

WILDERNESS RESORT HOTEL

We are pleased to report that we had a very successful meeting with the new owner of Wilderness Resort Hotel in the middle of March. Albert Wiffen, resident in Mossel Bay but born and bred in George, expressed a keen interest in the Wilderness Improvement Program.

Interestingly, he was instrumental in creating a City Improvement District for the CBD of Mossel Bay, and understands the need for community initiatives to improve safety and cleanliness in areas such as the Village.

He was excited about the infrastructure upgrades to the Village that would flow from the George Integrated Public Transport Network. He did not anticipate that the temporary bus transit point outside the Hotel would pose a problem, provided this was only a temporary measure. In this regard, he fully supported the initiative to use the current SANParks parking area as an overflow parking facility as the first step in moving the bus transit point there on a permanent basis. This would involve the upgrade of the vehicle access to the parking area from the Village, as well as the installation of adequate lighting.

We were very encouraged to hear Mr Wiffen expand on his ideas for the future development of the Resort Hotel, as these were very much in line with the vision that the WIP espouses: sympathetic developments that do not change the character or ambiance of the Village but add to the experience of residents and visitors. It is possible that the Ambassador program will need to be expanded as a result of this vision in order to ensure safe pedestrian access between the Hotel and the Village centre.

We believe that the re-opening of the Hotel will have a significant and positive effect on Wilderness. We are sure that Mr Wiffen will add much value to the initiatives that WRRRA has undertaken over the last few years to make Wilderness a safe, clean and attractive environment.

Rehabilitation of the N2 road leading to Ebb and Flow (notice from SANParks)

The entrance road from the N2 leading to Ebb & Flow rest camp in the Wilderness section of the Garden Route National Park will be rehabilitated. The 650-meter sub-base of the paved road is damaged and uneven. Work will mainly include the removal of the current paving to restabilize the base of the road.

‘Although the road leading from the N2 will be closed, the main Ebb & Flow rest camp, reception area and Loerie Nest venue will be fully operational’ says Mzwandile Mjadu, Area Manager of the Wilderness section of the Garden Route National Park.

Construction work is expected to take between 12 and 16 weeks. During this time, visitors to the Park are encouraged to use two **alternative routes**:

- Entry from the N2 via Hoekwil. This route leads to a dirt road of approximately 1.4km
- Entry through the town of Wilderness is about 3.5km

WRRRA had discussions with SANParks to ensure that instructions and signage are in place to ensure that caravaners who are booked in at Ebb and Flow use the Hoekwil and gravel road rather than trying to negotiate the road through the Village while the GIPTN roadworks are in progress.

Update on Wilderness Improvement Program

We announced in our last newsletter that Les and Veronica Stephens of 4Front Consultants had taken over the supervision and administration of the Wilderness Improvement Program. This handover has gone very well and a fourth Ambassador has been appointed so that we can extend their hours until 22:00 in the evening, thus ensuring that patrons leaving restaurants in the Village are not harassed by informal “car guards”.

We have been grateful to the Municipality who over the last 18 months, have provided partial funding for the Ambassador program via EPWP route. While we are now able to fund this program from voluntary contributions from the business and hospitality sector, we will still continue to explore funding options with the Municipality. The list of WIP Partners is too long to include in this newsletter, but please look out for the WIP Partner logo that all participating businesses will be displaying in the near future. However special mention must be made of SPAR who continue to sponsor the meals that are provided for the Ambassadors, as well as making a substantial financial contribution to the WIP program.

Thanks to Jacques Quinot of the Municipality Roads Department, we have been loaned a street vacuum machine, which should assist the Ambassadors in ensuring that the Village streets are kept clean and free of leaves and rubbish.

Parking is likely to be a growing problem in the Village, with the imminent sale and development of the vacant land which we are currently renting for parking. In addition, changes to the road infrastructure in the Village, which forms part of the GIPTN upgrade, will exacerbate this problem. We are currently in discussions with the Municipality with a view to providing alternative parking facilities.

The latest information we have is that SANParks are very amenable to the use of part of their parking area adjacent to the N2 as a an overflow parking area, and discussions in this regard are progressing well, with an official request having been sent to SANParks by the Municipality. The following is an extract from a letter to SANParks, a copy of which we received from Mr Lionel Daniels, the Engineer in charge of the Wilderness GIPTN project: *“With reference to our meeting at your offices on 20 March 2014, where we discussed SANPARKS willingness to explore the possibility of utilizing the existing parking area adjacent to the N2 at the Touw River bridge crossing, we herewith enclose George Municipality's formal request to investigate the matter. Once again we wish to thank SANPARKS for their positive attitude and support towards the GIPTN system and look forward to working with you.”*

As indicated in earlier newsletters, this is the first stage of the request to have the transit point moved from outside the Hotel to the present SANParks parking area.

