

# Celebrating the magic of books

BERYL EICHENBERGER

Project Manager, Mother City Book Festival

The Mother City Book Festival from 30 August to 4 September 2005, offered a wide range of events for book lovers and featured more than 75 speakers over the six days. More than 2 000 people took advantage of the abundance of activities that celebrated the written word.

Having spread its wings following the success of the inaugural Celebrate Women Book Festival of 2004, the event was no longer gender specific but adamant about the need to showcase South African talent. The theme *Escape with a good read...* dwelt on the use of imagination that reading and story-telling offers and the involvement of top South African authors, poets and publishers offered the public a taste of what is available. In association with the Victoria & Alfred (V&A) Waterfront venues in and around this popular venue were used as well as around the Peninsula. Objectives were to engender a culture of reading with both children and adults, showcase our South African talent, offer opportunities for the public to interact with writers and explore the



Escape with a good read.

the Premier has in the project that Member of Executive Council (MEC) Richard Dyantyi came in his place and read the Premier's prepared speech with passion and integrity.

'South Africa is experiencing a renaissance of the arts. With the end of apartheid, writers and artists of all kinds seem to have lost the inhibitions that came from oppression and are now writing more fiction, biography and history than ever before,' he said.

'The enormous value of this festival is that it is multifaceted. It opens its arms to readers of all ages, it is committed to opening new windows in the lives of people who are reluctant or struggle to read. It brings us real writers to meet and encourages schools to promote a culture of reading,' he concluded.

Derick van der Merwe, managing director of the V&A Waterfront and a major sponsor of the initiative further reinforced the vital role that reading plays in a person's life. He recounted the Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) project that is one of the Waterfront staff projects and the joy that is experienced when someone has learnt to read and sees the world opening up to them: 'Nothing can compensate for that reaction', he said, 'we have seen the faces of our staff light up as they painstakingly read some words and from then on realise how different their lives have become!'

And so the week began. With more than 40 events on the programme and a wide variety of subjects explored, the several components of the festival were well received. Publishers and authors embraced the project with passion and expertise, with a line up of some of the best that South Africa has to offer.

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world of writing, offer schoolchildren creative story-telling workshops and to raise funds for Love to Read.

The opening event at the Nedbank Board of Executives (BoE) Auditorium at the Clock Tower gave guests a taste of the direction of the festival and featured story-telling as the vital link that gave children the love of stories and using their imagination, thus creating a desire to read and explore the world contained in books. Poetry, in each of the three major languages of the Cape, showed the audience what rich talent we have on our doorstep and how this genre has gained in popularity.

Keynote speaker Premier Ebrahim Rasool was taken ill before the event but it is a measure of the belief that



Finuala Dowling, Gabeba Baderoon and Natalie Becker at the kick-off breakfast of the Mother City Book Festival

'The most significant message to come out of the festival was the realisation that Cape Town is overflowing with published and budding writers and that we have a responsibility to affirm this talent,' said Beryl Eichenberger, project manager of the Festival.

'The generosity of the South African authors who use this event as a platform to further promote local literature means we are seeing a definite shift to the enjoyment and understanding of our literary landscape. It appears that we are indeed in the middle of a renaissance and that Cape Town has all the elements contributing to a vibrant literary hub.

'It was enormously encouraging to see the interest we had from the public in our writing skills and publishing workshops. With each of these events we wanted to bring the subjects to the consumer in an informative, lively and understandable way and we were able to achieve this,' Eichenberger said.

Library visits were an important addition to the programme and including the communities whilst not wanting to marginalize them, was seen as a major focus. Several top authors including Rayda Jacobs, Henrietta Rose-Innes, Chris van Wyk and Barbara Erasmus, visited libraries on the Friday morning and these were very well attended in the areas of Khayelitsha, Bonteheuwel, Fish Hoek and Delft - enormously encouraging for the authors and the librarians. This is an area of growth and although the organisers feel strongly that it is vital for people of all communities to interact on neutral ground it is realised that poverty restricts movement. However, with improved sponsorship in the future, it would be envisaged that more people from communities can be transported to the hub of the Festival. The David Graaff Foundation made the library visits possible.

Another major development was the Nedbank Clock Tower Auditorium programme which was generously sponsored by Nedbank, allowing for more than half the events to be free to the public. Forming the core of the Festival the presentations included interviews with authors as well as workshops and panel discussions. The most successful of the workshops held were self-publishing, publishing on demand, submitting a book to publishers, writing skills for business, book cover design and the performance poetry.

The breakfasts, lunches and early evening events were held at restaurants and provided the guests with a relaxed environment in which to listen to authors and ask questions. The costs may have prohibited a wider audience, however; this component certainly has appeal and could possibly be improved upon by restricting these paid events to the launch of new works by very popular writers. Finnuala Dowling, Rustim Kozain, Hamilton Wende, Anne Schuster, Chris van Wyk, Rayda Jacobs and Pat Cavendish O'Neill were amongst the authors presented.

Special free events for children, sponsored by Amalgamated Banks of South Africa (ABSA), took place in the Blue Shed at the V&A Waterfront. The Love to Read programme offered story-telling in Afrikaans, English and Xhosa in a delightful programme. Authors and illustrators Niki Daly, Barbara Kovik and Marquerite van Heerden presented workshops where kids could allow their creativity to run wild!

Writing workshops covered the subjects of business, fact and fiction and a three-day course was run by author, doctor and lecturer Dawn Garisch, which explored the relationship between mind and body to create wonderful literary pieces. Dorian Haarhoff hosted 'Once upon a...' and proved that anyone can create a story. The writing process gave authors Susan Mann, Ken Barris, Henrietta Rose-Innes and Consuelo Roland great subject for discussion whilst Mandy Lebides' workshop on business principles was an unqualified success, being fully booked.

'The future of this event looks bright, however; local and national organisations need to become more involved and recognise how important local literature is in forming a solid foundation for reading. It is with this familiarity that we should be able to build a reading nation.' Concluded Eichenberger; 'We hope to continue this success by finding new elements that will encourage a love of reading and allow all communities to interact using the written word as the catalyst.'

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Lucille Greeff recites an Afrikaans poem at the opening



Children enjoy the love of reading at the ABSA Children's Book Festival



Story-telling at the Craft Market