From the Mayor’s Pen

There is no question about the fact that we’re in the middle of winter – it’s getting more difficult to get up in the cold, dark mornings when we’d all rather spend 15 more minutes snuggled up in bed. The Pick n Pay Knysna Oyster Festival helped to keep us warm while giving us the best ten days of our winter, and we thank all the organisers and sponsors for their hard work in bringing us another fantastic festival.

Now we are looking forward to National Women’s Day in August. I firmly believe that women play an integral role in our economy – on a national and local scale. From raising children to becoming prosperous businesspeople and entrepreneurs, to playing their own part in starting, running and owning their own successful enterprises, women are showing their mettle in the business world and staking their claim as professionals to be reckoned with.

As a municipality, we are doing what we can to cultivate new enterprises through our SMME Incubator Programme. Initiatives like these mean that we are assisting entrepreneurs in starting their own sustainable business. And, in time, they will be able to pay this assistance they will receive forward by training others in their area of expertise.

I believe that women, as nurturers by nature, are naturally equipped to nurture their own businesses into thriving enterprises, benefitting themselves, their families, and our local economy.

Arguably one of the most influential female entrepreneurs of all time, and a personal inspiration to me, Coco Chanel once said “There is no time for cut-and-dried monotony. There is time for work, and there is time for love. That leaves no other time!” Women are not only nurturing by nature, but also loving and hard working. But I’d like to take the idea behind Chanel’s words a step further, because I believe that when you love what you do, then you won’t feel as if you’re working.

I am confident about the impact and contribution our women can make, and are making, to Knysna’s economy.

Georlene Wolmarans • Executive Mayor

Knysna connects local business with the world

The installation of over 120km of fibre-optic cables will connect the entire Knysna municipal area with the rest of the world via high speed, broadband connectivity. This high speed connectivity will present unlimited potential for investment and economic growth.

“There is very little connectivity choice in Knysna and speeds are generally poor,” said Chairperson for the Governance and Economic Development Committee Councillor Esmé Edge. “This has been hampering business productivity and investment in our area.”

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The greater Knysna municipal area is steeped in natural beauty, and Sedgefield is undoubtedly the jewel in its crown. Ward 1 consists of Rondevlei, Sizamile, Smutsville, Myoli Beach and The Island. While these are all areas with unique challenges, the residents share a unique sense of community and camaraderie, standing by one another during times of difficulty and celebration.

While I am the Councillor for this ward, I also serve on the Mayoral Committee as the Chairperson for Community Services. As in any well-managed organisation, the various arms of our local government work closely together and community services often walks hand in hand with economic development. A healthy community is dependent on a healthy economy.

I have mentioned that Ward 1 faces unique challenges. But teamwork between our residents and the municipality, as well as the various departments within the municipality, will ensure that we not only face these challenges with optimism and confidence, but that we overcome and learn from them.

Councillor Irene Grootboom

Smutsville Community Centre upgraded to Multipurpose Centre status

An R11.3 million upgrade to the existing community facilities in Smutsville will culminate in the completion of a state of the art, multipurpose centre in July 2015, to be officially opened in September 2015. According to Ward 1 Councillor Irene Grootboom, the condition of the existing netball court and rugby pitch prohibited practicing and matches. The buildings within the facility also required extensive maintenance and upgrading.

“A substantial portion of the work has already been completed,” said Grootboom. “The ripping and layer works of the existing rugby field was completed in July 2014 The entire perimeter wall was repositioned and replaced and the building was renovated and new toilets were installed. A new parking area and access ramps were constructed as well.”

“The second phase consisted of the final layers and synthetic surfacing of the rugby and soccer field,” she continued. “Four new energy efficient light masts were installed around the field, which will allow for night time sport matches.”

Councillor Grootboom explained that this project provided job opportunities for the local community. “Unemployment is always a major concern in our communities. The project was labour intensive and the main contractors sourced most of the labour from Smutsville for the first phase. The second phase consisted of mostly specialist work with some local community labour sourced from Smutsville.”

“These upgrades will ensure that the Smutsville multipurpose centre will be one of the best in the greater Knysna municipal area – and the only one with a synthetic rugby/soccer field,” she concluded. “I urge all community members to make good use of it, while looking after it.”

Expanded Public Works Programme expands temporary earning potential

Ward 1 Councillor Irene Grootboom explained that the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) stems from the Growth and Development Summit (GDS) of 2003. “Four themes were adopted at this summit,” she said. “One of which was ‘more jobs, better jobs, decent work for all’.”

“The GDS further agreed that public works programmes could provide poverty and income relief through providing temporary work for the unemployed, while carrying out socially useful activities.”

