

CELEBRATE OUR CARIB HERITAGE

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The Carib people want to create their own heritage centre, but there is one minor obstacle: they have few artifacts to work with.

The Santa Rosa Carib Community Centre at Paul Mitchell Street, Arima, has several items made out of coconut leaves - a shield, a hummingbird, and a catfish.

There are also a wooden grater, *coulev* or *cibukan*, which the Amerindians used to squeeze cassava, and a sifter, made out of terite.

None of these things, however is enough to give the groups of schoolchildren and foreign researchers and professors who visit the centre each year, the information they need about the Amerindians' presence in Trinidad.

That's where the value of having a comprehensive heritage collection comes in.

Ricardo Hernandez-Bharath, president of the Carib community, said the intention is to establish the collection by July 31, when it will coincide with the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival to these shores.

"There's a continuous pouring of students of all age groups from Sangre Grande, San Fernando, Port of Spain, asking about the early Amerindians, and the connection between the Santa Rosa Festival and the Indians," Bharath said.

It's not unusual for Bharath to receive researchers, such as Australian Maximillan Forte from the University of Adelaide, who is researching the Carib community for his doctorate. He plans to spend a year in Trinidad.

He had already visited historical sites in the borough, interviewed some of the older heads and scoured through the Santa Rosa RC Church records showing those Amerindians who were baptized by Spanish priests to Catholicism.

Christo Adonis, the Carib *chaman* or medicine man, is teaching himself the Carib language using English/Carib dictionary given him by the Caribs of Dominica.

"We want people to know about us. You hardly hear anyone telling about First Nation people in Trinidad," he said.

He produced from the publication, The Sixth Annual Conference Jointly with the American Dialect Society: 27-30 August 1986, the names of several Indian tribes who once inhabited Trinidad. Apart from the Caribans and the Arawakans, there were also the Chimay, the Warauan, the Taino, Nepoio, the Yao and the Sbehaio peoples. Not all the tribes lived in Arima. Some settled in Tacarigua, Arouca, and Caura.

The document identified on a map of Trinidad, areas that bear Amerindian names: Arena, Naparima, Moruga, Cunupia, Cunapo, Yarra, Siparia, Nariva, Icacos, and Guaracara. "All of that we'll identify in the collection," Adonis said.

They intend to display photographs of some of the surviving elderly Amerindian folks, and also of those who have died.

Adonis, Bharath and other Arimians who are involved in the project, hope that people who may have dated, clay pottery, photographs - perhaps of their ancestors - historical documents, newspaper clippings, and tools of one kind or another of the early days, will donate them to the collection.

The centre is decorated with framed photographs of a Carib elder weaving a basket; an old man squeezing cane, (the juice was used for sweetening tea and fermented to produce wine); the late Carib queen Edith Martinez; 91-year-old Mealannie Calderon; and a calabash carved by the Dominican Caribs.

There are also photos of Guyanese Amerindians, and another of a thatched hut that stood where the concrete structure of the centre has been built.

"In Guyana, Amerindians still live on the banks of the Pomeroon River," Bharath said. "They do a lot of handicraft and are still into growing cassava for (making) bread and fishing. They more live the Amerindian lifestyle than us in Trinidad."

Adonis plans to carve onto calabash, local wild animals such as agouti, lappe, wild hog or quenk, the ocelot, and birds.

Even his son, Dane, 19, will contribute. He had done a handsome carving of an Amerindian chief on a stick, known as a war club. Its fine details included a necklace, a feather headdress, and a basket hanging on the chief's back.

The two men feel the Amerindian descendants deserve "a day of recognition" - though not a public holiday - to which they can invite their Caribbean neighbours to celebrate indigenous dances, food and rituals and exhibit handicraft.

"It will help the community to survive," Bharath said.