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US philanthropist to be among first recipients of honorary doctorate from University of Guyana

CMC

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(CMC) – A Guyanese-born philanthropist and entrepreneur in Queens, New York will be among first ever recipients of an honorary doctorate from University of Guyana.

In a statement on Saturday, Jay Sobhraj said he will be recognized, on November 10, in a ceremony, at the University of Guyana, for his “long dedication to philanthropy and record of success in business.”

“The honour recognizes his work in founding the Jay and Sylvia Sobhraj Foundation, which, this year, helped create the nation of Guyana’s first degree programme in psychology, as well as a new building and resources to house mental health services at the university,” the statement said.

“It further recognizes the foundation’s work in creating scholarships for students to attend the university, its purchase of equipment for the Guyana police force, as well as for the specialized high school preparatory classes it runs for hundreds of public school students in Queens.”

In bestowing the honor on Sobhraj, the University of Guyana, which is awarding honorary doctorates for the first time, cites his “combination of business acumen, personal distinction in the field of real estate development, connection to The University of Guyana, through generous philanthropy, as well as exceptional service to the Guyanese community in Guyana and in the United States of America.”

The other three recipients are musician and singer Eddy Grant, renowned for the hit song, “Electric Avenue”; indigenous rights activist Laura George; Yesu Persaud, another leading Guyanese business figure and philanthropist and past president of the Guyana Manufacturers Association.

“It is a tremendous honour to receive this recognition from the University of Guyana, whose educational mission has been central to so many of the charitable endeavors Sylvia and I have been fortunate enough to support,” Sobhraj said.

Born in Guyana in 1948, Sobhraj said he was one of 10 children and the son of a rice farmer. He earned a degree in engineering from Middlesex Polytechnic in London, England, and became a member of the Institute of Mechanical Engineers in 1984.

After working in the oil industry in the United Arab Emirates, Sobhraj said he and two of his brothers, George and Ken, co-founded Zara Realty in 1982 in Jamaica, Queens.

Sobhraj said the firm, one of New York City’s top providers of affordable housing, also owns or manages more than 3.1 million square feet of commercial real estate in the New York region.

In 2007, after years of independent charitable giving, Sobhraj said he officially founded the Jay and Sylvia Sobhraj Foundation with his wife. He said the foundation has donated more than US\$2 million to various causes over the years in the United States and Guyana.

Sobhraj said this includes the new psychology program at the University of Guyana, five student scholarships a year and "crucial equipment for the Guyana police force."

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