

## **WILDERNESS RESIDENTS AND RATEPAYERS ASSOCIATION CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR 2016**

When preparing this report, I found myself really wondering why it should be done. No doubt the constitution requires it but the content has already been shared with you through the numerous newsletters this past year.

So, I intend to focus on the areas that you are perhaps less aware of – what a great dedicated committee we have and just how they have achieved in their various roles. However, I am always reminded that nothing could have been achieved without our members' support and the relationships and cooperation that we have continued to foster with our other stakeholders including SANParks, SANRAL and of course the George Municipality, to name a few.

Our membership currently stands at a total of 329 members. Without doubt, greater Wilderness benefits from our efforts and in this coming year we will focus on recruiting more members. It still amazes me to meet people who are unaware that the Association even exists and the apathy of a portion of our community – that is, until something affects them.

During the year we continued to hold our annual “working breakfast” with the various heads of departments in the municipality and this has helped to maintain our good relationships with them – an absolutely vital ingredient if we are to get the cooperation and support needed when things need to get done. A very special thanks to Councillor Marlene Viljoen for her wise counsel and being prepared to escalate issues within the Council and municipality when necessary.

And so to the portfolios:

**Environmental:** Chris Burlock has to be one of the hardest working and persistent people I've ever met. The fire in August was nothing short of a disaster but there are proper plans in place to decrease the risk of fires in the future. It certainly isn't a once-off exercise and on-going vigilance is required.

The introduction of the new “dog” signs on the beaches and the common are 99% thanks to Chris. We are encouraged by the reaction to them by most dog owners, but there are still a few who are putting the project at risk.

John Miller has also organised a series of public lectures and these are proving to be more and more popular, particularly as most of the speakers are from Wilderness.

**Town Planning:** George Markgraff and John Miller have reviewed all the various applications that we have received. During the year WRRRA adopted a policy of only objecting to applications for relaxations of building requirements where these are materially flawed and /or have an impact on adjacent properties or the environment. We are still striving to limit the rezoning of residential erven where these are not adjacent to existing business premises.

Parking is an on-going issue for Wilderness and we are proposing that a small area on the southern boundary of the common (which belongs to the municipality) be used to accommodate more parking bays. The loss to the common will be negligible but the parking bays, together with making Owen Grant Avenue a one-way, will certainly be beneficial to the village.

**Tourism:** During the year, Dee Marcus surveyed all the Wilderness B&B's year regarding what their perceptions were of Wilderness as a tourism destination and just if and how WRRRA could act as a catalyst to achieving their objectives. The number of responses was quite disappointing but at least those that responded gave us a better insight as to where they thought Wilderness could be

improved.

Although there was only one reported case of assault on tourists over the holiday season, this still has an enormous negative impact on tourism and hence the economy of Wilderness. Much improved safety and security on the beaches and in the village made for a festive environment without the all-too-common detractions we have had in the past.

**Services:** John Miller seems to have had a relatively easy year thanks largely to the great cooperation from the municipal officials. There are still issues around landowners not allowing the municipality onto their premises to clear vegetation affecting the power lines. Again, we appeal to these people to think further than just what affects them personally and to allow thorough clearing to take place.

Perhaps the most significant issue during the year was the completion of the new mains water supply on Waterside Road. Well done and thanks to all concerned.

**Roads:** Doug Wilcox looks after more than just our web site. Dealing with contractors for the George municipality, Eden District municipality as well as on a provincial and national level keeps Doug more than busy.

The focus is currently on the Heights Rd upgrade as well as the impact that this project is having on Whites Rd as the alternative route.

WRRRA was also nominated by SANRAL as the go-between the engineers and the public with regard to the proposed upgrades on the N2. A second round of feedback has now taken place and whilst everything cannot always be to everyone's liking, the engineers have been very accommodating with the concerns that have been raised. The project should commence within a few months so we will have to endure some disruptions which, as we have been promised, will be kept to a minimum.

