

Barberton's tourism office closes down

Marius Bakkes

BARBERTON - The local tourism information and marketing office has closed down, and all the staff has been retrenched. This includes the director, Astrid Christianson.

The tourism office in the centre of town, for many years a welcoming sight to the inquisitive visitor, has already been cleared and its assets put in storage.

The marketing office, which facilitated many events and media arrangements to keep the town and its activities under the attention of the South African and foreign tourism markets, has also closed down.

At the derelict council building in downtown Barberton that used to house the tourism information office, not much of

the information signage, an internationally known indication for worthy tourism information, is visible from the street. This is due to negligence of the premises which accommodate other departments of the council as well. The derelict, broken floor tiles and peeling paint which greeted many visitors was finally cleared this week due to a lack of funding.

Meanwhile, the City of Mbombela remains mum on the matter. The following media release from the board of Barberton Local Tourism was forwarded to the municipality for comment a week ago, though no reply has been received yet.

"Barberton Community Tourism (BCT) has exhausted all sources of financial support and retrenched all three staff members at the end of June.

"Despite occupying attractive municipal

offices in Barberton for the past 15 years, financial support from Umjindi Local Municipality was last provided in January 2013.

"Since that date, BCT has survived on grants provided by the Barberton Chamber of Business (BCoB) (four years) and Barberton Mines (one year).

"Residual funds will be used to pay appropriate retrenchment packages to the staff. "Barberton Tourism is a non-profit organisation that promotes the interests of tourism-related businesses in the Barberton/Umjindi area.

"It is a tourism marketing agency whose membership and functioning are also part of Kruger Lowveld Chamber of Business and Tourism.

"BCT's volunteer board of directors will remain functional and

will continue to seek alternative tourism marketing arrangements, including gaining support from the municipality.

"Phone and electronic contacts will remain functional, but the physical information office at the Victorian Tea Garden reverted to the municipality at the end of the month.

"The board chairman, Nathi Masango, said it regrets this unavoidable decision and thanks the BCoB and Barberton Mines for their support.

"Stands with pamphlets and literature of tourism operators and properties in Barberton, will be put up in the foyer of Barberton Museum. "The private tourism operator, Dusty Track in the historic Greenstone Life Style Centre, has offered to also serve some information and, with Christianson, to act on a marketing consultancy base where possible."

BCT has exhausted all sources of financial support and retrenched all three staff members at the end of June

BARBERTON TOURISM



Astrid Christianson at the derelict council building. Insert: Derelict, broken floor tiles and peeling paint which greeted many visitors was cleared this week.