

ALCEF Riviera Amusement Park Children And Parents Dream

The Aunt Lizzy's Christian Educational Foundation, ALCEF Riviera Amusement Park is the number one recreational park in the Southwest Region. Its uniqueness is not because it is a one-and-only resort of its kind, but because it beats its counterparts all over the country. Plus its state-of-the art installations, its uniqueness is because most of its attractions are natural: the flowers, the trees, the overlooking forest and the fish pond and the stream that runs by its side, for a natural cool down makes it an amusement destination for children and their parents during the weekends and holidays. The Proprietor of ALCEF Riviera Amusement Park, Ebob Tanyi, talks in this interview granted on the Riviera itself, of the source of her inspiration, where the park is now, the level where she wants to take it to so that children and their parents, will not envy any other place on planet Cameroon. Excerpts:

The Post: The Park is such a unique cocktail of all sorts of amusements for kids, one can have on the same ground. What inspired the idea of putting up this beautiful place?

Ebob Tanyi: Actually, the Amusement Park idea was forced on me - so to speak! I had intended to start a school. The Park stands on state land which I got on a long term lease. What has happened here was the result of the challenge I faced when it actually came to building the school. My idea had been to start with two classrooms; the year after, do another two classrooms and so build the school progressively. But when I spoke to a number of people, including the Delegate of Basic Education, they informed me that it was going to be extremely difficult to function that way. And what they said made sense. The Delegate in particular said if the school was going to be here at Mile Four while the target population is for children in the town of Limbe, it would mean parents would have to bring their nursery school children, leave them here, go back to town with their older children and, then, later on, be obliged to come back here and pick them up. And since I didn't have a school bus, it would have been extremely difficult for the parents. So, his suggestion was for me to start the entire school at a go from Class One to Six - even if it meant building something temporary, wooden structure or that kind of a thing. So I ended up "negotiating" with my Dad - may his soul rest in peace - to start the school at his premises - the former Miramare Hotel - inside the Botanic Gardens. That didn't cost me anything. I just had to take down some walls, partition the rooms and the school started. That, then, freed the funds which I had set aside to start the school to do what has been done here: the ALCEF Riviera Amusement Park. Note, too, that it was not like this from the beginning; I started it at a certain level, and it has grown bit by bit.

How did you come about the money for the school which alternatively had to become the funds to set up something this magnificent?

It was for every single dime I had ever put aside, for the school project over the thirty-two years of my career, the proceeds of my work with private companies, my life insurance... in short, all the savings enabled by NOT taking luxury trips abroad and buying expensive cars! Again, do not forget that the Park did not start out like this; it has grown slowly, slowly, to the point now where it can benefit from its own proceeds and those of the school which is four years old now.

So, the original idea was a school but then it did come to be an amusement park?

That's it. The land was given to me for the purpose of starting a school. As I have explained already, I couldn't afford to build the entire school from scratch. By God's grace, I was able to start the school on premises that were already built up,

leaving the land in Mile Four idle. The rules concerning state land on long term lease are to develop the land within three years of the grant or forfeit it. What was I therefore to do, to prevent that from happening? I believe the easiest answer to that question was to do what I did; start out with the school's playground first - which would not be too capital intensive - do it in such a way that other children and their parents could pay a token sum to benefit from it too, and thus raise the funds to build the school. My ultimate aim is to go forth one day and have a secondary school here that will eventually absorb those from the primary school in Botanic Garden. There is more than enough space for that.

What we have seen planted here really must have cost you a fortune. Is it just from your savings or how else did you come by it?

First, as I said, was the initial funding which was meant to build the school which was not used by the school any more. But now; the business is funding itself. We have been on for a year and a half. The school also in this year has close to 200 children. I have school fees, I have the business itself. So, for the time being; I am making absolutely no franc from here. Everything that I make is being ploughed back to improve on the place. I expect to be, maybe, a billionaire but not till the next ten years maybe; that's if I am still alive (laughs)

Is Victoria (Limbe) hosting this park by choice or by accident?

It is by choice. You know, I grew up here. True, I was born in Nigeria while my Dad was working as an electrical engineer with the SHELL-BP Petroleum Development Corporation. We travelled all over but we came back here to settle as a family in 1962 and this is where - with my father as the pioneer General Manager of the former POWER-CAM - we grew up, went to school and sent down roots. I have heard you call this town "Victoria" more than once; when you do, I sympathise; I still think of the place as it was then. So, it is by choice that I am here. When I made my request for a piece of land, I made it for Limbe.

What are actually the facilities that are here?

We have got the play ground for the children; the snack section and a full-fledged restaurant for those who might get hungry while playing. There are also special areas where parents can wait while their children are playing. There are facilities too for the adults; you can just sit down and have a drink of your choice. There is shelter for a billiards table and ping pong. In the next two weeks, we are going to have a mini golf course with just six holes or puts for people who would just want to swing a club. When the park is closed for children at 6:30 pm, it is then time for adults. You can just come round; have some delicious pepper soup, chicken, fish or something else from the barbecue. The facilities are both for children and for adults.

For the children, we have a mini swimming pool where children can splash around; an electronically driven train or rail cars, a merry-go-round, plenty of swings, seesaws, trampoline, a play castle where you can climb and then slide down by the toboggan. We also have a little fish pond for school children who might be coming here for an excursion. They can go down there, feed the fish and see how they swim up to the surface of the water. The orchard has just been started. It is entirely of fruit trees: mangoes, guavas and so on. The place is quite big and has all that it takes to amuse oneself.