**Safety and Security:** Ian van Rooyen keeps a close watch on developments, especially in the CBD where the problem of vagrants and undesirables although still present, is a far cry from what has been in the past, particularly as a result of the increased village monitor presence over the season.

Perhaps the most significant contributor to safety and security was the enormous visible policing and law enforcement presence that Wilderness has ever experienced. This was made possible through the very generous donations from our members, so much so that we were able to fund extra SAPS trained neighbourhood watch officials at every entrance to the beach and three extra part-time monitors. Couple this with a large contingent of municipal law enforcement officers and beach wardens, the crowds that we experienced were well controlled and alcohol abuse was at an all-time low.

The monthly community policing forum meetings are now held at the Wilderness Hotel and attendance remains excellent.

**Communication:** During the year the newsletter has gone from strength to strength thanks to Donald Goldfain and Chris Burlock, so much so that it is now sent to some 600 people. The positive feedback we get is very encouraging and we are using it more and more to air the opinions of our members and not only our blurb.

Thankfully, we haven't had too many power outages of late but our SMS system is there to be used whenever we need all our members to be informed as quickly as possible.

**Wilderness Heights:** Ronnie Board and John Miller remain closely involved with the delicate issue of Erf 329 or the squatter camp as it is generally referred to. WRRRA remains committed to getting this resolved as soon as possible but as we all know, politics can be just as constructive as destructive. More engagements are planned after the various new studies have been completed.

**Finance and Administration:** Niel Viljoen has ensured that our finances are kept in a straight stripe and my appreciation to Ronnie Board for conducting the annual audit. The increase in subscriptions last year has stabilised our financial position and no increase is proposed for next year. I'm sure that everyone knows our Vanessa Hau-Yoon. She is the stalwart that keeps us all going and takes all sorts of queries and complaints and thankfully, some praises too. More often than not, administration is such a thankless task but very necessary and she does it so willingly too.

**Wilderness Improvement Program:** We are now into the fourth year of the program and the on-going benefits to Wilderness and all of us are there for all to see.

All of the WIP projects are not funded from WRRRA member contributions but only from income received from advertisements on the "Wilderness Wall" at the garage and on-going monthly contributions from business, restaurants and some B&B's. Through their continuous support and that of the George Municipality it has been possible to significantly increase the impact of the monitor and security program and once again Wilderness has enhanced its reputation as one of the cleanest and safest coastal villages

Furthermore, it has allowed us to assist in the upkeep and expansion of the village gardens, cleaning up of informal dump areas throughout Wilderness and add to the infrastructure in terms of signposts, road signs and facilities to manage refuse.

The most important facet of the Program is the Village Monitors. I'm delighted that during this year, we did not lose one of our monitor due to poor work performance. In fact, these more mature gentlemen are fast becoming the friends of the public and it is showing in the respect that they are earning. It is particularly gratifying to see businesses come forward to support them, especially with hampers at Christmas time. Thanks to the awesome donations to the security fund, we were able to employ 3 additional monitors over the season as well as assist W/O Bennie Boshoff with additional resources to man the entrances to the beach

WRRRA continued with the upgrade work at the police station in 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. The geyser was relocated, the sink and cupboard repaired and refurbished and various lights either fixed or replaced thanks to the George Municipality.

Other projects undertaken this year were the provision of additional refuse bins as well as repairing those that needed attention.

**Conclusion:** I have tried to highlight just a few of the many activities that your committee has been involved with during the year. It is simply impossible to list them all but most have been covered in the newsletters.

It remains for me to thank the Committee, Donald, George, Doug, Niel, Ian, John, Chris, Vanessa, Ronnie, Cornell, Deidre and our councillor Marlene for the hours and hours they have sacrificed in the interest of the Association but above all, for keeping our Wilderness looking and feeling how we believe it should be.

**Neville Ewing**  
**Chairman**