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Ayanda Matthews leaves a legacy of love and humanity



Few people who know the powerhouse that is Ayanda Matthews can picture her as a stay-at-home mom.

But for five years, the woman who is synonymous with Rand Aid Association stayed home to raise her first two children.

Even after retiring on November 30 following more than 35 years at Rand Aid, it is hard to imagine her settling into a quiet, homebound life. Asked how long she'd last into retirement without starting a project, she says: "One month."

Which is just as well, because she has a bucket list and is determined to tick off as many adventures as possible, with a visit to the ancient Inca city of Machu Picchu in Peru at the top.

Apart from travelling as much as she can, she plans to get involved in family businesses, take up photography, join a dance group, garden and look after her 'beloved grandson'.

A force of nature

With her sparkling eyes, energy and can-do attitude, Ayanda has inspired countless colleagues, staff members and Rand Aid residents. She has an unusual ability to relate to people from all walks of life and, after years in HR and labour relations, believes that 'every one of us has something of value to offer'.

That nurturing side stands in stark contrast to the saying she is best known for: "Go suck a lemon."

She firmly believes in rolling with the punches and getting over things – but she is equally known for her wicked sense of humour. So if Ayanda ever told you to suck a lemon, you could be fairly sure it was either said with a smile or intended as a gentle reminder that life's complexities call for a bit of tenacity and perseverance.

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Ron Smith Care Centre resident turns 104

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Turn to page 3 for an update on Rand Aid's performance, plans for the future and what they mean for residents.

A life impacted by a forward-thinking grandfather

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The phrase 'larger than life' may be a cliché, but it applies to Ayanda.

When Rae Brown, who was Rand Aid CEO for almost 15 years until his death in 2019, walked in on his first day, he was met with a sight he would never forget. It was the then-accountant's birthday, and Ayanda stood proudly on his desk, belting out *Happy Birthday*. "In typical Rae fashion, he just stood there shaking his head," recalls Ayanda.

People who left their mark

Rae left a lasting impact on Ayanda. "It didn't matter what station in life you were at, Rae respected you," she says.

He was one of five CEOs Ayanda worked with during her Rand Aid career.

Other people who inspired her include a cardiologist who was a client in Rand Aid's substance use disorder centre; Amanda Diener, a fellow Exco member who has 'passion and unlimited reserves in doing her job'; and the late Esme Erasmus, who joined Rand Aid in the same year as Ayanda.

"There was still a tangible black and white divide; however, she welcomed me as a fellow professional and bent over backwards whenever there was any unfair treatment meted out to me. Over the years, we became family."

A career born from circumstance

Ayanda's own arrival at Rand Aid was almost accidental. She had left the labour ward at Baragwanath Hospital in September 1991, at the height of the HIV epidemic. Many women arrived to give birth without having had prenatal HIV tests. At the time, it was common practice for these women to be left unattended during labour, but Ayanda's conscience would not allow her to do that.

"I opted to leave without any job prospects," she says.



Ayanda Matthews.

Her husband saw an opportunity to turn the unexpected break into a holiday, and the couple went to Port St Johns. When they returned, a note waited under their door, asking her to report to Matron Myles at Rand Aid Association.

On October 7, 1991, Ayanda arrived to meet the matron. "She hired me there and then."

Her decision to become a nurse had its own deep roots. Her grandmother was a nurse who later became a teacher, while her mother was also a nurse. But the stories her grandmother told about her own experiences as a patient ultimately drew Ayanda to the profession. Her grandmother lost nine babies, with only Ayanda's mother surviving. Some were stillborn and others died shortly after birth.

"She never spoke of how she felt at losing her babies but would always relate how she was treated by each midwife who assisted her during delivery. Some were not pretty stories and I vowed that if I were ever in a position to have the responsibility of someone's life in my hands, I would do all in my power to be positively present."

Ready when opportunity came

Ayanda started at Rand Aid as a professional nurse, but it was not long before she moved into management. She was ambitious, she says, and Rand Aid gave her opportunities to turn that ambition into action.

"I quickly enrolled for a business management diploma as I could see the opportunities and had to be ready when the time came."

She believes that drive was planted long before she entered the workplace. "I come from a family of achievers and I married a man who was wise and driven himself."

Her grandfather, Abednigo Jafta, was particularly influential. "He was a man before his time. He positively reinforced hard work, reaping what you sow and success against all odds being the only path to a life worth living."

At a time when girls were largely groomed for motherhood and marriage, her grandfather asked Ayanda a different question: "What is the goal?"

A changing Rand Aid

Mirroring South African society, Ayanda says Rand Aid has changed enormously since she joined the organisation in 1991 – three years before South Africa became a democracy. "Salaries were based on colour then," she recalls.

The change has extended beyond employment practices. "Back then, care centres for older people were very hospital-like. The shift towards person-centred, relationship-focused care has been huge. We have realised that Rand Aid is not a retirement village or a frail care centre to our residents – it is their home. We don't prescribe the care our residents need; we work with them towards a common goal, finding out what matters to each person and supporting them to live the life they want."

