

A warm welcome for new KLCBT president

Bongekile Khumalo

MBOMBELA - Witnessed by some of the city's most distinguished individuals, Professor David Mabunda was inaugurated as the new president of the Kruger Lowveld Chamber of Business and Tourism (KLCBT).

The inauguration took place at Emnotweni Arena last Tuesday, and most members of the KLCBT gave Mabunda a warm welcome.

Mabunda, of Nselenduna Consulting, is Sandra Jacob's successor, and will be president for these next two years.

Steering the special occasion as the MC, Linda Grimbeek, the KLCBT's COO, announced the new board members and a new special portfolio. She said Mabunda was elected by the new board, which includes Johan Barnard, Ferdi Bijzet, Anne Briggs, Melissa Brockman, Eddie de Lange, Dr Norah Fakude-Nkuna, Denis Goffinet, Reyneck Khoza, Oscar Mthimkhulu, Oupa Pilane, Buyi Shongwe, Hugo Stroud, Sakkie van Rooyen, and then Jacobs and Mabunda.

She also announced Pilane as a special attaché for tourism development and transformation, and Hendrik Janse van Rensburg as a special attaché for skills development. "Deploying these members is an initiative implemented for the first time this year. These two are the ones who will be



Sandra Jacobs and Professor David Mabunda. > Photo: Hennie Homann

on the ground all the time, to tackle all that is required," Grimbeek said.

Mabunda said he would hit the ground running and be ready to put in the work. He said wanted to make an impact in the

community the KLCBT serves. "I have been a member of the KLCBT for a long time and implemented some successful projects. We need to create more spaces for growth for local businesses and youth development.

There are a number of key areas we need to look into that will bring our cities to an incredible state."

Some of the issues he outlined during his speech that he believes needed attention include safety and security at national parks, illegal dumping and the state of the road infrastructure.

The outgoing president, Jacobs, said she is passing the baton to Mabunda to continue with the race and implement successful projects, some of which are already in progress. "I was a president during a difficult time for businesses. However, we as the KLCBT created opportunities for growth, despite challenges. We formed successful relationships and private/public growth partnerships. We will continue to do so and show great support to my successor. I wish him all the best as the new president."

Pilane, the co-chairperson of the board committee of the South African Tourism Services Association, took to stage and welcomed Mabunda. "He was the perfect candidate for the presidential seat, and I believe he will do a magnificent job during his time. We are yet to witness more of his greatness from what he has started as a member of the KLCBT," he said.

Businesses need to think big in order to grow - David Mabunda

Irma Green

MBOMBELA - When Professor David Mabunda took to the podium to deliver his inaugural speech as the newly elected president of the KLCBT, a few moments of unease passed as the Ballyhoo! song, "Man on the moon", belted over the sound system.

He stood patiently and the audience were baffled until the music was turned down. His opening words explained it all.

"On July 20, 1969, Neil Armstrong took one giant leap for mankind when he became the first man to set foot on the moon from Apollo 11. It was the final step of an eight-year process that began when one leader with a bold idea lit the collective imagination of a 400 000-person-strong organisation called the National Aeronautics and Space Administration [NASA]."

It was President JF Kennedy's vision to send a man to the moon and return him safely to Earth.

Mabunda explained that in JFK's book, it was clarified that it was far more than a physical trip to the moon, but about advancing US science and superiority in space control and to overshadow Russia's launch of the Sputnik Space Programme in 1957.

In September 1962, JFK visited NASA's headquarters as part of an inspection tour,

and in the hallway he saw a man carrying a broom. The president stopped and introduced himself, and asked the man what he was doing.

"Well, Mr President, I'm helping put a man on the moon," he answered.

"To most people, the cleaner was just mopping the floors, but in a larger, more mythic story unfolding around him, he was making history," Mabunda explained.

He further elaborated that JFK had the ability to open a pathway between pragmatism and idealism, and said, "Here's the point: no matter how small or large your role is, you are contributing to the larger story unfolding in your life, your business and your country. When your entire team embraces that type of attitude and belief system, incredible things happen - they place a man on the moon."

Mabunda, who is an accomplished business leader and member of various boards of directors for leading companies, told the audience that in business terms, placing a man on the moon means growing your business to the highest level possible and contributing to the growth of the country's economy.

He did not shy away from the challenges the country was facing, which include multiple collapses of leadership and governance.

"We feel like we are on autopilot as we watch helplessly how things are falling apart. The road infrastructure is crumbling, copper cables are stolen, *izinyoka* [electricity cable thieves] are stealing our electricity with impunity, public amenities are vandalised, healthcare workers are being attacked in hospitals, the rail network

is being disrupted and lack of service delivery is hampering the normal functioning of our communities."

Mabunda said leaders have lost the compass of placing a man on the moon. Current policies and programmes

are not helping to create more jobs, and unemployed qualified graduates are without work. "Something drastic must happen to deal with the time bomb of youth unemployment before it is too late. If the current unemployment, lack of housing and business opportunities situation is allowed to fester, the Arab Spring experience will not be a far-fetched reality."

The state of towns, especially townships that are dirty and stinky with rubbish piling

up, should be addressed and cleaned up, he said.

The load-shedding crisis has made the cost of doing business astronomically high, and Mabunda raised the question: "The alternatives do not come cheap, so where does Joe Soap and Nyankwabe pluck the capital to flood a rooftop with a sizeable system of panels?"

The KLCBT is hard at work with role players to find a sustainable alternative energy solution for Mbombela.

He further said urban decay in Mbombela and Barberton should be strategically addressed through urban renewal programmes, like Mary Fitzgerald Square and the well-known Maboneng District of Johannesburg.

Mabunda stressed the importance of tourism development and told the audience Mpumalanga ranked second to the Western Cape in terms of international arrivals, but that the province lacked suitable and appropriate products on which tourists could spend their money.

The safety of tourists will continue to feature high on the KLCBT's agenda.

"I have two years to ventilate our vision to the rest of the business community. Let's do things differently and inspire our businesses, partners and investors to make history by attracting investment to the region. Let's all help place a man on the moon."

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