

KLCBT's efforts praised as 'most impressive'

Stefan de Villiers

MBOMBELA - Kruger Lowveld Chamber of Business and Tourism's (KLCBT) president, Oupa Pilane, gave a thoughtful, sobering and rousing farewell speech at the chamber's annual general meeting last week.

The meeting, held at Bundu Lodge, was well attended. The programme was packed with feedback and information.

After a presentation of the annual financial statements, auditor Margaret Raubenheimer of A2A Kopano, gave an unqualified opinion and declared the organisation financially sound.

KLCBT COO, Linda Grimbeck, presented the operational report which was well received by the audience. Most members were surprised by the vast amount of work done by KLCBT with few resources.

Christopher Harvie from the Hazyview Chamber of Business and Tourism, commented that it is a most impressive organisation and it was an eye-opener to see just how much it does for tourists, particularly concerning infrastructure.

Pilane made his farewell speech as his two-year term will end when the next president is elected in July/August 2018.

He urged stakeholders to go through more trouble to include all communities in tourism work so that everyone understands the value of a tourist and so that more jobs are created.

"When the poor get hungry, they will eat the rich," Harvie, who is very involved with tourism in the Hazyview area, said. "That makes one think, doesn't it."

Pilane also suggested that, in the entire Mpumalanga, statistics seem to show that fewer than 500 000 people have matric. "If this is accurate, it amounts to fewer than 10 per cent of the people in the province having successfully completed education up to grade 12. Frightening. And no wonder there



Marinda Toerien, Jaqueline Weideman and Anita McGrarry.

is unrest," said Harvie.

"There is no doubt that Mpumalanga is one of South Africa's most attractive and top tourist destinations. The Lowveld-Ehlanzeni boasts of extraordinary beauty that can be matched by few regions in the world.

"Scenic mountains, panoramic passes, valleys, rivers, waterfalls and forests are simple characteristics the landscape of the Lowveld-Ehlanzeni. The iconic Kruger National Park adding another must-see offer

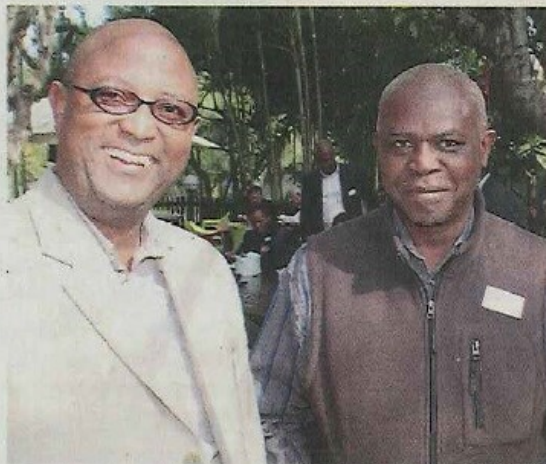
with its sanctuary of wildlife coupled with dozens of different species of birds and flora. The cherry on top is the tapestry of its indigenous cultures and the warmth of its people.

"However, if the region or district chooses to stay where it is currently, it will not only have an impact on the quality of life for residents but also negatively impact on inward investment opportunities in the economy. Currently we do not have

a workable plan that is inclusive of all stakeholders. Therefore, to realise its full potential in an increasingly competitive market, the Ehlanzeni District needs to reposition itself as a destination, but this will require a joined up approach and a significant change of culture," Harvie added.

"There is a need to create a common sense of purpose and strategic direction among private and public sector interests for an integrated management of Ehlanzeni as a tourism and investment destination.

"This will assist in governing its development, which requires integrative planning, meaning analysis of the destination, vision, goals, strategy formulation, operative plans, control and evaluation of both achieved and not achieved results with the intention of encouraging stakeholders to work together for the overall benefit of the visitor economy, increasing job opportunities for local residents, transformation of our economic sectors and developing facilities, infrastructure, services and events for visitors and residents to enjoy," Harvie concluded.



Nonhlanhla Themba and Meshak Nkosi.



Quintin Coetzer and Reinette Kerswill.



Oupa Pilane.