What Ayanda leaves behind

When asked what she hopes to leave behind at Rand Aid, she says: "Love and humanness."

Those who have worked with her would probably add a few more words. Ayanda says the traits her colleagues would recognise most readily are respect for others, sharing knowledge, reliability and keeping confidences. Perhaps surprisingly for someone with such formidable energy, she values inner peace. "I am at peace with the world, no matter what storms are raging."

If she could give the Ayanda who walked through the gates of Wedge Gardens in 1991 one piece of advice, it would be simple. "Patience. Rome was not built in one day."

When asked what she would take with her into retirement if she could choose just one thing, she knows exactly what she would choose. "A promise, preferably written, that every person who walks through our gates will be treated as a human being."

TO OUR RAND AID FAMILY, MAY THE FESTIVE SEASON BRING JOY, CONNECTION AND PEACE, AND MAY THE NEW YEAR BRING RENEWED HOPE.



Rand Aid's Men's Shed: Craftsmanship and camaraderie

Established in 2019, the George Green Men's Shed provides Rand Aid residents with a well-equipped 200m² workshop where they can pursue DIY projects, collaborate on community initiatives and share skills in a relaxed, social setting – without worrying about space constraints or disturbing neighbours. The shed is at the central services complex at SANCA Wedge Gardens Treatment Centre in Whitney Gardens. "Like most men's sheds worldwide, the facility is available to us rent-free. However, it is subject to certain conditions: it is for the exclusive use of village residents, and all work must be for personal needs or those of fellow residents," says Sheddie Diego Sella. The shed is open to all residents. Pictured: Gordon Roberts and Kevin Doherty. For more information, contact Diego on 082 652 5311.

Rand Aid takes stock and looks to the future

What does the future of Rand Aid look like, and what does it mean for residents? These were some of the questions discussed at Rand Aid's information meeting on November 11.

Instead of holding a traditional AGM, Rand Aid Association used the opportunity to give residents a broader update on how the organisation is doing, what it has achieved so far this year and where it is heading next.

Rand Aid CEO Gert Coetzee said the change was made to ensure residents received information that was directly relevant to them.

"This year, we reported on last year's annual financial statements, but we also gave an update on Rand Aid's performance year to date, both financially and operationally. We also shared the strategies and goals, both long- and short-term. The floor was opened to residents to ask questions," says Gert.

How are the villages and care centres doing?

Our independent living villages are all on track against year-to-date (YTD) budgets. Thornhill Manor, however, has experienced a rate increase that is higher than budgeted. Rand Aid has lodged an objection and appeal with the council. Exco, in conjunction with the village committee, has put measures in place to mitigate the impact on levies going forward.



Rand Aid CEO Gert Coetzee.

Looking ahead

Rand Aid's strategic goals for 2026/27 include setting up a Supportive Living Department, reducing the shortfalls at care centres, repurposing the Levy Stabilisation Fund, limiting the amount allocated for benevolent activities, strengthening the organisation's marketing and developing an Assisted Living offering.

As for our care centres, we are heading in the right direction. However, the level of internal subsidies required by Thembalami and the Max Ordman Deaf Association remains a concern, and the Board has made a deliberate decision to actively work on plans to reduce the demand on the Trust. Rand Aid remains committed to keeping its services sustainable while continuing to meet residents' needs.

Keeping the villages running

A great deal of work happens behind the scenes to keep Rand Aid's properties and services running smoothly.

The Central Services workshop completed dozens of upgrades across the villages and care centres this year, including 34 at Ron Smith Care Centre, 30 at Tarentaal Village, 11 at Elphin Lodge, eight at Inyoni Creek, and six at Thornhill Manor.

The laundry has processed 88 641kg of washing YTD – another reminder of just how much happens behind the scenes every day.

Investing in Rand Aid's future

The Rand Aid Welfare Development Trust also continues to play an important role in supporting the organisation.

YTD, the Trust recorded sales of R45.9 million and investment income of R17.9 million. It paid R1.39 million in transition levies and transferred R13 million to Rand Aid for benevolent support.

Capital projects are also underway, including R3 million for water back-up at Elphin and Ron Smith, R2.33 million for capital improvements and infrastructure maintenance, and R4.1 million for refurbishments.

After careful consideration, Rand Aid has decided not to proceed with the proposed Glendower development.

A new approach to the Levy Stabilisation Fund

One key change discussed was the repurposing of the Levy Stabilisation Fund.

Under the new approach, independent villages will no longer be responsible for capital expenditure. The Trust will take responsibility for preventive infrastructure maintenance, while money historically allocated to the Levy Stabilisation Fund will be used for capital expenditure and preventive maintenance.

Any surplus or shortfall will be ring-fenced for the individual village and used for its benefit.

A new maintenance matrix will also clearly set out who is responsible for different types of maintenance – whether this is the Trust, the village or the resident.



Some of the Rand Aid team at the open day.

A closer look at retirement living and care

People nearing retirement or seeking care for a loved one could see firsthand what Rand Aid Association offers at its open day on October 17.

Visitors toured the retirement villages and care centres, spoke to staff and saw the level of care provided, while also getting a feel for the strong sense of community across Rand Aid's properties.

