

## **WILDERNESS RESIDENTS AND RATEPAYERS ASSOCIATION CHAIRMANS REPORT FOR 2017**

For those of you that are not resident here in our beautiful Wilderness and have not been reading our newsletters, you may not be aware of how much effort your WRRRA committee has put into Wilderness over the past year.

The evidence of your dedicated and efficient **voluntary** WRRRA committee can be found by simply reviewing the past 12 months Newsletters at <http://wrra.co.za/index.php/2015-07-18-10-22-03/newsletters-archive> .

The enthusiasm and hard work that the various committee members have put into Wilderness is manifest in how beautiful our Village and beaches. Not only has this been due to work by the committee but is also a result of the tremendous help we have received from our Ward Councillor Mrs. Marlene Barnardt and the great working partnership that has been forged between the WRRRA and the George Municipality. I am extremely grateful to all these stakeholders who have made being Chairman of the WRRRA for the last year so easy and such a pleasure.

My job has also been made so much easier by Jackie Berry, our Secretary, whose cool and calm efficiency has rescued me on more than one occasion. Jackie took over as Secretary from Vanessa Hau-Yoon whom many of you have dealt with over many years as our WRRRA Secretary. Thank you, Vanessa, for all your hard work for the WRRRA and for all the years that you volunteered to be in the front line for the WRRRA. Much appreciated.

The WRRRA has three Portfolios that need champions, namely Services, Environmental and Business/Tourism. We hope that these positions are filled at the upcoming AGM in February.

Here is a brief overview of our activities over the last year.

### **Roads, Doug Wilcox:**

After many years with limited road building activity 2017 was a busy one. The upgrading of Heights and Seven Passes was not an easy project. Full road closures were necessary because the narrow roads necessitated stop-goes and one-way routes along Whites Road. We now have a much-improved Heights Road and while Seven Passes is also an improvement we do have sections where budget constraints have left an unsatisfactory road surface. Hopefully this will be rectified.

For 2018 we can look forward to refurbishment of the Hoekwil road which will be completed in 2019. The N2 upgrade will probably start in the middle of the year but this will stretch over 42 months, so completion will be towards the end of 2021. Fortunately, the road is wide enough to support single lane bi-directional traffic while the upgrades are undertaken so NO STOP-GOES, we hope.

### **Gardens and Maintenance, Cornell Barnardt:**

I am sure that you have seen our dedicated “garden technician” volunteer Cornell Barnardt and his assistant Willem Averies, decked out in their lime green “WRRRA@Work” T-shirts, busy in the Village and surrounding areas keeping Wilderness in tip-top shape. They have done a remarkable job. Please stop and thank them when you see them.

They started off the year by allocating a substantial part of our budget to increasing our presence in the Village and surrounding suburbs and the Heights, especially the informal settlement, to win the battle against littering and these areas are now being cleaned on a weekly basis. This initiative was substantially enhanced when we acquired EPWP funded workers from the George Municipality to assist. We hope that this assistance will be ongoing.

Our second goal was to deal with weeds on the pavements and streets and to keep footpaths in the Village tidy and user friendly. The two footpaths built over the railway lines at the tunnels were also a huge improvement in the area.

A lot of effort went into sprucing up the Village with a lick of donated paint here and there. The entrance to Constantia Kloof, all the wooden dustbins, both tunnels leading to the beach, the fence along Leila's Lane, the wall, platform, signals and signage at the station to name a few, all received a much-needed makeover. We appointed a garden service which helped us to keep the Village lawns neat and tidy.

#### **Development Diligence, John Miller:**

While Wilderness is undeniably growing, we would like to help maintain its unique character that we all appreciate and cherish. We changed the name of this Portfolio, from Town Planning, to reflect our intention to pay closer attention to the growth and change of the Village. In some cases, we are proactive – initiating our concerns to the municipal authorities. In most cases, however, we respond to the applications that the George Town Planning office sends for our review, an average of about one application per week. Many applications request building line relaxations. Others seek approval for buildings already built, the applicant not so much asking for permission, but rather asking for forgiveness for what he's already done. In 2017, we made some very specific suggestions on 22 applications, following up on several in meetings with Town Planning.

#### **Public Lecture Series, John Miller:**

The WRRRA hosted six speakers during the year, offering not only an entertaining opportunity to hear from residents about local topics, but as well to provide a social evening for members and non-members, all the while raising funds for some special projects.

