Residents were shocked when the Boatshed on Thesen Island caught on fire recently, causing damage to one of South Africa’s favourite restaurants, Ile de Pain. Offices were destroyed and luckily the Fire Department got the fire under control before more shops and the nearby hotel were damaged. At the same time, a fire did extensive damage to a house in Campbell Drive, and a week before 17 houses burnt down in White Location. These instances and the devastating fires a few weeks back in Cape Town made me wonder what I would take with me if I had to evacuate my house on short notice.

It also makes you stop and think of all the things you have that you don’t really need. And what you would really miss if you lost everything. So many people affected by the fires above lost everything they own, and for most of them these were items of daily survival – a roof over their head, clothes, shoes and blankets.

I read an interesting article recently on the “Collective Evolution” website about the Swedes and how efficient they are at recycling. The article calls it a “recycling revolution” that has been growing over the last few years and currently only 1% of their garbage ends up in landfills. There are positive and negative reviews about the ways they get rid of the garbage, but what stands out the most is that for the Swedes it is second nature to recycle - it’s a way of life. There are also interesting stories about people striving to produce 0% waste, and what I found inspiring was how do-able it was. The first supermarket in Germany that will produce 0% waste is due to open soon, and a restaurant in the US has been operating for the last two years, with the same accolade.

The municipality runs a recycling programme but we have seen over the last few years that recycling figures are declining, rather than increasing. The issue is, Knysna has no landfill, and the waste we create, recycled or not, is being transported to alternative land sites, not only at tremendous financial cost, but also increasing our environmental footprint. For us, minimising waste is a necessity.

I challenge the Knysna community to join us on a waste minimization revolution in Knysna. I have requested the Community Services Director to investigate the setting up of depots, like they have overseas, where people can get rid of unwanted items, and these items can be re-used by people in need. Like when they’ve lost everything in a fire.

The municipality will draw up a list of handy tips on possible ways to minimise your waste – if you want to join the revolution, please contact my office and we will forward these to you.

Georlene Wolmarans • Executive Mayor

Celebrate your courage on Youth Day

South Africa celebrates Youth Day on 16 June. On this day we commemorate and celebrate the courage of our youth, and of ourselves as South Africans.

Our country has a rich history. A history filled with accounts and stories of how South Africans gathered their strength and faced their challenges, bringing about change for the better. And we will never forget the courageous protests launched by the students in 1976. Their demonstrations – and the reaction it evoked on a national and global scale – was one of the great strides our country took towards freedom and equality for all. And it is proof of our inherent courageous nature as South Africans.

Enjoy the public holiday, but remember those courageous young people who sacrificed their freedom and their lives so that we may enjoy and appreciate ours.

Georlene Wolmarans • Executive Mayor
Local government is the sphere of government closest to the people. Many basic services are delivered by local municipalities and local Ward Councillors are the politicians closest to communities. Councillors are elected every five years during Local Government elections. Knysna currently has nineteen Councillors, of which ten are Ward Councillors and the remainder are Proportional Representation Councillors. The number of Proportional Councillors is determined by the proportion of votes each party receives in an election. This means that all votes contribute to the resulting Council and not only the majority of the votes.

Two legs of local government are the Council and the municipal administration, which is made up of officials under the leadership of the Municipal Manager. But there is a very important third leg: the community.

The Constitution and the South African government gives clear direction about how municipalities and Councillors should be responsive to community views and to local issues. Partnerships should be built between the community, Councillors and the administration to address local matters. A number of laws outline participation processes that Councils and municipalities have to use to consult the community, most particularly the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act.

Municipal Council aware of the needs and concerns of residents and keep people informed of the activities of Municipal Council.

Ward Committees are made up of a Ward Councillor, who is the Chairperson, and no more than ten people who are elected from the ward and who serve voluntarily for a five-year term. Council must make rules regarding how Ward Committees operate.

The Ward Committee is an advisory body, meaning that it can make recommendations to Municipal Council, but does not have the power to make decisions on its own. Your Ward Committee should be an effective way of spreading information concerning what your community wants from Municipal Council and what Council is doing.

One of the most important tasks of the Ward Committees is engaging with the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and the Annual Budget. The Committees will assist the Ward Councillor to determine what are the priorities for the ward. But determining what needs to happen in your ward is not only the responsibility of the Council and the Ward Committees. Individuals are invited to attend the regular Ward meetings and the meetings where the Council and the Administration will present the Budget and IDP. You are welcome to make inputs at these meetings and then put your proposals in writing for the Council to consider. For those who cannot write, there is ready assistance available.

Look out from July onwards for our “Know Your Ward” editions where we will report on the various priorities and services for each ward.
Have your children’s births been registered with the Department of Home Affairs?