"Our open day gave people the opportunity to see that retirement living does not have to mean giving up your independence," says Rand Aid CEO Gert Coetzee. "For people looking for a lock-and-go lifestyle, our villages offer security, support and a community of active people, while taking away much of the maintenance and responsibility that comes with owning a home."

For families considering care for an older loved one, the open day also offered an opportunity to meet the people behind Rand Aid's relational-care approach and learn more about the emotional and practical aspects of moving into residential care.

"Our care centres are about much more than providing accommodation and care," says Gert. "We understand that moving a loved one into care can be an emotional decision for the whole family. Our teams are there to answer questions, explain the options and help families understand what life in one of our care centres can look like."

A century of caring

Founded in 1903, Rand Aid initially supported vulnerable people in Johannesburg. Over the past century, its services have evolved to meet the changing needs of older people and the wider community.

Rand Aid opened its first home for frail older women in 1918, followed by Cransley House for women pensioners in 1924 and Jordan House in 1927. Further expansion saw Bramley House and cottages established in 1960 and Helen House for frail care in 1961.

The organisation later developed Tarentaal, Elphin Lodge, Thornhill Manor, and Inyoni Creek retirement villages, as well as the Ron Smith and Thembalami care centres.

The RA Welfare Development Trust was established in 1997 to strengthen funding for Rand Aid initiatives.

Support as needs change

One of Rand Aid's strengths is its ability to provide different levels of support as people's needs change.

Independent-living residents benefit from extensive security infrastructure, including 62 security guards, specialised technicians, electrified perimeter fencing and continuous control-room camera surveillance.

Residents can also access a 24-hour care phone service via panic buttons, SMS or direct phone calls for urgent medical assistance and maintenance support. Supportive living home-based care and on-site psychosocial support services further help residents remain independent for as long as possible.

When residents need more support, Rand Aid's care centres provide services tailored to individual needs. These include memory care, ongoing physical care, respite care for families and day-care services.

Thembalami Care Centre deputy manager Elize Raath says one open day visitor, an 82-year-old nurse, arrived with her son and explored the care centre from top to bottom, including the gardens.

"She was so impressed that she told her son Thembalami was where she wanted to come should she need care," says Elize.



Michelle Matsolo, the social worker at Inyoni Creek retirement village, takes two guests on a tour during the Rand Aid open day.

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RAND AID OPEN DAY

■ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

"It was wonderful to see someone who was still working and independent recognising that Thembalami could be the right place for her when her needs changed."

Visitors were particularly impressed by the sensory stimulation and occupational therapy room, where staff demonstrated how the facility supports residents' well-being and engagement.

At Thornhill Manor, village manager Shaun Victor says feedback from the village committee members who assisted with the open day was overwhelmingly positive.

"Visitors were very impressed with Thornhill," says Shaun. "They commented on the grounds and gardens, but also on the general feel of the village and the sense of community."

More than retirement and care

Rand Aid's services extend beyond retirement living and residential care. The organisation also operates Wedge Gardens Treatment Centre, which provides specialised support for men with substance use disorders through private and government-subsidised programmes.

The treatment centre offers safe, 24-hour monitored detoxification, inpatient treatment and halfway-house services, with full board and lodging. A multidisciplinary team supports its holistic approach, including a clinical psychologist, social workers, medical and nursing practitioners and a spiritual therapist.

If you couldn't attend the open day but would like to learn more, Rand Aid can arrange individual tours of its retirement villages and care facilities.

Call Erica at 011 882 2510 or 010 100 3656.

Help is just a button away

A fall, a burst geyser or a car breakdown can turn an ordinary day into an emergency. For Rand Aid residents, help is just a button press away.

Rand Aid's 24-hour call centre at Ron Smith Care Centre provides a central point of contact for medical, maintenance and security-related emergencies across its retirement villages.

Each residential unit has a cellular-enabled panic button, small enough to carry on a lanyard. It has a microphone and speaker, allowing the call centre operator to speak directly to the resident.

When a button is pressed, the operator can immediately see the resident's details and location on a map and attempts to establish contact. If there is no response, the resident's cellphone is called and, if necessary, a nursing sister or security personnel is sent to the unit.

"The call centre gives our residents the reassurance that someone is always looking out for them," says Hennie Mostert, Rand Aid's technical manager.

> ***"The important thing is that our residents know we have their backs when they need us.***

The GPS tracking capability can also be useful when a resident is away from the village. Hennie recalls an occasion when a resident accidentally activated her panic button inside her handbag while visiting the Pilanesberg National Park. She could not hear the button ringing, but the call centre was able to track its location and contact the lodge where she was staying.



Nomasonto Maseko and Dineo Mofokeng at work in the call centre.

Calls are roughly evenly divided between maintenance issues – such as burst geysers, stuck doors and power failures – and medical needs, ranging from requesting a nurse to treating a wound or responding to a fall. The village sister assesses medical emergencies during the day, while the nurse on call responds at night, over weekends and on public holidays. An ambulance is arranged when necessary.

Ulricka Beukman, manager of Ron Smith Care Centre, says the call centre operates around the clock, with two staff members on duty during the day and one at night.

