

# Friends keep Liesbeeck River pretty for 20 years

A group of individuals 20 years ago changed the course of the Liesbeeck River after the formation of the Friends of the Liesbeeck, under the auspices of the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA).

"Our founder members met with the intention of raising awareness of the value of the Liesbeeck River, with a long-term vision of a restored river and its surrounding environment," says secretary of the Friends group, Francine Becker.

The original committee members of this Friends group, which in time inspired similar groups for other rivers, were Peter Price, Bonita Bezuidenhout, Evan Duguid, Edward Tilanus and David Wheeler.

Ms Becker wants members of the public to help celebrate the group's 20th anniversary by contributing photos, stories, poems and newspaper clippings or anecdotes about the river or the Friends group.

"We want to set up a display on the anniversary of the founding meeting of the Friends of the Liesbeeck, Monday November 28 – so all contributions should come in."

"The first activities of the Friends involved river walks and talks, some for historical interest and others for bird watching and gaining a general understanding of the river."

"Today our main activities have

broadened to include collaboration with universities and other research institutions, but we still provide information by means of guided river walks, newsletters, campaigns and exhibitions, and river signage," says Ms Becker.

"We lobby and network for best management practice of all rivers, and as our contribution, run the Liesbeeck Maintenance Project."

The group organises activities and audited clean-ups on the river, usually with the help of students and interns and is concerned about pollution, litter and dumping, alien vegetation and erosion, illegal extraction and damming, canalisation and channelisation as well as inappropriate development, flooding and the rehabilitation of the river and its surrounds.

The group believes that rivers are invaluable assets in urban settlements as they function as stormwater catchments while at the same time serving as green spaces for recreation, enjoyment and wildlife habitat.

"However, urban rivers are being degraded by erosion and silt deposits, pollution from stormwater runoff and industry, loss of habitat from development and engineering, and litter accumulation," Ms Becker says.

This has been recognised by the City of Cape Town in the launch of the integrated catchment management plan in mem-



■ The Liesbeeck River has been protected and promoted by the Friends of the Liesbeeck for 20 years.

ory of Professor Kader Asmal, former Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry. "The proposed intervention addresses an urgent need to improve fresh water ecosystem health and functions, and is a welcome expansion of the work already being done by the Friends of the Liesbeeck and other Friends groups," says Ms Becker.

Despite many threats and its expansive urban back drop, the Liesbeeck remains the cleanest urban river in Cape Town and probably all of South Africa, Ms Becker says.

"Although impacted by urban-

isation, it still retains many natural features and displays numerous qualities that often exemplify much larger rivers."

When there is heavy rainfall, rapid torrents flow from the steep slopes of Table Mountain through Window, Skeleton and Protea gorges, then slow over the foothills near Kirstenbosch, and finally, through a series of canalised and non-canalised sections, the river reaches the confluence of the Black River, nine kilometres from its headwaters.

The Friends' main project is the Liesbeeck maintenance project (LMP). "This aims to ensure a litter-free Liesbeeck and a well-maintained river trail through a process that creates jobs and develops skills, improves safety, reduces anti-social behaviour and encourages sound environmental practices," Ms Becker says.

The LMP team removes litter, cuts back overgrown vegetation, weeds, sweeps the walkway and removes graffiti.

City departments provide support

by mowing and removing all waste collected as well responding to incidents of pollution reported by the Friends.

"Besides these tasks, the team has planted and watered numerous trees and groundcover and already some of these have propagated themselves, proving that the work being done is sustainable," Ms Becker says.

The committee attributed their 20-year success to a number of fundamental tenets which they adhere to. These include:

Learning from others, making the river accessible, having a dedicated project team and partnering with City officials and councillors and getting the City to help in projects.

Building capacity and expertise and finding innovative solutions to challenges, and creating awareness. "Exploring other uses of green spaces and how to manage them sustainably has been equally important," she says.

"We would like to honour past committee members and ask that if you were a committee member or know of someone who was active in Friends in the past, post a message to: [www.fol.org.za](http://www.fol.org.za) or call me at 021 671 5385," Ms Becker says.

You can email: [secretary@fol.org.za](mailto:secretary@fol.org.za) or snail mail: FoL, PO Box 333, Rondebosch.

● Information supplied by The Friends of the Liesbeeck.

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## PUBLIC MEETING: TRAFFIC ISSUES IN WALMER ESTATE, UNIVERSITY ESTATE AND WOODSTOCK

A public meeting will be held to allow citizens and municipal officials to engage on traffic issues affecting the suburbs of Walmer Estate, University Estate and Woodstock. Information relating to the issues will be presented along with alternative solutions to the problems experienced by residents of these suburbs. Opportunity will be given for inputs by citizens and responses by officials.

Date: Tuesday 8 November 2011  
Venue: Council Chamber, Cape Town Civic Centre,  
Hertzog Boulevard, Cape Town  
Time: 17:30 to 19:00

For parking, please RSVP to Yvette Coetzee on tel 021 400 1384.  
For other enquiries, please contact  
Sean Glass on tel 021 812 4409.

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