George Integrated Public Transport Network

Further to our update on the road and pedestrian upgrades in the Village for the GIPTN, we received concerned feedback on the potential loss of parking spaces as a direct result of the project. We want to make it abundantly clear that we (WRRRA) had **no** part in the design of the changes. Upon receipt of the original sketch diagram, we raised the parking problem with SMEC and the GIPTN team at the Municipality. Some accommodating changes were incorporated, but not enough to fully address our concerns. We will continue to raise our/your concerns with the project team, with whom we have a good working relationship, as we explore other alternatives to the Village parking problem – see above. We are committed to serve the needs of our members, including that of our business partners.

Following concerns expressed by the business community, we had a very productive meeting with William vd Poll, the project manager for the GIPTN upgrades. He was very sympathetic

to our concerns and undertook to do whatever he could to minimize the disruption and deliver upgrades that would enhance the ambiance of the Village. Nevertheless, the road works will cause some disruption, particularly during the upgrade of the intersection of Leila's Lane and George Road. What is planned is that during this construction disruption will be confined as far as possible to Mondays to Fridays for a period of two to three weeks, with the intersection open to normal traffic over weekends. We are pleased that as a result of our submissions, it has been agreed to schedule the upgrade to the Leila's Lane intersection until after the Easter holiday period.

Breaking news – the Municipality has agreed to proceed with the second phase of the road upgrade, which involves the area immediately coming off the N2 into the Village, in front of the Caltex service station up to the intersection at Leila's Lane. This means that the entire road and pedestrian infrastructure of the Village will be upgraded as a result of the GIPTN. This upgrade will only take place after July 2014. We will keep you informed as we get more details on Phase Two.

Meeting with Mayor

We have been trying to arrange a visit by the Mayoral Committee to Wilderness to see the positive impact of the Wilderness Improvement Program. To date this has not been possible, so we were very pleased when our outgoing Member of Parliament, Marius de Swart, arranged for us to meet with the Mayor at his office. We used this opportunity to share with him and his Deputy the WRRRA vision for Wilderness, to ask for his support for the various initiatives that WRRRA has undertaken, and to assure him of our willingness to become actively involved in programs that the Municipality wishes to implement for the upliftment of the community.

Employing foreign nationals

It is common knowledge that many locals employ foreign nationals as gardeners and domestic workers. The following useful information was kindly supplied to us by the Sedgfield Community Police sub Forum. A more detailed explanation appeared in The Edge Community Newspaper (you can download a copy from their website).

“We are going to give you some important pointers which will assist those of you that currently employ foreign nationals, for example - Malawians.

A few pointers which you need to take note of:

1. Does your employee (Malawian) have a work permit from the Department of Home Affairs?

2. Did your Malawian pay anything up to R1500 or more for the work permit?

If your answer to both of the above questions is YES, then there is a 99% chance that the work permit is fraudulent and was purchased through one of the several syndicates operating in major cities throughout the country. However, recent reliable information received by us, indicates that some foreign nationals can also purchase their work permits inside Home Affairs at the counter for around R300. We find this strange as in terms of the Immigration Act and the information relayed back to us, this procedure is not permitted??

3. As most of the Malawians are here on refugee (Asylum seeker) status, they are therefore not permitted to work. There is a list of criteria of which your Malawian will be required to meet in order to obtain a work permit. Scarce Skills is a definite must - unfortunately excellent gardening and domestic cleaning skills is not a scarce skill and will not be accepted. Math teaching, Au-pair, engineer, doctor etc would probably be more applicable as a scarce skill.”

Address by Helen Zille

Concern has been expressed that the wording of the recent WRRRA invitation to hear the DA leader Helen Zille address Wilderness residents might inadvertently have created the impression that the WRRRA supported the DA. We wish to assure concerned residents that WRRRA is totally apolitical; it does not support any political party and it does not encourage its members to vote for any particular political party. We were asked to advertise the meeting as the short notice provided did not allow time for a press announcement, and it was felt that because WRRRA is able to communicate with so many residents electronically we would be performing a valuable public service by making residents aware of this opportunity to hear the Premier of the Western Cape address local residents.

Power outage

Today's power outage was caused by a bird strike on the 11kV line which caused a flashover. Appreciation to Kevin Groenewald and his team, who were on site with the minimum of delay and had the power restored within two hours. We hope you all received notification of the problem and another notification when the power was restored via the WRRRA sms system.