Going the extra mile

Former care phone operator and current Elphin Lodge/Ron Smith Care Centre receptionist Zodwa Mthombeni has seen how the system can make a difference well beyond the village gates.

A Tarentaal resident once pressed her panic button after her car broke down at a busy intersection on the way to Greenstone Shopping Centre. Her son was in Pretoria and she did not know who else to call.

Zodwa established that the resident was safely locked inside the vehicle, confirmed that she had car insurance and contacted the insurer. The car was towed back to the village.

"She was so appreciative," says Zodwa, who worked at the call centre from 2013 to 2017 and again from 2018 until her move to the reception desk in 2025.

On another occasion, a resident fell at a shopping centre and used her panic button. Zodwa contacted the centre's security team and arranged for an ambulance to assist her.

For Zodwa, these experiences underline why residents should not dismiss the panic button as something they will never need.

"Knowing that help is available at the press of a button gives residents a sense of security, especially those who live alone. They don't have to find a number and make a call – they just press the button," she says.

Residents are encouraged to test their buttons at least once a month, both to ensure they are working and to become familiar with the process.

"The important thing is that our residents know we have their backs when they need us," says Hennie. "It is a service we are very proud of."

Your story could reassure other residents about the support available to them and highlight the people who are always ready to help.

THROUGH THE CAMERA *LENS*



Linda Didcott (front), who came up with the idea for an Austrian-themed day at Elphin Lodge, with her sister, Wendy Martin. The event, at Elphino's on October 27, transported residents to the Alps with Austrian music, apple strudel and cream, and festive red-and-white decorations.



Ron Smith Care Centre care partner China Matsane and resident Ethelwynne van Eck join in the Heritage Day celebrations on September 25. The day featured colourful cultural attire, isiZulu, Xitsonga and Sepedi dancing, an interactive drumming session with Drum Café, live music and a traditional braaied lunch followed by peppermint crisp tart.



Thornhill Manor residents Graham Barnes and Tim Lord welcome a happy customer at the village's Family Fun Day and Fête on October 10. The event drew a record number of outside stalls, offering visitors everything from handmade toys, jewellery and plants to boerewors rolls, pancakes, cakes and Italian biscotti.



Rudi van Niekerk provided live music and entertainment.

BELOW:
Keith Fraser, Gavin Standing, Mary Barnes, Joanne Jourdan, Heidie Beyers and Marion Smith at the curry and rice stand.



Residents of the Max Ordman Deaf Association (MODA) at Thembalami Care Centre enjoyed a Pancake Friday on October 9. The residents joined volunteer Kirsten Rodrigues, occupational therapy assistant Peggy Kupa and Thembalami manager Esme van der Walt in preparing pancakes, from mixing the batter and cooking to choosing their favourite toppings. Kirsten volunteers at MODA every Friday while studying psychology. She says she has always had a passion for working with both older people and the deaf community. As part of her commitment to the community, Kirsten is learning South African Sign Language and has done a few basic sessions with our staff. Pictured are (front): Gail Lester and Cecilia Röttcher, and (back): Annette Verskin, Shaun White, Sidney le Sueur, Kirsten Rodrigues and Pieter van der Westhuizen.



THROUGH THE CAMERA *LENS*



Fouche Raath, son of Thembalami Care Centre deputy manager Elize Raath, and MODA resident Barry Waldeck enjoy a festive family day at the end of October. The gathering brought residents, families and friends together under the lapa for boerewors rolls, cake, hot and cold drinks, and an afternoon of good food and conversation.



Give Mimmo Spagnuolo a few scraps of timber and some time, and he can turn them into something remarkable. At 80, the Tarentaal Village resident continues to create intricate miniature buildings, houses, wagons and other structures using off-cuts, dowel sticks and whatever else he can find. A qualified jeweller with an eye for detail, Mimmo can spend up to six months on a model – and is always eager to start the next one.



Ron Smith Care Centre resident Ria Milburn and care partner Susan Esbend entertain the audience with a lively guitar performance and rendition of Daar kom die Alabama during the centre's first Got Talent competition on October 23. The event brought staff and residents together for a morning of music, dancing, poetry, comedy and plenty of unexpected talent, with the REC Team taking first place.



The admin team's synchronised swimmers: Simoné Botha, Nadine Radford, Leanie Bessinger, Karabo Matlaletsa, Boniswa Sithole, Tanya Switala.



Tarentaal Village residents Anna Horn and Joanne Horne enjoy the annual Heritage Day braai on September 25. Residents gathered for wors rolls, cold drinks and ice cream, while traditional dancing by Tarentaal's general assistants in colourful cultural attire added to the celebrations.



LEFT: Residents committee member David Picton.



Malcom Jaros enjoys Tarentaal Village's combined Heritage Day celebration and September birthday bash on September 25. The event featured energetic traditional dancing by the visiting Indoni Cultural Group, a friendly dance competition between staff teams, and a lunch of boerewors, chicken and pap and sous, followed by live music from Ilana Jooste.



