

Ambassador Pandiani to soon say farewell to B'dos

By Regina Selman Moore

AMBASSADOR of the Argentine Republic to Barbados, His Excellency Gustavo Martinez Pandiani will soon be saying farewell to this island, which he has called his second home for the past three years. However, Ambassador Pandiani says he is happy with what he has been able to accomplish to date, whilst serving as a diplomat here.

The Ambassador sat down for an interview with *The Barbados Advocate* recently, whilst on location at the Embassy of Argentina in Barbados, located in the Lucerne Building in Hastings Christ Church. There, he reflected on his three years of service, working to deepen the relationship between the two countries, after arriving here in January of 2018.

Acknowledging that Argentina and Barbados have had excellent bilateral relations for more than 50 years, as those bilateral ties started in 1968, two years after this country gained its Independence, Pandiani noted that his vision of co-operation, having signed a bilateral co-operation agreement with the government in office soon after his arrival, was to focus on areas that could be mutually beneficial to both countries. He turned his attention therefore to important areas such as agriculture, sports, culture, the arts and even health, amongst others.

In the area of agriculture, Barbados benefited greatly from Argentina's agricultural expertise. For example, the Government of Barbados, the Government of Argentina and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, embarked on an ambitious co-operation project aimed at converting volumes of fish waste, into animal feed and fertiliser. Experts from Buenos Aires came to Barbados, to work closely with both Bridgetown and Oistins fisher folk and

to share with them an innovative and self-sustainable technique of producing fish silage, as a resource for livestock and agriculture. The Regional co-operation Project on Apiculture (ApiCaribe), was also conducted by the Embassy of Argentina and the Inter-American Institute for co-operation in Agriculture (IICA), in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture in Barbados and the Barbados Beekeeping Association. The Apiculture Project saw experts from Argentina, helping to develop the apiculture sector here and boost honey production.

"The last project we started with the agricultural community, was in relation to the production of milk. You have a problem here with milk, where you are not getting enough from the producers. I realised that the problem was not so much the milk in itself from the cows, but from the soil, the quality of the grass," Pandiani noted, as he expounded on the work done to assist the local agricultural sector.

In the area of sports, the link between Argentina and Barbados was made stronger, with the signing of an agreement that would see the famous World Cup winning nation sharing its expertise with this island, by affording youthful Barbadian footballers the opportunity to visit Argentina and engage in training programmes there, whilst coaches and those in sports medicine were also able to gain some assistance as well. That was made possible via a Memorandum of Understanding with the Barbados Football Association (BFA) and the Argentina Football Association.

"For the first time, we took the Barbados National Football team to Argentina for training, to give the young people the opportunity to train with footballers from Argentina. The 17-year-olds, had a fantastic experience. It was a cultural experience as well," the Ambassador pointed out.

Ambassador Pandiani, during his tenure, also opened the Embassy in Barbados to local artists, providing

them a space to showcase their work and in some instances, giving them the opportunity to sell it as well.

"I decided from the very beginning, that it was important to develop an intense collaboration with the artistic community, painters, sculptors, all the artists. You have a lot of talented Barbadians, but sometimes people don't have (avenues) to sell their work. So I decided to give a hand to the artistic community in Barbados," he said, noting that over the last three years, a total of seventy-five artists have been able to exhibit their pieces at the Embassy and in some cases, get their artwork sold. That artistic group will meanwhile be hosting a Farewell Art Exhibition for Ambassador Pandiani soon, as will the local sporting and entertainment community.

The reach of the Ambassador did not end there however. The Embassy of the Argentine Republic in Barbados recently hosted its first Certificate Award Ceremony for Barbadian children, who successfully completed the Level One Spanish course taught during the COVID-19 pandemic. The ceremony saw close to 100 eager students, in the presence of their proud families, receiving their certificates. Ambassador Pandiani said the idea was birthed out of a conversation with Prime Minister of Barbados, Mia Amor Mottley, about the need for Barbados to become a bilingual country, in order to connect with the world and even do more business development projects, with those across our shores. He noted that Barbados can also help Argentina with the English Language and in future, he would like to see more adults learning Conversational Spanish.

As a farewell gesture, Ambassador Pandiani meanwhile noted that he had to do his part, in securing a donation from the Government of the Argentine Republic of over 8 000 COVID-19 test kits, which were sent to the Best-Dos Santos Public Health Laboratory and the Ministry of Health here. The donation arrived in Bridgetown



Ambassador of the Argentine Republic to Barbados, His Excellency Gustavo Martinez Pandiani.

recently, in the framework of the intense co-operation in place, between the two countries. Noting that he did receive some criticism for not sending test kits to Argentina, given the toll a second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic is having on that country, he however stressed that he felt the need to assist his "home away from home", since in times of crisis, "that's what friends are for".

"Even with such a level of contagious virus in Argentina, I prioritised co-operation with Barbados. We need as many tests as we can get now, but my President responded to me positively, when I explained why I needed to send an important number of tests to Barbados," he explained.

"You were going to reopen the economy and you needed a lot of tests, so was I able to secure 8 000 hi-tech tests for Barbados and I feel particularly proud of having accomplished that, as my last gesture. It was a good way to say thank you to Barbados as well. I had a wonderful time here and I want to say thank you to every Barbadian. I needed to express gratitude to these people, the people that have been my family for the past three years. I miss my family in Buenos Aires, but I was very much at home here. I will not forget that. This was my home away from home," Pandiana stressed.

As he meets with members of the business community, key officials in the military, the sporting arena and other areas to finalise a number of projects, as well as pave the way for his successor who has already been accredited to serve when he leaves in November, Pandiani says he only wishes he could have taken Prime Minister Mottley to meet with his President in Argentina. Looking back however, he has no regrets and feels accomplished, even as his leaving is bitter sweet.

"I have to be honest. I really feel sad that I am leaving. My heart is broken. At the same time, I realise that Barbados is always going to be in my heart. Having been a diplomat for 30 years, I never had this type of falling in love with a country, that is not my own," the Ambassador stated.

He has however pledged to continue working up to the time he is scheduled to leave, to ensure that the many developmental projects and areas of co-operation which have been forged, can continue, even after he says farewell.



Ambassador of the Argentine Republic to Barbados, His Excellency Gustavo Martinez Pandiani gives a demonstration on the sport of football, on location at the Barbados Defence Force (BDF) Paragon Base in Christ Church, for the benefit of children attending Camp Energy.