According to the Department of Public Works’ website, the EPWP was launched in 2004 and is still being successfully implemented. The website further states that: the EPWP is a nationwide programme covering all spheres of government and state-owned enterprises. The programme provides an important avenue for labour absorption and income transfers to poor households in the short to medium-term. It is also a deliberate attempt by the public sector bodies to use expenditure on goods and services to create work opportunities for the unemployed. EPWP projects employ workers on a temporary or on-going basis either by government, by contractors, or by other non-governmental organisations under the Ministerial Conditions of Employment for the EPWP or learnership employment conditions.

“And the EPWP has been running in Ward 1 as well – with great success,” Grootboom exclaimed. “During the 2014/2015 financial year we were able to provide temporary employment to a total of 47 individuals in Ward 1.”

Of these 47 community members, one was employed as a youth advisor in Smutsville, 11 joined the solid waste team, four worked in the Sedgefield library, two were employed as fire fighters and 29 were employed during the upgrading of the new multipurpose centre in Smutsville.

“This is proof of this municipality’s commitment to job creation and poverty alleviation,” Grootboom concluded. “And these figures don’t even include those jobs created through the ward based projects! These efforts in creating temporary employment opportunities for our residents are clear indications of our intention to create a town where people and nature prosper.”

For more information on the EPWP, please visit www.epwp.gov.za. Employment figures relating to ward based projects were not available at the time of printing.
Knysna connects with the world

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This situation is set to change as the roll-out of the high speed fibre network will take place over the next five years at an investment value of approximately R150 million. “This new network holds unlimited possibilities for business in, with, and from Knysna,” said Edge. “It will be on par with networks in big cities in terms of speed, connectivity and reliability.”

“Businesses outside the region, where connectivity is slower, may relocate to Knysna in order to make use of the newfound high internet speeds. And once they are connected to this network, they may start offering new services that were previously impossible to deliver along slower connections like remote support and call centres.”

“Professionals who currently commute between Knysna and larger centres will be able to spend more time here thanks to instant connectivity and the possibilities of video conferencing,” she continued. “Other businesses will be able to relocate or expand to Knysna as the high speed and real time nature of the fibre network will make it easy to stay on top of operations.”

“In short, this high speed, fibre-optic network will attract investment to the greater Knysna municipal area, allow business growth and facilitate new job creation,” she concluded. “It will help us to create a town where people and nature prosper.”

Director of Planning and Development Mike Maughan-Brown on Economic Development

Mr. Maughan-Brown is responsible for the departments related to town and economic development. He writes:

The state of the economy in the greater Knysna municipal area is of critical importance to the welfare of its residents, as well as the future of the municipality itself. The economy needs to be strong for money to flow into the area so that there is the prospect of employment and a positive outlook for entrepreneurs and investors. It also has to be structured in such a way that the future is hopeful for all sectors of the population, especially those for whom the current reality is most challenging. Without a strong economy creating profits and employment there is no financial base for the municipality as an institution and it will not be able to sustain itself into the future.

The Economic Development Department focuses on both these functions: strengthening the local economy and ensuring that the economic opportunities are distributed into the areas and to the people who have been excluded in the past. Its most important work in strengthening the economy is identifying opportunities to make Knysna more attractive to investors. The initiative to establish a fibre-optic network that will give businesses in the municipal area the benefit of national and international connectivity is the best example of this sort of work. The growth in business opportunities and employment arising from this one initiative is expected to be very significant. Similar work is being done in identifying opportunities in sectors with potential, such as agricultural processing and education. The department also works to support and encourage diversification in the tourism sector, which is currently the mainstay of our economy.

To ensure that opportunities are distributed throughout the municipal area, this department works at ensuring the distribution of infrastructure (for instance, the fibre-optic network will reach all areas), and to provide training, support and assistance to emerging entrepreneurs and small businesses.

The department also supports the administration of the municipality in the spheres in which it has specialist knowledge, in particular in the interpretation and packaging of information and in the management of the Expanded Public Works Programme. The last few years have seen the investment of vast amounts energy, dedication and expertise into this function and the returns on this investment will become apparent in the next few years.

Municipality captures data to improve services

Knysna Municipality has developed an innovative application that allows it to conduct surveys and collect data across a broad spectrum of industries.

“We were already using this app to create a database of all businesses in the greater Knysna municipal area,” explained Ilse van Schalkwyk, the Economic Development Manager. “This will be the first time that the municipality will have accurate information on the total number of functioning businesses in all areas. This app will also enable us to effectively communicate with these businesses on a number of matters.”

The application may be used to amass a variety of information.