Thembalami resident Mario Agostinho enjoys a morning of Lego, puzzles, colouring and outdoor activities during a visit to Willowbrook Montessori Preschool in Edenvale on November 11. Residents and children spent time playing and learning together before sharing tea, coffee and tarts.



LEFT: Robert Webster enjoys some intergenerational fun.



Neil Munro (82), with this Parkrun Alphabet Challenge Flag, achieved in Sabie on October 3.

82-year-old parkrunner finally finds the missing letter Y

For most people, a Saturday morning parkrun means turning up, completing 5km and perhaps stopping for coffee. For Neil Munro, it has meant nine years of chasing letters across four countries.

The 82-year-old Inyoni Creek resident completed his parkrun alphabet on October 3 at the York Timbers parkrun in Sabie, finally collecting the elusive letter Y.

The parkrun alphabet challenge requires participants to complete events beginning with every letter of the alphabet except X – 25 letters in all. Some are easy to collect, while others require considerably more planning.

Neil has now completed 310 parkruns at 139 locations, including 122 in South Africa, 15 in the UK and two in Namibia.

The missing Y had been particularly stubborn. "There was no Y in South Africa until York Timbers launched in Sabie on August 22," he says.

York Timbers was a fitting place to complete the challenge, with its scenic setting making it one of Neil's most memorable parkruns. Others have taken him much further afield. For his 80th birthday, he skipped the traditional party and flew to Namibia with friends to complete the Walvis Bay and Swakopmund parkruns. Trips to visit his daughter in England have also doubled as opportunities to fill gaps in his alphabet, including the Queen Elizabeth parkrun for the elusive Q and Bushy Park in London, where parkrun began 22 years ago.

"Saturday parkrun is like a ritual," he says.

The man now clocking up parkruns once struggled to walk. He had both knees replaced in 2010 after years of pain, poor mobility and a crooked leg.

"The surgery was a success and I am fully mobile again," he says.

When Neil registered for parkrun in 2017, his barcode number was in the three millions. Today, newly registered barcodes worldwide have reached more than 12 million, he says, a growth he believes demonstrates just how far the movement has come.

What occupational therapy really means for older adults

Sometimes occupational therapy (OT) looks like relearning how to walk. Other times, it's picking up a crochet hook, joining a music session or discovering that something you thought you'd lost is still within reach.

For World Occupational Therapy Day on October 27, under this year's theme 'Participation matters', Rand Aid's occupational therapy team shared some of the lessons and little victories that have shown them why participation can make such a difference to residents' lives.



RSCC recreation assistant Sanele Ndlovu with resident Rhona Burnham.

At Thembalami Care Centre, occupational therapist Tsakani Shihlomule remembers a resident who had sustained a spinal injury and was unable to sit independently when they first met. She spent much of her time in bed and could not walk, but was determined to participate in her rehabilitation.

Through regular exercises, encouragement and support, she gradually grew stronger. What began as small improvements eventually saw her progress from being unable to sit or walk to being able to walk indoors.

"For me, it was a reminder that rehabilitation is not always about achieving a big change overnight," Tsakani says. "Sometimes, it is about celebrating every small step."

Small victories

At Ron Smith Care Centre (RSCC), occupational therapist Simoné Botha says OT's value often shows up when residents get the chance to try something they, and perhaps those around them, thought they could no longer do.

"Sometimes they manage to do it independently, with a little assistance or with the help of an assistive device," Botha says. "The outcome itself may seem small, but the impact can be huge."

"For me, that is where OT really matters. It's about creating opportunities for people to discover that they can still do more than they thought possible – or maybe just do it differently."

Her colleague, Karabo Matlaletsa, says residents have changed how she thinks about ageing.

"They have taught me that ageing is not a bad thing or something to be feared," Karabo says. She has witnessed residents navigate physical, cognitive and life changes with resilience while maintaining their dignity and sense of humour.

Lucia Nkuna, who is also a recreation assistant at RSCC, says painting, music and other activities can help residents manage anxiety and loneliness, while giving them an opportunity to connect with things they have enjoyed throughout their lives.



Thembalami Care Centre OT Tsakani Shihlomule.

"Participating in these tasks reminds them that they still have life, even if they cannot have their previous big space around them," Lucia says.

Sometimes, participation starts with getting someone out of their room. RSCC recreation assistant Evelyn Shilubane noticed that one resident regularly stayed in her room. When Evelyn mentioned that she knitted and crocheted, the resident immediately became excited about learning to crochet. That small conversation has since grown into a weekly knitting and crochet club held every Tuesday in the different wings. "It is great to see the joy and excitement it brings," Evelyn says.

For Rand Aid's OT team, these stories illustrate what 'Participation matters' means in practice. It is about helping people stay connected to the activities, relationships, and abilities that give their days meaning.



The winning indigenous/waterwise garden (self-designed), belonging to Sylvia Sinclair.



The winning indigenous garden (designed by a landscaper), belonging to Paul and Margie Clark.

RIGHT: Margie Clark (winner: Indigenous, professionally designed), Vicky Keenan (Thornhill Manor Garden Club), Enid Dixon (winner: Roses and mixed beds, self-designed) and Sylvia Sinclair (winner: Indigenous/waterwise, self-designed).