When is the secondary school going to kick off?

I intend to have the school here in the not-too-distant future; in fact I have begun it by starting off with the school's playground. It so happens, though, that the facility is now growing and it is involving lots of people. It is no longer just children or the parents from around who are coming. It is attracting people from Douala and even Yaounde. The place is more and more taking on a tourism vocation. If the volume of activity in this area becomes more significant, I am going to go right back to the Senior Divisional Officer and do everything officially in order to have the purpose modified to include tourism. The initial idea of land for educational purposes, however, remains firmly in place. That was my original plan, and that is the domain I am more comfortable in, being a teacher myself.

How are you going to run the amusement park and the school in one place?

First of all, you have to understand that the land here is vast. Look at where we have ended with what may be called the tourism part of the project; we have used up barely a third of the land! The two can conveniently be quite apart from each other. But even if you wanted to build the school right here in this area, it would just be a matter of

a walled off area and strict discipline; the children would stay at school for their lessons, and be allowed on to the playground for normal physical exercise at times already programmed and with teacher supervision ensured. I have no fears, whatsoever, about running the two structures side by side.

Parents would naturally love to bring their children here, say, for a weekend, if they left say Yaounde. But there is no lodging facility.

There are lots of hotels in Limbe. I don't want to get into that race. You can conveniently book a place in any hotel of your choice in town; you come with your children and spend the day here and go back in the evening, have dinner and have your shower and sleep. The following morning, you bring them back here again if you want to. We have everything you need for the daytime; toilet facilities, food, relaxation, in short, all you need to spend a comfortable, fun-filled day. There is enough trouble involved in running the place as it is already; there would have been a need to take on that additional headache if Limbe were short of lodging, but I believe that is far from being the case.

We see so many people coming but it seems

ly rich, but you have not talked of football which is like a religion in Cameroon?

The place was actually done with the idea of playing football as well. But you can see that at the back there it is not yet level; I ran out of funds to complete the job and did not bother to pick up with it as not many people were coming here for that.

The problem with Cameroon is that many people invest and factor nothing for maintenance and the place eventually dies. What do we expect to see here in five years to come?

I have somebody who is here full time for maintenance. That is his job; that is, mowing of the lawns, weeding and so on. You cannot build an open air thing like this without having a person devoted entirely to keeping the grounds. It may be costly, but that is the only way to keep the place going. As you see we have had to repaint the place. You know how damaging the rainy season can be to a place like this. However, that is the price to pay. You just have to make your budget knowing that, every year, you would have to spend a given amount on maintenance. We hope that the business activity will cover the cost.

What new things are in the pipeline?

The swimming pools - you notice that I put that



Ebob Tanyi

the restaurant can take just some 40 persons at a time.

Well, I don't expect the children or their parents to come all at once. You, know, most often, children are not really interested in food when they come to a place like this. What they want is pop corn, sandwiches, biscuits and they can eat them anywhere they want. They don't always want to sit in the restaurant. It is the parents who may want to eat some food who would want to sit there while their children play. True, the restaurant has just 40 places, but that is full capacity at a given time. Remember that the restaurant is open all day long from 11:00 am till 11:00 pm. So, the restaurant can end up taking more than 300 persons a day because they are coming at different times.

How affordable are the services here?

We think we have made the prices at really down-to-earth levels. We have put the entry at a FCFA 1000. When you pay FCFA 1000, as an adult, you can have a drink on that same ticket. As a child, you pay FCFA 1,000 too, and have access to play. However, for certain structures that experience wear and tear more readily and for those which use electricity like the railcars and the merry-go-round, you pay FCFA 500 more for a specified duration. For a child to take advantage of the entire Park and play for the whole day, you pay just FCFA 3,500. I know that the children will want to go on and pester their parents for more, but then, it is always good to give your children a treat - for goodness sake! They are the reason for which we parents work; it shouldn't be a bad idea to give them whatever treat would keep them both happy and healthy.

You talked about golf which is for the high-

in the plural. That is what I intend to do next. We have already allocated the places for the pools.

Shall they be of international swimming dimensions?

Well, it would not be a bad idea to do something of international standards, but I am not aiming at that as such. Having such a pool will enable us distinguish ourselves from what we have around but the funds required will be enormous and, for the moment, not necessary.

What else would you have loved children, parents and all persons interested in this amusement park to know?

First of all, most people consider this place as being just for children. No; it is both for and adults. Some adults are already using it, but they use it alongside their children and go away. Adults should know that they can come back here in the evening. We have got the restful sea breeze, we have got beautiful followers, a giant television screen for watching football, if that is your choice. I mean, once the children have gone away and you come back from work, the park is an ideal and unique place for your evening relaxation. I encourage all to make this place their destination for whatever relaxation they wish to have for themselves, their children, their friends... You can come in the evening with your wife or partner or your business friends and have a drink and lots of fun.

Adults, I wish you the best as you come along. Children, Aunt Lizzy say welcome and have the fun that gives pleasure and good health. All packaged here at the Riviera-Park in Limbe - just for you!

INTERVIEWED BY BOLDINAH ADAMS & FRANCIS TAM MBOM