



Windsor Forest Primary School, Jamaica

PHOTOGRAPHED BY **DOMINIC ALI**

When most Calgarians think of Jamaica, they picture turquoise waves, sunny beaches, and Rastas rolling ganja spliffs to the reggae classic “One Love.” And for many Jamaicans, Calgary will forever be associated with the debut of the island’s bobsled team at the 1988 Winter Olympics and the Disney movie *Cool Runnings*.

Despite the differences (and the stereotypes), the distance from the birthplace of Bob Marley and the Wailers to the native land of Bob and Doug McKenzie isn’t as far as you might think—especially when it comes to the annual Calgary Reggae Festival (Aug. 18 to 20). ReggaeFest has flourished since its founding in 2004, but not everyone believed it would take root. “When my friends back in *yard* first heard of it, they said, ‘that’s a cow town *mon*, they only listen to country music up there!’” recounts Leo Cripps, president of the Calgary Reggae Festival Society. “But reggae is universal music.”

As a nod to the music’s global appeal, ReggaeFest organizers are currently seeking donations from Calgary reggae fans (“Rastagarians”) to build a resource centre for the Windsor Forest Primary School in Portland, Jamaica. The project is something of a personal mission for Cripps since the school is his alma mater. “We want to show there’s more to reggae than drugs and dreadlocks,” he says. “Reggae is the cultural identity of the Caribbean.

We want to use it to do something for the next generation.” (He’s quick to point out that every dollar donated to the project will go directly to the resource centre. ReggaeFest organizers will give their time and skills and buy their own plane tickets to lend a hand with the tiling, plumbing, and installing the computer network.)

Built in 1965, the main schoolhouse where Cripps attended class has been well-maintained and it currently has 200 students in grades one to six. But on sunny days the small classrooms get uncomfortably hot, and classes are held under the shade of a tree in the large schoolyard.

Construction of the resource centre began last year, but was halted due to lack of funds. The concrete structure is currently used as a multi-purpose room for small group activities. Cripps expects the resource centre to be completed in February 2012, and he hopes that it will help connect the young students to the global village. The school also plans on offering evening classes to disadvantaged adults from the surrounding community.

With the help of Rastagarians, the Windsor Forest resource centre promises to be a monument to the *irie* reggae vibes that stretch all the way from Jamaica to Calgary and back again.

One love, indeed. **📍**