Thornhill Manor gardens bloom with creativity

"What beautiful gardens your village has!" exclaimed one of the judges at Thornhill Manor's recent garden competition, capturing the panel's admiration.

The competition, organised by the Thornhill Manor Garden Club, showcased the talent and dedication of residents who take pride in beautifying their surroundings.

Twenty-one residents entered the competition, which Michelle Woodrow and Barbara Davison of Gardens of the Golden City, and Kathy Munro of the Johannesburg Heritage Foundation, judged on October 17. All three judges were impressed by the gardens' standard and variety. The prize-giving was held on October 29.

The competition recognised excellence in four categories, with the winners being:

- Indigenous/waterwise, self-designed: Sylvia Sinclair.
- Indigenous, professionally designed: Paul and Margie Clark.
- Roses and mixed beds, self-designed: Enid Dixon.
- Roses and mixed beds, professionally designed: Pam Gross.
- Spot prizes were also awarded to Robbie Vermont, Ingrid Behnke, June Robinson, Lorraine Blount, Moira Simonsen, Terry and Barbara Riley, Brian and Dawn Burls, Helen Hundermark and Olwyn Kushner.

Vicky Keenan of the Thornhill Manor Garden Club thanked everyone who helped make the competition a success, including Wendy Wright of Green Scene and Joanne Jourdan, who hosted the judges on the day. She also thanked the judges and the residents who entered and shared their gardens.

"The competition is one of the initiatives through which Vicky has breathed new life into the garden club. With her trademark enthusiasm and creativity, she has developed an engaging programme of interesting talks, outings and hands-on gardening activities, attracting a growing membership," says Thornhill Manor manager Shaun Victor.



RON SMITH CARE CENTRE RESIDENT TURNS 104

Ron Smith Care Centre resident Isobel Kohll turned 104 on November 13, surrounded by staff and fellow residents who gathered to mark the milestone.

Known for her cheerful nature and ability to find pleasure in life's small things, Isobel was her 'usual sparkling self' at the celebration. "As is her style, she added flair and joy to the celebration," says occupational therapy and recreation manager Simoné Botha. "She continues to inspire everyone around her."

Sr Leigh Kotze wished Isobel a happy birthday, saying it was a privilege to know her and celebrate such a significant milestone with her.



Isobel Kohll (104).

Born in Boksburg North, Isobel married Raymond in 1947. The couple lived in Zimbabwe and South Africa and raised two sons, Malcolm and Jeffrey.

A talented actress and dancer, Isobel became a dedicated teacher of speech and drama, and her love of the arts enriched countless lives.

Her adventurous spirit also took her around the world. Because Isobel always wanted to travel, she worked at a travel agency to get discounted tickets and visit many destinations.

She continued exploring new interests well into later life, taking up painting in her 90s and becoming known as a formidable Scrabble player.

Isobel spent more than 21 years at Rand Aid's Elphin Lodge retirement village before moving to Ron Smith Care Centre in March 2024. The care centre is situated on the same expansive property.

COMINGS, GOINGS & STAFF HAPPENINGS

Expect the unexpected: Sam keeps Rand Aid moving

If Sam Ncube could plan his working day, he probably would. The problem is that his plans rarely survive the first maintenance call.

"I wake with day plans every morning and then suddenly find myself running around all over between villages and centres every day, chasing after sudden faults and problems," he says with a smile.

That unpredictability is all part of the job for Rand Aid Association's maintenance, health and safety manager, a role Sam took up on July 1. Fixing a broken component or responding to an unexpected fault may be the most visible part of his job, but Sam's work goes beyond keeping things running. It helps create the environment Rand Aid residents need to enjoy a carefree lifestyle.

Sam oversees maintenance across Rand Aid's portfolio, from planning and scheduling preventative maintenance to ensuring that faults, breakdowns and other reactive maintenance issues are attended to.

"One part of my role is managing occupational health and safety, which some stakeholders view as a role for exposing others," he says. "Yet the role is meant for providing them and others with protection against safety risks and injuries."

As Rand Aid's appointed Section 16(2) health and safety representative, Sam also helps the CEO fulfil responsibilities under the Occupational Health and Safety Act. This includes managing significant risks, monitoring compliance and reporting health and safety performance and non-compliance to the executive committee.



Sam Ncube, Rand Aid Association's maintenance, health and safety manager.

His approach to the role is shaped by more than two decades of experience in facilities management, security and operations. He has worked in facilities roles for organisations including Johnson Controls Facilities Management, Momentum Metropolitan, Media24, Anova Health Institute and FNB.

That experience has given him a broad understanding of what it takes to keep complex environments functioning – but Rand Aid has added a new dimension to his career. "I am learning a lot of things that are new in my career, and the environment is exposing me to change in career and life," he says.

He has also built on his practical experience with formal studies, including an MBA and postgraduate qualification in project management, as well as qualifications in facilities management and occupational health and safety. He is currently studying towards an Advanced Diploma in Facilities Management.