#### **Wilderness Heights, John Miller:**

The situation of Erf 329, as the informal settlement is generally referred to, remains unresolved. The WRRRA is committed to getting this resolved as soon as possible but politicians apparently don't share our commitment. In the absence of a response to our request for updated information, here is what we received in July 2017 from the Western Cape Chief Director: Human Settlements Implementation:

1. Topographical survey completed.
2. Specialist consultants appointed for fresh water and botanical assessments.
3. The biggest hurdle has been the issue regarding deviation from the current Spatial Development Framework. We have now received feedback from the local authority regarding this issue and we will be proceeding to make representation for deviation citing site specific circumstances as allowed for by the legislation.

4. We have not been able to proceed beyond concept due to the aforementioned town planning challenges. However, we have now resolved to proceed with detailed designs and make representation to the local authority as outlined in (3) above.

The future will dictate if upgrading erf 329 proceeds as envisaged in the ambitious plans of the Provincial Government, or rather continues with the basic services as are currently provided. Time will tell.

**Communications, Chris Burlock:**

Our WRRRA newsletter continues to keep our Wilderness community up to date on the important and interesting activities and events that are pertinent to Wilderness, Hoekwil and Rondevlei. During the last 12 months, our distribution mail list, now numbering 770 people, received monthly newsletters covering many and varied topics of concern to our readers. Additional communiques advised about upcoming WRRRA Talks, community events such as the Woofathon, Winter Warmth Drive, Take 5 and other beach clean-up events and updated us all on many other issues such as the fireworks ban and the roll out of the Dog Walk Zones. Chris has done an amazing job. Thanks Chris!

The WHATSAPP Security Group initiative now covers over 1,000 people and keeps growing every month. Thank you to **ALL** the Security Group administrators that manage this vital communication tool for us all.

**Environmental, Vacant:** (Chris Burlock has kindly been standing in)

The WRRRA successfully initiated the following environmental projects during the last year:

- Ongoing roll out of the Dog Walk Zones
- Fishing line tubes on all our beaches
- “War on Waste” initiative to keep the Heights and Village and suburbs clean.
- Beach clean-up and Take5 beach plastic clean-up campaign
- Sponsored the Touw River catchment weather station for SANParks
- Partnering with Roxi on the No Fireworks campaign.

**Safety & SAPS Liaison, Ian Willis:**

Ian Willis took this portfolio over from Ian van Rooyen late last year when Ian moved from Wilderness. The WRRRA and its members owe Ian van Rooyen a huge vote of thanks for the many years of dedicated service he gave to the WRRRA in managing this portfolio. When Ian Willis took over the reins, the ease with which he was able to take control was because of the excellent groundwork Ian van Rooyen put into this portfolio and in creating such a great working relationship with W/O Bennie Boshoff and his Wilderness SAPS team.

Times are changing and although we are fortunate not to have too many incidences of crime, there is no question that we are beginning to see an increase in criminal activity. Install an alarm, use perimeter alarms and above all be vigilant. The WRRRA and SAPS encourage you all take responsibility for your own families’ security.

**Membership, Dee Marcus:**

Thanks to technology and Dee’s tenacity, substantial progress has been made in the correcting the data in our WRRRA mail lists. We currently have separate mail lists for Wilderness, Hoekwil, Rondevlei and soon Langvlei Dunes. This will enable us to start targeting communications directly to the relevant areas, rather than the current “shotgun” approach we currently use.

Rather disappointingly, many of our Wilderness residents read our WRRRA newsletters, benefit from our communiques and WRRRA achievements, but for some reason have not joined the WRRRA. As a past Chairman pointed out, the cost of R170 per annum is less than the cost of a cup of coffee a month and I can only wonder what more the WRRRA needs to do to get our non-member residents to join the WRRRA? Let me urge each of your current member to take a moment to encourage a friend or neighbour to join us.

Please pay the this year's subscription of R170 and it will help the WRRRA to keep doing its great work.

Go to <http://wrra.co.za/images/stories/PDF/Membership/WRRRA%20Application%20Form.pdf>

It is the right thing to do!

