge of litigation, intellectual property and pre-broadcast review. At Viacom, I was in a similar role, but my portfolio included several other Viacom properties, including CBS, Paramount Studios, etc.

4. Was tempo a joint venture with MTV? what was the network's association with MTV?

I came up with the idea while I was a senior executive at MTV. So, once the idea was approved in 2005, TEMPO became an MTV Network property and I became the General Manager. Two years later, I bought TEMPO, the Company I founded, from MTV in a management buy-out.

5. Where in the Caribbean are you originally from? And, how long have you resided in the states?

I was born and raised in St. Croix, the United States Virgin Islands. My parents are from the Federation of St. Kitts- Nevis. I attended University in the United States and have lived in the United States for most of my adult life (20+ years)

6. What are some of the current shows that air on tempo?

There are classic shows, like the “Cross Caribbean Countdown” (Regional Music Video Countdown show) and new shows, like “Caribbean Dream”, which explores the tremendous contributions made by Caribbean Americans (like Yvette Noel Schure, Beyonce’s publicist since she was 14, who is from Grenada). There are also new shows, like “The Road Ahead” (Probing serious issues impacting the Caribbean, like the impact of the Pandemic on Tourism, Caribbean Reparations, etc.). There are shows exploring the impact of the Caribbean on Music, like Hip Hop Origins, set to premier this month -- Hip Hop being founded by DJ Kool Herc from Jamaica and the historical dominance of Caribbean Artist in the genre.

7. Who are some of the popular personalities that have been on tempo?

Over the years, since TEMPO’s inception, practically every major Caribbean Artist have been featured on TEMPO, from international superstar Rihanna to Buju, Machel, Shaggy, Tarrus Riley, Morgan Heritage, Bounty Killa, Jimmy Cliff, Beenie Man, Kes Da Band, Bunji Garlin and numerous international artists. Numerous Regional leaders, including Prime Ministers from practically every Caribbean country and other heads of government, together with Corporate heads from throughout the region and diaspora.

8. When you started tempo what was it that you initially set out to do? Have those objectives been realized?

When I started TEMPO, it was my dream and main objective to create a unifying and quality platform for the Caribbean through media, where the Caribbean islands/countries could be connected through their shared history and experiences. I always felt, the Caribbean islands/countries were more alike than different and that our differences where just good fun (how we made our saltfish different, how we called the same fruit by a different name or how our dialect caused us to sing our words, etc.). It was to do what the Federation couldn’t, to add to how cricket unites us or how UWI educates us. I believe we have done an extraordinary job at doing so. Since the Network was launched, regional travel increased, interest in our Caribbean neighbors grew to more than just a passing thought. Many Caribbean people learned for the first time about the artist that they heard on the radio or that there are carnivals in other islands or that they could travel to another island and have an enjoyable experience that also reminds them in many ways of home. I also wanted to create a platform for our extraordinary talent and I am happy to be able to say that TEMPO has been extremely influential in launching and supporting the careers of many Caribbean artists. There is much more to accomplish and we are strategically positioned, with technology improvements, to market and promote our amazing islands/countries to the world in a quality fashion. In this regard, we are looking forward to the launch of our Over the Top platform (TEMPO APP) before the end of the year.

9. You launched in the USVI 15 years ago, reflect on that occasion.

The USVI is home and home is where the heart is. TEMPO has held 5 major events in the USVI, including its launch event and subsequent anniversary events. Who can forget TEMPO Turns 1 in St. Croix at Cramer Park – an amazing event with too many memorable moments to count. Then, there was Rock de TEMPO in St. Thomas, another sold out TEMPO Event at the Lionell Roberts Stadium. I am forever indebted for the love the USVI has given to me and TEMPO throughout the years. I can’t wait to return and to possibly launch a festival, post pandemic, that would become the signature annual event for the islands.

10. What are the countries that tempo currently broadcasts?

See Attached Distribution Chart. We also broadcast in the USA on Cablevision and Verizon Fios and with the launch of our App., we will be worldwide.

11. Looking ahead, what are some of the plans that you have to take the network further and to also expand on your reach? What is on the new frontier for Tempo?

I am extraordinarily excited for the launch of the TEMPO App. It is already built and available on IOS (Apple) and Android platforms. You can go and download it right now. We have 15 years of content to load and are working on a slate of new shows and curating carefully acquired content to ensure that TEMPO becomes, as many are calling it, the Netflix of the Caribbean. Watch out!

12. What type of contribution would you say that tempo has made to Caribbean life?

The Network has without a doubt helped us to appreciate our own culture and to value ourselves in the way that we should. We have always (and still do to a certain extent) value everything outside of the region as having more significance. TEMPO helped to change that and as a result, enhanced our Caribbean Pride, which is absolutely necessary to a successful future. The Network helped us to share our collective experiences so that we could be more united, helping to forge a stronger regional identity. We, of course, also created a strong platform for our artist to market and promote their amazing work. There is much more work to be done, but TEMPO will undoubtedly go down in history of one of the institutions that only entertained us, but united us as a people.