Being part of the Rand Aid team

He describes Rand Aid as a purpose-driven organisation with a long-term commitment to service. "Every management decision, including the decision about the management of maintenance, health and safety, has huge potential in contributing to residents' well-being and quality of life," he says.

Since joining the organisation, he has been struck by the long-standing relationships between Rand Aid, its residents, families, employees and service providers, with some people contributing to the organisation for decades.

"I view Rand Aid as a people-centred working environment," he says, referring to the collaboration and support he has experienced from colleagues across the organisation, as well as residents and service providers.

Sam lives in Roodepoort, with his wife and their four children – three daughters and a seven-year-old son. Away from work, he enjoys spending time with his family, shopping and attending church services.

While his days at Rand Aid may rarely go to plan, Sam seems to have found the right mindset for the job. "Expect the unexpected, solve the problem and keep things moving."

Inyoni Creek employee goes the extra mile to gain plumbing skills

Timothy Mapheto's determination to build a future in plumbing has already paid off, with new skills giving the Inyoni Creek maintenance assistant the confidence to tackle work he previously would not have attempted.

Timothy, who has worked at Rand Aid since March 2018, completed a plumbing diploma through the Ekurhuleni Artisans and Skills Training Centre after years of trying to overcome various obstacles to obtaining a formal plumbing qualification.

Timothy's day-to-day maintenance work at Inyoni Creek had exposed him to a considerable amount of plumbing, sparking his desire to deepen his knowledge and invest in his future.

He had completed other courses over the years and repeatedly tried to pursue a plumbing qualification, but various stumbling blocks – including the Covid-19 pandemic – delayed his plans.

When the opportunity arose this year, he was determined not to let it pass.

The course ran from July 20 to September 2 and covered six modules. Although Timothy did not pass one module on his first attempt, he immediately enrolled to repeat it, taking additional leave to attend the training. He subsequently passed his final module and will receive his certificate in due course.

His commitment was evident even before the course began. While village manager Jenny Tonkin was seeking approval from head office for possible financial assistance, Timothy explained that he had already enrolled and paid the full course fee himself. When he was told he might not have enough leave available, he was prepared to take unpaid leave to complete the training.

"His response showed clear determination to complete the course and a commendable willingness to invest in his own growth," Jenny says.



Timothy Mapheto and Jenny Tonkin.

Amanda Diener, Rand Aid GM of commercial and compliance, praised his 'commitment, initiative and dedication to improve oneself'.

Timothy lives in Rand Aid staff housing with his wife and their two children.

COMINGS, GOINGS & STAFF HAPPENINGS



Simon Moagi with the gift he received from the Elphin Lodge residents committee in recognition of completing his first Comrades. He is pictured with village manager Debbie Beech and Shirley Cosser, chairperson of the village's residents committee.

Simon's first Comrades earns special recognition

When Elphin Lodge security guard Simon Moagi saw resident Malcolm Livingstone running, he decided to give it a try. This year, the 60-year-old has completed his first Comrades Marathon and secured his number for next year's centenary race.

Simon, who has worked for Rand Aid for 18 years, started running after Covid and joined the Orlando Athletics Club four years ago. He had always been active, previously playing soccer as a striker before spending about 10 years singing baritone with the Meadowlands Gospel Choir.

Today, he runs about 75km a week, increasing that to 75km to 90km when preparing for major races. He typically runs 25km to 30km at a time.

Simon ran the 2024 City-to-City Marathon alongside Malcolm and describes him and fellow Elphin Lodge resident Jeff Solomon as his mentors. His younger sister, who lives with him in Braam Fischerville, is also his biggest supporter.

Simon qualified for this year's Comrades by completing the Balwin Marathon in 4:30 and finished his first Comrades in 10:48.

With about 24 000 runners taking part, he admits he was scared during the race but also excited. When he crossed the finish line, he laughed and said he thought he was dreaming.

"I enjoy the endurance. It keeps me busy," he says, adding that he particularly enjoys running with others and meeting new people.

He is already looking ahead, with plans to run the Two Oceans next year and the Comrades centenary race.

Asked what running has taught him about life, Simon has a simple answer: "Patience like a crocodile."

New Thornhill Manor village sister brings a lifetime of caring experience

Lynn Hinde's return to nursing has brought her to Thornhill Manor at a time when her own family's experiences with ageing and dementia have given her a deeper understanding of care, compassion and independence.

She became Thornhill Manor's village sister in mid-August and says her experiences as both a mother and daughter have prepared her unexpectedly well for the role.

A career shaped by care

Born in the UK and raised in Springs, Lynn began her nursing career in 1985, enrolling in a three-year general nursing course at Johannesburg General Hospital, now Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital.

She spent about 10 years at the hospital, working in a medical ward and eventually becoming a charge sister. She later completed a midwifery course before returning to medical nursing.

After leaving Johannesburg General in 1994, Lynn spent about two years at Linksfield Clinic before stepping away from nursing to raise her three sons.

Her time as a mother brought another dimension to her understanding of care. Her eldest son, Josh, was diagnosed with special needs at about two and was eventually placed in residential care, where he benefits from being among his peers.

The experience gave Lynn empathy for families faced with difficult decisions about caring for a loved one.