The Late Registration of Birth process currently followed by the Department of Home Affairs will come to an end on 31 December 2015. Thereafter a new procedure to register late births on the National Population Register will be followed, with strict procedures and regulations to adhere to.

Knysna Executive Deputy Mayor Esmé Edge said that the South African government provides its residents with many benefits. “These include access to a variety of grants, housing and education. But to even apply for any of these benefits, you must be a registered South African citizen.”

“According to legislation, all children born in South Africa must be registered within 30 days of their birth,” said Edge. “The new requirements for registration that will come into effect from 1 January 2016 will be stringent, with requirements specific to children younger than 14 years, and those 15 and older.”

Various factors will determine registration requirements,” she continued. “These include issues such as birth in and out of wedlock, as well as abandonment. Knysna Municipality will work closely with the Department of Home Affairs and our Community Workers to ensure that all of the greater Knysna area’s children are correctly registered.”

“As South Africans, we are extremely proud of our young democracy, where everyone has the right to vote. But our young people won’t be able to vote if they are not registered at birth. We will do everything we can to make this new registration process as easy as possible for applicants and their guardians,” she concluded. “That is really just another way in which we are creating a town where people and nature prosper.”

For more information on the current and new requirements for the registration of a birth, please visit the Department of Home Affairs at 106 York Street, George, or call them on 044 805 4103, or visit http://www.dha.gov.za/.

Changes in Council

Knysna Executive Mayor Cllr Georlene Wolmarans reshuffled her Mayoral Committee (MAYCO) at a Special Council Meeting on 7 May 2015. She announced that COPE member, Cllr Elrick van Aswegen will be added to the Mayoral Committee with immediate effect, replacing Cllr Ray Barrell.

She said that an organisation is only as strong as its leadership and as they operate in an ever-changing environment, at times it was necessary to mirror these changes in the organisation. “In the political arena the DA and COPE are strengthening their coalition, and I also feel it is important that this reflects in our local structures. I want to thank Cllr Barrell for his contribution to date – always valuable and wise – and know that I will continue to get his guidance via our DA caucus.”

She welcomed Cllr van Aswegen and said that she was looking forward to working with him. “He was part of the Transitional Local Council in 1993 and brings a wealth of experience to the Mayoral Committee with over 15 years’ experience. He was born in Knysna and is a well-liked and respected leader in the community. I know that Knysna will benefit from the inclusion of Cllr van Aswegen on the Mayoral Committee, and that this consolidation will be the strong leadership Knysna needs towards a successful future as a town and a community.”

Changes to the portfolios include Cllr van Aswegen taking over as Chairperson of the Finance Committee and Deputy Mayor Cllr Esmé Edge will be the new Chairperson of the Governance and Economic Development Committee. Cllr Irene Grootboom remains the Chairperson of the Community Services Committee and Cllr Louisa Hart the Chairperson of the Planning, Development & Infrastructure Committee.
Knysna’s Red Bridge is once again open to the public. The bridge was closed in April 2014 for essential maintenance and refurbishment work undertaken by the Knysna Municipality at a cost of R3.2 million. While the public regained access to the bridge in January 2015, the Red Bridge was officially reopened on Tuesday 12 May 2015 as Knysna Deputy Executive Mayor Esme Edge unveiled a commemorative plaque at the bridge.

The Red Bridge currently supports the main raw water pipeline that conveys more than 80% of Knysna’s potable water from the abstraction point at Charlesford to the town. Corrosion of this metal structure necessitated the recent works.

“Corroded elements needed to be replaced and the entire structure has now been protected against corrosion,” said Edge. “And while the bridge was cleaned by abrasive blast cleaning, great efforts were made to ensure that we contained any potential pollution of the estuary and also minimised the amount of noise associated with an operation of this nature.”

An additional pipeline will be installed in the future to assist in managing the area’s increasing demand for potable water.

“We are committed to providing our residents with clean water,” Edge continued. “Our region experienced a major drought in 2009/2010 and we have already done a lot to ensure that our residents have sufficient access to potable water – even in times of drought. The refurbishment of the Red Bridge and the envisaged additional pipeline prove this commitment: our commitment to creating a town where people and nature prosper.”

Edge thanked the teams from Southey Construction, Aurecon, Sharples Environmental Services, OHS Consultants, along with all other role players and affected parties for their part in completing this project. She also thanked Mr Philip Caveney and the Knysna Historical Society for organising the beautiful plaque dedicated to the history of the bridge. The Deputy Mayor also reminded residents that they make use of the Red Bridge at their own risk.

Executive Deputy Mayor Esme Edge (far right) with Stan & Jo Davis (Knysna Historical Society), Rhoydon Parry (Manager: Water & Sewer), Neale Perring & Philip Caveney (Knysna Historical Society)