#### **Wilderness Fire Management Unit, Jerry Eccles:**

After the Knysna fires, which generated a great deal of concern among our residents, presentations were made on behalf of the SCFPA in Hoekwil and Wilderness by Barry Smales. One of the WRRRA Committee, Jeremy Eccles, determined to establish a Fire Management Unit (FMU) in Wilderness and set up a "kick-off" workshop with Barry at the end of October. After an initial presentation by Barry, the workshop successfully started the Wilderness FMU (WFMU), with two separate task-teams dealing with Fire Hazards (driven by Jeremy and Steve Cox), and Environment/Resources/Funding (driven by Roy and Dee Marcus). The Fire Hazard team has succeeded in identifying fire hazards on well over half the roads in Wilderness Heights through 10 street monitors and are currently generating action plans to deal with them. Membership of WFMU is now of the order of 30 people (which well exceeds expectations) and is now interfacing with the Kleinkrantz/Langvlei Dunes FMU, with the objective of coordinating their strategic initiatives; it is hoped that Hoekwil and Rondevlei will soon join them. A fire training day has been organised through the SCFPA, and it seems there are more people wanting to participate than the course can take.

#### **Rondevlei, Robin Emslie:**

In the middle of the year we welcomed representatives from Rondevlei onto our Committee, continuing our strategy of broadening the WRRRA footprint into one 'Greater Wilderness'. We have gained a handful of additional members as a result and are learning the intricacies of country living where everyone pays rates but must provide their own water (mostly harvesting rain off roofs), electricity (buying direct from Eskom, or solar panels), sewerage systems (septic tanks, conservancies) and campaigning to improve their roads which can be quite dauntingly bad and sometimes so rough they threaten ordinary access. The WRRRA has been able to assist the Rondevlei group in getting the George Municipality to start installing water storage tanks for the Rondevlei Station dwellers (six cottages) and structuring and submitting a petition to the Minister of Transport and Public Works in the Western Cape Government to re-instate the previously approved upgrading (tarring and paving) of DR1609 to commence during 2018. Hopefully a positive reply to the petition will be available before this report is tabled.

#### **Hoekwil, Terry Lamont Smith:**

HRRRA had a busy year.

- Some progress was made in building bridges with Touwsranten, via the primary school and Seven Passes initiative.

- A Hoekwil Services Directory was produced which has been well received and already more people want to be added. This includes anyone in the greater Hoekwil, Touwsrante and Wilderness areas who offer a service.
- HRRRA played a key role in trying to get government to cooperate and use the opportunity presented by the provincial road refurbishment started in late 2017 to get safety measures built through Touwsrante. We remain frustrated that there is such bureaucratic inertia against simply cooperating and coordinating to make improvements, the petition process looking like it will outlast the duration of the contract.
- The cooperation agreement with WRRRA (giving HRRRA members access to WRRRA services, and WRRRA access to our members details) has worked well and we hope that this will continue.
- Several social get togethers were arranged allowing newcomers to the village to introduce themselves and get to know some of the old-timers.
- The HRRRA committee has long said that there are two areas they don't try to cover
  - Fire Management
  - Security management

In both cases there are so many regulatory and governmental requirements to meet, and both require a level of youthfulness that are not necessarily in abundance in our committee. Yet in 2017 we had the dreadful fires, and a sad and alarming increase in violent crime in our area.

There are groups of residents busy with finding the best and most effective measures to improve village security, with HRRRA's help wherever we can. Regarding the fire issue, those residents who joined up with SCFPA are watching how WH FMU gets and keeps going, and hopefully will find enough members to get an FMU working in Hoekwil.

**Treasurer, Neville Ewing:**

WRRRA finances are in good shape, thanks to Neville's strict control. I don't call him \$\$Crooge for nothing. The Receipts and Payments schedule which form part of the AGM documents you received were self-explanatory. The biggest increase in expenditure was for cleaning and maintenance of the Village and greater Wilderness. This was a considered decision and was taken in answer to previous years comments in which the WRRRA was taken to task for appearing to only care for the Village. Some of these expenses were "once off" for capital items such as dirt bins and equipment and we do not budget to spend as much during 2018. Any shortfall regarding maintenance and cleaning will be funded by the surplus generated out of the Wilderness Improvement Program funds. Thank you, Neville, for your assistance, advice and support during the year.

**Conclusion:**

Once again, I must thank and commend the WRRRA committee members for their dedication and commitment to Wilderness and the WRRRA. And thank you to the WRRRA members and Wilderness residents that have supported the WRRRA and its initiatives over the past year and in the past. This is your community and we can only be as successful as you all allow us to be. WRRRA needs you ALL to become paid up members and together Wilderness, Hoekwil, Kleinkrantz, Rondevlei and Langvlei Dunes can become a force to reckon with for the good of our community.

Thanks to my committee for their sterling efforts.

Donald Goldfain

Chairman

