

SÃO SEBASTIÃO DO PARAISO

The town that gave birth to the Brazilian Carnival Ball.

BY HOWARD GILLICK

SITUATED IN THE SOUTHWEST OF the rich state of Minas Gerais, high up in the mountains and nestled in a luxurious green valley is São Sebastião do Paraíso—a true paradise. The town traces its beginnings to the time when an envoy of the King of Portugal first arrived in the area to establish gold mining facilities, and was awed by the beauty of the scenery that surrounded him. “This,” he exclaimed, “must be Paradise!”

Centuries later, Anna Maria Marcolini Guidi [de Souza] left her birthplace of São Sebastião do Paraíso, arrived in Canada, and founded the Brazilian Carnival Ball. And therein lies a tale.

As the annual Toronto charity ball became more and more successful, a decision was made to allocate a small portion of the net proceeds (less than five percent) to projects in Brazil. After all, Canadians were enjoying some of the colour and pageantry of Brazil, and Anna Maria was giving selflessly of her time—it seemed only fitting to give something back. Chosen as the focus of this initiative were the schools, hospitals and residences for seniors in São Sebastião do Paraíso.

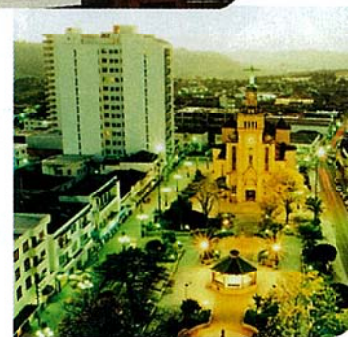
One of the first projects the Ball undertook was to provide a Massey Ferguson tractor to the local Escola de Agricultura. There followed a number of donations that have transformed the town into a centre for medical diagnosis and care for over 700,000 people living in southwestern Minas Gerais. Previously woefully underserved, the sick and elderly of the region now have a leading medical facility in São Sebastião do Paraíso’s Santa Casa de Misericórdia—thanks to generous donations of equipment and support from the Sunnybrook Health Science Centre, from



Mount Sinai Hospital and Wellesley Central Hospital.

Examples of the high-tech medical equipment the Brazilian Carnival Ball has been instrumental in providing include an RT 4000 ultrasound system; a GE Sytec 3000 high-resolution, whole-body tomography system capable of 360-degree scans in as few as three seconds; and a Sonograph 600T three-phase mammography system.

This noble act of giving by the Ball has improved the quality of life for hundreds of thousands of people in Brazil—it is not an overstatement to say that the Ball has saved many lives here. In addition to earning their gratitude, the Ball has also forged a vital link between the citizens of São Sebastião do Paraíso and Toronto. ■



With Canadian help, a small Brazilian town has become a medical mecca.