

Local Caribana participant mourns changes in festival

BY MIKE ADLER
Staff Writer

What's in a name?
A lot, if that name is Caribana, says Joan Alexander, a Markham woman involved in the festival from its inception 35 years ago.

For legal reasons, the festival was produced this year under a new name, Toronto International Carnival, a change Ms Alexander said has saddened many people.

"The name Caribana depicts the people from the Caribbean islands. I think it was a name that was chosen carefully," she said.

Ms Alexander was at the festival's first organizing meeting in 1966 and actually went into labour in 1967 while participating in the first Caribana parade.

"It has been part of us for such a long time."

Still, Ms Alexander said she has felt let down over the years by controversies surrounding Caribana's organizers, the Caribbean Cultural Committee.

This year's parade, on today until 6 p.m. at Toronto's Exhibition Place and Lakeshore Boulevard, is being produced by another group, the Toronto Mas Band Association.

Maybe it's for the best, she added this week. "If we people from the Caribbean could not put our own house in order

then somebody has to do it."

She noted the festival's original name is holding on, attached to an event on the Toronto Islands today and tomorrow.

This year, Ms Alexander continued to work with festival costumes and visited some masqueraders' camps to give advice, particularly Shadowland, which is based on the Toronto Islands.

Her grandson Joel Alexander, 15, is a DJ who played at Caribana's opening

two years ago and on June 29 this year at Scarabana, a Scarborough party featuring West Indian music and unsold costumes from Caribana camps.

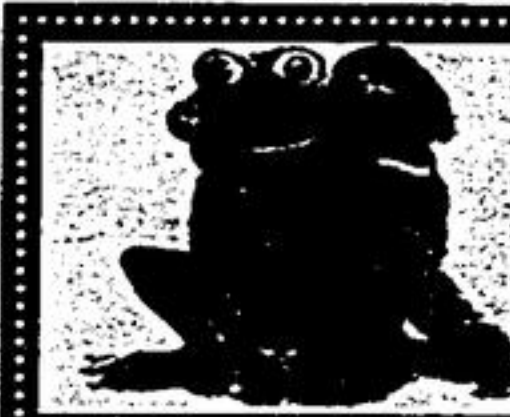
On her visits, Ms Alexander stresses to young masqueraders the historical side of the mas' from her native Trinidad and Tobago, not the glitter of the festival today.

She wants them to know about the costumes her

grandmother and great-grandmother played, such as Dame Lorraine — who can be a man or a woman dressed up with a French parasol — King Sailor with a paper boat hat and the Midnight Robber, a "criminal master" who demanded treasure from children on the streets of Trinidad.

In the Caribbean, there is a spiritual meaning behind the festival — emancipation — and remembering that is important, Ms Alexander said.

If we people from the Caribbean could not put our own house in order then somebody has to do it.



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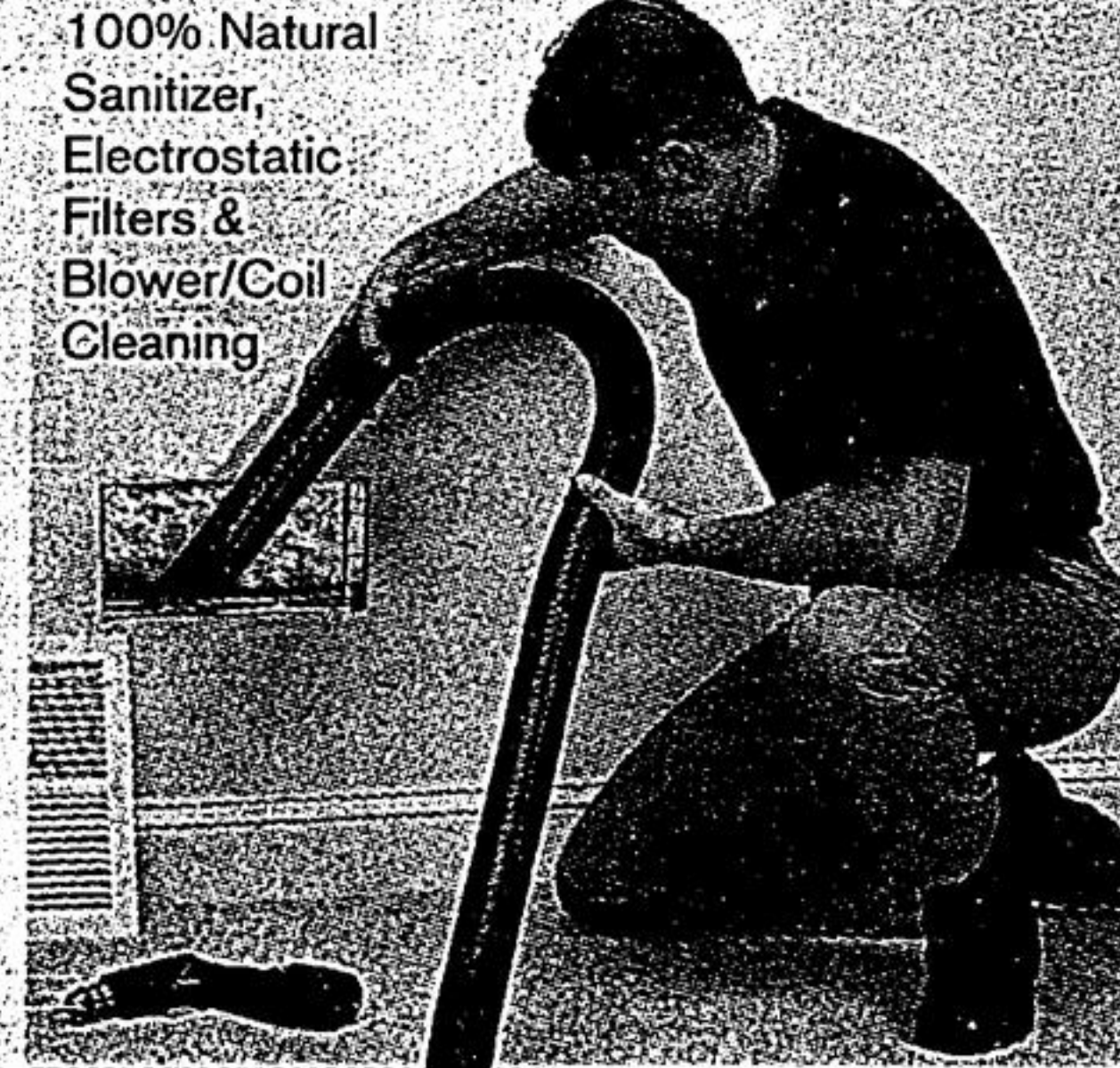
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