“We were able to gather interesting information during the Pick n Pay Knysna Oyster Festival,” said van Schalkwyk. “In the past, we were only able to obtain data from participants of the various events. Being able to ask regular festival goers a variety of questions this year cast an interesting light on visitors’ perceptions of the festival and provided much needed feedback on the impact of the festival. These kinds of interactions and reliable data could hold fantastic consequences for our tourism industry.”

“As we can gather information on a host of subjects, we are acting as a pilot project for Statistics South Africa,” she continued. “For Knysna, this app holds unlimited potential in terms of database development and maintenance. It will allow us to make more informed decisions, based on accurate and reliable statistics.”
You had been working for the municipality as a consultant before joining the team on a permanent basis in 2012. Has having the backing of an organisation like the municipality changed how you approach challenges and tasks?

Yes definitely. I have had to adapt and being in a very corporate environment has also been interesting. The public sector has such an important role to play in the future of our town and country, and the municipality has enabled me to facilitate and initiate investment projects which will change the future of our town - something I could never have achieved in the private sector.

Has your perception of your duties changed after almost three years in your current position? What do you see as your main duties?

No, my perception of my duties has not changed, but I have a greater awareness of how to get a job done within a very regulated and corporate environment. I have been able to refine my department’s focus areas to: Research and Data Management, Investment and Trade Promotion, and Business Development. Economic development is everyone’s business and as a mandate my job is to coordinate and create an economic focus across all our directorates. I am truly blessed to work under a Director and Municipal Manager who share my vision and create room within the organisation to grow and strengthen our mandate.

What do you see as your department’s greatest achievements in the last three years?

The broadband project, now in its first phase, which will invest R150 million into our local economy, bringing with it industry and the development of a data centre, film studio, call centre and more. The establishment of a fully-fledged data and research unit that is currently running a pilot project for Statistics SA. The development of an app to deal with our informal trading permit systems. The hosting of the semi-final judging for a category of the International Academy of Film and Television Awards (International Emmys). The establishment of the Knysna Timber Festival along with a host of up and coming festivals to support our tourism industries. The numerous entrepreneurs who we have been able to assist through our business support services, incubator programme and various training programmes.

Recent years have seen a sizable increase in the number of entrepreneurs starting their own businesses and contributing to their local, as well as the global economy. “We have long since recognised the importance of our SMME’s, or small, medium and micro-sized enterprises,” said Chairperson for Governance and Economic Development Councillor Esmé Edge. “And so the municipality has once again embarked on a programme to help dynamic and committed entrepreneurs to start or grow their businesses.”

“Our SMME incubator programme will impact on the development of trainable and motivated individuals who will be able to make an impact in the economic society, it will provide entrepreneurs with the equipment that will help them set up businesses and will empower, mentor and monitor entrepreneurs, allowing them to generate wealth and become financially independent.”

Municipal incubator programme to assist SMME’s

Shortlisted applicants will be required to present their business concept to a selection panel and applicants with an existing or emerging business are also encouraged to apply.

“The incubator programme will function in conjunction with an SMME training programme we are running with the Small Enterprise Development Agency (Seda),” Edge explained. “While this training programme will be advertised and is open to all qualifying SMME’s, participants of our incubator programme will be required to attend specific training sessions.”

Training sessions will focus on aspects pertaining to the business concept, business plan, basic business skills, basic bookkeeping skills, tender training, marketing for SMME’s, customer service training, franchise training and social media. All SMME’s who take part in these training sessions will be registered with Seda, affording them access to the development agency’s range of services. As registered Seda clients, their success and growth may also be tracked and evaluated.

“Research has shown that the successful completion of an SMME incubator programme dramatically increases the long term survival rates of SMME’s as compared to those who do not enter into incubator programmes,” Edge concluded. “This is one way in which we aim to create a town where people and nature prosper, as the long term survival of our SMME’s will not only be to their own benefit, but to the benefit of our local economy and our town as a whole.”

The Knysna Municipality SMME Incubator has been advertised. Applications close at 12h00 on 31 July 2015. Please contact Ilse van Schalkwyk at ivanschalkwyk@knysna.gov.za, or Allan River at ariver@knysna.gov.za for more information. The SMME Training schedule in conjunction with Seda will be advertised in local media.

**DATES TO REMEMBER - MUNICIPAL MEETINGS**

4 August Community Services Committee Meeting
5 August Planning, Development & Infrastructure Committee Meeting
18 August Mayoral Committee Meeting
27 August Council Meeting

**DATES TO REMEMBER - COMMEMORATIVE DAYS & EVENTS**

9 August National Women’s Day