Her own family recently faced a similar decision. Her father has dementia and, about three months ago, the family decided to place him in care. "It's a big decision for a family," she says. "Having gone through that myself, it is invaluable to be working in this environment."

Back to nursing

After several years away from nursing, Lynn returned to the healthcare environment in 2018, working part-time at an intravenous therapy clinic for about four years.

With her children now grown, she decided it was time to return to the workplace, and her first weeks at Thornhill have confirmed that she made the right decision. "The residents are lovely. They have given me such a warm welcome," she says.

"In Western culture, I don't think we honour our aged as we should," she says. "You often see people patronising older people, who have so much value to add."

She points to a 97-year-old Thornhill resident who still drives, hosts dinner parties and is exceptionally sharp as an example of how much life can continue to offer in later years.

"As much as I give, I get back from the village residents," she says.

Staying connected

For Lynn, ageing well means continuing to do the things that give life purpose, while allowing yourself time to rest.

"Don't become isolated," she says. "Keep going, but let yourself rest too. Give yourself permission to read a book, take the time off and appreciate the time to just be."

The sense of community at Thornhill is one of the things she values most, particularly for residents who have outlived a partner. At the same time, she is conscious that independent living means respecting residents' autonomy.

Lynn, who turns 60 this year, believes ageing should be approached with respect rather than fear.

Outside work, she enjoys reading, cooking, walking and pottering around at home. She also practises yoga, which she taught for a time.



Lynn Hinde, the new village sister at Thornhill Manor.

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There's always something happening across Rand Aid – and we want our wider Rand Aid family to know about it.

Please **follow Rand Aid Association's Facebook page** and regularly like, share or comment on posts. Your support helps us reach more people and showcase the good work happening across Rand Aid.

We also encourage everyone to join **Rand Aid's WhatsApp channel** for news and updates.

HOW TO JOIN:

1. Open your phone's camera.
2. Point it at the QR code.
3. Tap the link that appears.
4. Tap 'Follow'.

It's that simple!

Scan for WhatsApp

Downsize once: Plan your retirement move early

Time passes in the blink of an eye. One minute your children are little, the next they have children of their own. Your skin is unlined, then suddenly you look in the mirror and see crow's feet, laugh lines and what looks like a permanent frown.

In your 50s, retirement may seem far away, but before you know it, you may want to downsize to a home with less maintenance and more security.

But before selling up and moving into a smaller sectional-title or freestanding property, it is worth thinking about where you ultimately want to live in retirement.

Moving twice can be an expensive exercise

"Downsizing is often seen as simply moving into a smaller home, but if your ultimate destination is a retirement village, moving into another property first could mean paying the costs of buying and moving twice," says Rand Aid Association CEO Gert Coetzee.

Buying a property involves more than the purchase price. Depending on the property and transaction, you may face transfer duty, conveyancing, and other costs, as well as the expense and inconvenience of moving.

There are also less obvious costs of setting up a new home, from curtains and other fittings to adapting the property to your needs.

"If you downsize in your 50s and then decide five years later that you would rather move into a retirement village, you could end up going through the whole process again," says Gert.

Retirement villages aren't simply smaller homes. Many are lifestyle estates, offering security, social opportunities, communal facilities and, depending on the village, access to different levels of care.

If you know a retirement village is likely to be your long-term destination, moving there when you are ready may make more sense than downsizing twice.

JOIN THE QUEUE BEFORE YOU NEED TO MOVE

If you are 60 or older, a retirement lifestyle estate, with the perks of security and a lock-up-and-go lifestyle, may seem like your ideal next home.

But waiting until you need to move could mean missing out on your preferred village.

"The reality is that too many people forget how quickly time passes and, often, when they are ready to make the move, they find themselves at the bottom of a long waiting list," says Gert.

Waiting lists for popular retirement villages in South Africa can range from two to five years, and can stretch to 10 years or more in high-demand villages in regions such as Gauteng and the Western Cape.

If you wait until you need to downsize or move closer to care, you may find your preferred retirement village no longer has space available.

"Planning gives you the luxury of choosing where you want to live, rather than settling for what is available," he says.

Gert advises people to start thinking about where they want to live when they retire, or approach retirement, while they are still in their 50s, and to join a waiting list by at least age 55.

"Registering early gives you priority access, and if a unit becomes available before you are ready to move in, most villages allow you to defer your turn and stay near the top of the list until you are ready to move."

While many retirement villages charge a waiting-list deposit, they typically deduct this amount from the purchase price or security deposit when you move in.

"It is a small price to pay for the peace of mind it buys you," says Gert.



Thornhill Manor celebrated its dedicated care partners with a morning of gratitude on October 30, following International Day of Care and Support. The gathering recognised the commitment they bring to supporting older residents, including providing companionship and emotional support. Each care partner received a handmade bookmark created by resident Vicky Keenan as a token of appreciation. Music, singing, dancing, tea and cake added to the celebration. Pictured are care partners Virginia Mokomane, Lerato Ntwampe, Innocent Maluleke and Theodorah Mothapo, with resident Eunice Harris.