

# WELCOME TO ERMELO

## Gert Sibande District

*YOU would be forgiven for thinking that the Durban July came in May at the Gert Sibande District Municipality (GSDM) offices in Ermelo, Mpumalanga.*

Staff Reporter

This was as a result of the initiative by the Ermelo Business Association under the leadership of Mr. Athol Stark, its President, who had realized that Ermelo's economy had received a boost from the relocation of the District offices to this thriving town. Coupled with the coming of Eskom's Camden and the mines that have been set up, this called for a get-together, a networking gala dinner to welcome Gert Sibande District officially by local business.

The event took place at the Mayor's Parlour on 3 May 2012. Such a welcome had last been seen when the Msukaligwa LM offices were opened, presenting the best Municipal outfit at the time. Councillors, business people and the public sector gathered for this prestigious event which was oversubscribed.

Since the GSDM building had been officially opened on April 16, 2011 by the former Executive Mayor Alderman Andreas Gamede, it was the first time that the business sector and the public had officially welcomed the municipality to Ermelo since the move from Secunda. Acting Executive Mayor Councillor Tunu Agnes Mnisi, Madam Speaker Emily Dlamini, Acting Chief Whip Busisiwe Sikhonde and MMC for Finance Flora Moboa-Boltman were dressed to the nines at the function attended by over 200 guests.

Their fellow Members of Mayoral Committee (MMCs), Councillors Nhlakanipho Zuma, Joshua Nkosi, Patrick Magagula and Meshack Nhlabathi and the Municipal Manager Mbuleleni A. Ngcobo were also dressed for success and made a lasting impression to the business people and fellow guests. After the guests had snacks and drinks on the second floor, they moved to the Council Chamber where Rob Haswell, the HOD in Planning and Economic Development, made a presentation on how to make Gert Sibande District one of the most important regions in terms of economy and tourism.

He spoke about historic events that happened in places like Charlestown in 1913 when Mahatma Ghandi marched from Newcastle, in the then Natal and



**READY SMILE:** After it was all done; Speeches, Dinner, Networking, Council Chambers Presentation, the Acting Executive Mayor had time to take group pictures with colleagues and local business icons



**Athol Stark**  
EBA President



**Mbuleleni Ngcobo**  
Municipal Manager



**Nazeer Tayob**  
Cassim Motors



**Vusi Sindane**  
Ubumbano



**Melinda Stark**  
SACBW President

when they spent four days in Perdekop waiting for more masses to join them on the way to the Johannesburg in the former Transvaal. Haswell also told the audience how Nelson Mandela took a walkabout in Volksrust on his way to Johannesburg after his arrest in Howick, in the former Natal in 1962. This is the event that led to Mandela, ANC leaders and others from other organisations being tried during the Rivonia Treason Trial. Mandela eventually spent 27 years in prison and was released in 1990.

At the municipality offices, the guests were then taken to the library and toured the building. Some joked that looking at the building from outside, they thought it was either a casino or little Taj Mahal. Apart from the gala dinner, the Ermelo Business Association (EBA), led by its President Athol Stark also handed two certificates to the municipality. The Meritorious Award was to welcome the district to Ermelo and the Certificate of Endorsement was to

congratulate the district for financial management practices for getting a clean audit report.

GSDM achieved a Clean Audit Certificate from Auditor-General Terence Nombembe. The district celebrated the Clean Audit Certificate in February. The gala dinner was also attended by the previous councillors who worked under the tutelage of former Executive Mayor Alderman Andreas M. Gamede during 2010/2011 financial year when GSDM was awarded a clean audit report.

In appreciating a sterling job did by former Executive Mayor Alderman Andreas M. Gamede together with his former Council by getting a clean audit report, the current Acting Executive Councilor Tunu Agnes Mnisi presented the team with a certificate of appreciation.

The new building, which has become the talk of town because of its beauty, is admired by locals and people driving along the N17 and

Oosthuise Street. The building was built under Gamede's leadership. Acting Executive Mayor Councillor Tunu Agnes Mnisi appealed to business to build a better district together and also to assist in eradicating the high number of HIV/Aids cases.

"Mpumalanga is the second province after KwaZulu-Natal with the highest number of people living with HIV/Aids. But Gert Sibande District is number one in Mpumalanga province. Let us work together in eradicating this scourge and make sure that our kids do not roam the streets aimlessly," she said.

She said the business sector and the district must also work together in making sure Ermelo becomes a business hub and a tourist destination.

EBA President Athol Stark, who spoke on behalf of the Ermelo Business Association, said people need to acknowledge the work that is done by government. He said some people will always complain

about roads being damaged, and when government repairs the damaged roads, the same people will complain about being inconvenienced at the Stop and Go's . He also encouraged businesses to help the district in getting other clean audits.

Gert Sibande District Municipality is one of the few municipalities which got a clean audit in the financial year of 2010/2011. The gala dinner, which was attended by more than 200 guests, a huge success as only 150 had been expected. Some business people realized the potential and recommended that the Business Networking Dinner should happen more often.

The event sponsors were the Ermelo Business Association, Safika Oosthuizens, Blomme Vir Almaal, Highveld Conference Centre, SAB and Midway Bottle Store, Ozone Water, KFC, Calstar, Voorspoed Butchery, Game, Panarotti's and Pick n Pay, all of which are local businesses.