13. What does it feel like to Turn 15?

Turning 15 is a fulfillment of God's promise to me that TEMPO will be triumphant in its mission! 15 is a tremendous milestone and I recall many naysayers saying and predicting (perhaps hoping) at the launch of the Network that it would not last any longer than 2 years. So, in sense, Turning 15, is also vindication. It is an indescribable feeling that God is love, answers prayers, always protects his work, and fulfills his promises. I give thanks with a grateful heart to my God, my family, my wife, my children and to all those that know my heart. Now, that is a feeling!!

14. How has the station helped Caribbean Culture in the United States?

While the Network has had an impact on Caribbean Culture in the USA, being broadcast on Verizon and Cablevision, with the launch of the App, the Network is now poised to make an even greater contribution in this regard. As I mentioned, we recently launched a series of new shows designed to do just that, including "Caribbean Dream" which explores the impact of Caribbean Americans. At the end of this month, I will be receiving the "Trailblazer Award" from the Institute of Caribbean Studies in Washington D.C. We are planning together to utilize TEMPO to galvanize the community in a way that has never been done before. Stay tuned for our work in this regard.

15. How much has your content changed and has your core audience expanded?

Evolving, innovating and remaining culturally relevant are all key components of TEMPO's reaching a 15-year milestone. So, we are constantly improving and expanding our content to ensure that it is not just entertaining, but also maintains the core value of educating and unifying. We started out with a heavy emphasis on music (and that remains key in our lineup), however, we are now truly a life-style Network, touching on all aspects of Caribbean Life (travel & tourism, cuisine, news, documentaries, movies, etc.). We will continue to expand our content offering, always aiming to improve in ways that move the Caribbean forward.

16. What keeps you going?

I know it must not have been easy all these years? How have you had to adapt operations? Purpose! And the grace of God keeps me going. I was recently awarded the Trailblazer Award by the Institute of Caribbean Studies in Washington D.C. and as I reflected on the meaning of the award, I reached this conclusion. Blazing a trail is not an easy journey. It is filled with ups and downs, hills and valleys, triumphs and defeats and at times a whole lot of heartache, but the Caribbean is everything to me! I am in my calling, I am in my purpose and contributing to placing the Caribbean, its remarkable culture and people, firmly on the worldstage is my life work and so I keep going! With regards to adapting the operations, I work extremely hard to find the right people and build a loyal, dedicated team that subscribe to the vision so that the mission of the operations is always clearly focused on the elevation of the Caribbean in a supportive family environment.

17. And now in the middle of the pandemic I imagine a host of new challenges? What have you done differently to see through this year?

I have been in Trinidad for the past 8 months, having been locked in when the borders closed in March. I have learned, like most business owners, to manage and operate remotely, with the entire team, including the team at headquarters in the USA, working from home. While there are tremendous challenges, there has also been tremendous opportunities. We meet more as a team now that prior to the pandemic, with virtual zoom meetings 3 days a week. Prior to the pandemic, we met once a week. So, at this time, the team is more focused, coordinated and to some extent productivity is up, as there is no commuting time and associated distractions. Now, we do face, like all businesses, the issues of a stagnated market-place, producing content in a Covid locked-down environment and the uncertainty of the future. But, yet again, there is opportunity. We have now placed focus on our digital and social media platforms, a strategy we had intended to implement for some time. We are also in the midst of planning the launch of the TEMPO App, which is already built and being prepared for a Q1 2021 launch. And, we are working on building out our local presence in each country, launching local social media platforms (like @tempotrinidad) and reconnecting with local industry. We are about to produce a super-exciting TV series in Trinidad in January.

18. Personally, so much has happened to you in 15 years. You are a husband, a father and a successful businessman. What would 2020 Mr. Morton say to his 2005 self?

Wow! What an awesome question! I would say to the 2005 Mr. Morton, no matter what, find balance -- a wholistic balance! Make certain that your energy is properly distributed, with a priority on family, those you love and who care and are supportive of you. Make certain that you listen to the advice of those who have seen what the world gives (e.g., my parents), be very aware of those who come with unclean motives and intentions, who are wolves in sheep's clothing, learn to be alone for you will be lonely for most of the journey, be always grateful for even the smallest of contributions and above all keep God at the very center of it all and at all times. In each of these areas (father, husband, successful businessman), I am constantly working to divinely grow and develop through the Almighty creator. This process of growth and development, I pray will continue to divinely strengthen my resolve in Jesus mighty name!

