At the national Blue Flag launch at Thesen Islands on Tuesday 7 October, Knysna heard that the area will be the proud host of five Blue Flags during this year’s season.

Knysna Executive Mayor was extremely happy with the results. “Buffalo Bay and Brenton-on-Sea beaches once again received Blue Flag status. Swartvlei beach in the Sedgfield area received pilot status, and Thesen Islands Marina full Blue Flag status. I also want to congratulate Ocean Odyssey, a local lagoon and ocean charter boat company, for receiving their Blue Flag status.”

WESSA (the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa) has announced a record 82 Blue Flag sites for the season at the launch, attended by Minister of Tourism Mr. Derek Hanekom. Mayor Wolmarans said that integrated conservation management is key to their success. “Achieving Blue Flag status recognises all the efforts of numerous NGO’s like the Knysna River Basin project; the Knysna Municipality, Cape Nature; and SANParks. Team work is of the essence to achieve, and maintain this status and I want to thank the team at the municipality, all the other NGO’s and stakeholders in this natural asset for their contribution towards conserving it.”

Knysna Proud owner of 5 blue flags

Minister Hanekom said that investing in the environment has significant economic benefits. “Tourism is a very important sector of our economy as it is responsible for creating 1.4 million jobs in South Africa. This is more than the total number of jobs in the mining sector.”

Mayor Wolmarans echoed these sentiments. “The main driving factor of our local economy is tourism and one of our biggest challenges as a local authority is how to balance economic growth with the wellbeing of our natural resources. The Blue Flag programme is one of the initiatives that help us to find this balance.”

She referred to the “Naturally Knysna” campaign that was launched with exactly this purpose in mind - to find this balance. “We want to motivate residents and visitors to Knysna to recognise the impact their actions have on the sensitive environment they live in. The core values of the campaign encourage lifestyles that emulate nature and in so doing we can live in harmony with it. Our success depends on our ability to generate green industry reliant on technology that does not detract from the environment.”

To achieve Blue Flag status, as many as 33 different criteria spanning over four aspects of coastal management have to be met: water quality, environmental education and information, environmental management (including access to sensitive areas) and safety and services. Each Blue Flag site is compelled to conduct several environmental education activities during the year, and to practice effective and efficient conservation management. For further information about the Blue Flag Programme please visit www.blueflag.org.za

Council revises the Economic Development Strategy

Knysna Municipality’s Economic Development Department has undergone a change in direction in the past two years. It has become more aligned to the strategic focus of council in relation to economic development as prescribed in the National Development Plan and the Local Economic Development (LED) Framework.

“Economic Development may be described as the process by which the public, business, government and nongovernmental sector partners work together to create better conditions for economic growth and employment generation,” explained Knysna Municipal Manager Lauren Waring. “The aim is to improve the quality of life for all, while we work towards a town where people and nature prosper.”

“Our economy has undergone considerable changes in recent years,” she continued. “We have been affected by factors such as the property market slowing down, which also impacted the construction industry. We are also affected by national and international forces such as fluctuating interest rates. We need to understand these and also the other market forces to know how to assist businesses and to attract new investment into our local economy, ultimately resulting in renewed local economic activity in numerous sectors.”

“We need to stimulate key economic interventions and co-ordinate “real” sectors to diversify our economy and initiate long term, sustainable job creation.”

As part of the shift in focus, the municipality hopes to maximise the competitiveness of existing, strong sectors. “In other words, to build on what we have,” said Waring. “We also need to promote the development of an economy internationally recognised for its competitive advantages, private investment by individuals and businesses, the growth of businesses in the central business district and the introduction of new businesses and business clusters in Knysna.”

“We want to encourage a vibrant, productive and inclusive economy by promoting priority economic sectors and thereby generating economic growth,” she said. “And we want to encourage equitable revenue generation across geographical areas through focusing on economic sector diversity.”

To achieve this, various initiatives are underway. A focus on the Knowledge Economy has identified the need for a smarter workforce and has led to the establishment of several educational facilities such as the Knysna Learning Initiative Community College and a planned campus for the Knysna University Initiative.

The transportation of people and goods needs to be upgraded, and so the municipality is investigating possibilities such as an improved public transportation system and a modal shift for the transportation of timber and waste from road to rail.

A need to invest in fibre optic infrastructure has been identified, as many industries may be attracted with world class connectivity to the Internet and network management. Community WiFi hotspots are already being installed as part of the Digital Village Hotspot project at public venues like community centres and libraries, providing free connectivity to the Internet.

“In saying that we have to build on what we have, we must also focus on the tourism industry and investment marketing,” said Waring “For this reason we are looking at the rebranding of Knysna Tourism, or Knysna & Partners. We are looking at the establishment of a world class Convention Centre and hope to focus on growing key festivals throughout the year. We must also develop investment packages to link investors with opportunities through development facilitation.”

“In terms of agricultural beneficiation, technology must be utilised to develop niche, high value products like berries or honeybees. We have access to our rural nodes like Karatara and Rheenendal, and we must focus on agricultural cooperatives and small scale processing factories throughout our municipal area.”

Waring emphasised the need to invest in small, medium and micro enterprises (SMME’s). “We would like to create formal and informal economic investment in each neighbourhood, and link business development programmes to partners like the Small Enterprise Development Agency (Seda) and the newly established Knysna small business ministry.”

“But, more importantly, we need to train our entrepreneurs,” she said. “They need to learn to use the Internet as a resource and undergo entrepreneurship development programmes in key sectors to align skills training with economic opportunities. All SMME’s should look out for business skills programmes that will be launched this month, as part of the Entrepreneurship Week initiative.”

“Most importantly, we all have to remember that economic development is not just the business of council and the municipality,” Waring concluded. “Each and every person working and living in the greater Knysna municipal area has a role to play in how we secure our economic future. Make sure that yours is a positive contribution.”

Messages from the Mayor

October is Breast Cancer Awareness month, an annual campaign to increase awareness of the disease.

The NBCC (National Breast Cancer Foundation) is the driving force behind this campaign, and it involves three key areas: the “Early Detection Plan”, “Beyond the shock” and a fundraising initiative. According to the World Health Organization breast cancer alone kills some 458,000 people each year, mainly in low- and middle-income countries. It has got to be a priority to ensure that more women can access facilities for early detection. I am having my Cuppa for Cancer on 31 October please support this event and help me to make a difference!

I want to conclude my message with the words of Lauren Waring, our Municipal Manager, who has battled against and beaten breast cancer during the economic downturn.

“As a breast cancer survivor I learnt very quickly that each instance of cancer, irrespective of type, is just as unique as we are all individuals. But there are some things that we must all remember: cancer can be cured - it is not always a life sentence; we can be stronger than this terrible disease that will try and ravage our bodies; early detection and treatment is critical; and ensuring your support network or your ‘C’ team is there for you is vital.”