



“AS WE CELEBRATE WOMEN’S MONTH LET US REMEMBER THE POOR, THE MARGINALISED AND ABUSED WOMEN IN OUR COMMUNITIES”

– eThekweni Mayor, Cllr Obed Mlaba

GCINA AND THE ZULU HEROINES

News Page 4



R150m loan for uShaka

SIYABONGA MAPHUMULO

THE municipality's Executive Committee (Exco) has agreed to grant uShaka Marine World a R150-million loan. The beachfront theme park, which opened its doors three years ago, requested the loan from the city to make up for a revenue shortfall.

A report to the committee states that the park's attendance figures had been falling, which had hit profits.

The report said the "operating loss is further exacerbated once interest and depreciation are taken into account."

This had resulted in the theme park not being able to repay a R150-million loan it had taken with Citibank and the Development Bank of South Africa.

City Manager Michael Sutcliffe told Exco that while uShaka had run at a loss for the first few years, this trend was not uncommon when compared with attendance figures of other international marine parks.

"We can say we made some mistakes (in estimations) but the footfall (attendance) is not that phenomenal compared with other theme parks in the world.

"The Gold Coast in Australia had a 100% footfall in year one, ours is just 35%," said Sutcliffe.

Attendance figures for uShaka since 2004 hover just above one million.

The report states uShaka could not be simply dis-

missed as a loss making entity as it had played a pivotal role in regenerating the Point area.

The report also said that one of the park's largest expenses was footing the bill of the South African Association for Marine Biological Research (SAAMBR).

As a Section 21 company, SAAMBR does not generate profit and thus relies on uShaka for its funding.

DA caucus leader Cllr John Steenhuisen said while his party had no problem with the Council bailing out the theme park, a few adjustments would have to be made.

He cited accessibility or the lack thereof as one of the hindering factors for visitors to the area.

"The area has not been developed to its maximum capacity, there is a run-around in terms of access and we also need to address crime and grime," he said.

Mayor Obed Mlaba said while it was true uShaka had incurred some loss, "the project was not a money spinning one but a developmental initiative.

"This is an educational and recreational facility and we will use the year two and three projections to better plan for the future," he said.

The committee agreed to give an annual R19-million grant-in-aid to SAAMBR for its operational costs commencing in the 2007/2008 financial year.

This is in line with the Municipal Financial Management Act, which allows municipalities to give grants to Section 21 organisations.

MaphumuloSiya@durban.gov.za



BIN THERE, DONE THAT

COUNCIL Speaker James Nxumalo helps out with a clean up at Clermont's KK Hostels as part of a series of events organised for Public Service Week. The week, which ends today, was organised by the city's Batho Pele office. See page 5

Picture: THEMBA KHUMALO

City wins UN award for debt plan

KEN MCHUNU

BARELY a year since eThekweni received the ZK Matthews and Govan Mbeki awards for service delivery, the city's Water Services unit has added another piece of silverware to the mayor's cabinet.

This time the recognition is global: The unit has won a United Nations Public Service Award for their debt relief scheme, in the category of improved service delivery.

Neil McLeod, Head of eThekweni Water, said the

debt relief scheme responded to the growing water debt problem and the realisation that many poor customers were not paying for water.

He said the scheme released poor consumers from debt through an interest-free settlement over 20 months.

He said: "More than 43 000 customers have signed up for the scheme."

McLeod said the total debt translated to nearly R400-million and the "debt write-off has now amounted to more than R50-million".

He said consumers were

expected to pay their current accounts in full, on time and in return a percentage of their arrears would be written off monthly. Time was added when a customer failed to meet the deadline and the contract was terminated after three non-payments.

"This gives poor families a way out of their predicament and converts them from non-paying customers to paying customers," he said.

So far R37-million had been repaid.

The UN's Fifth Public Service Awards were held in

Vienna in June. It promotes excellent provision of services in the public sector.

eThekweni Water was among 14 other entities from 200 countries that were short-listed for the award.

The unit's Teddy Gounden received the award on behalf of the municipality.

McLeod this week handed the award over to Deputy Mayor Logie Naidoo.

Naidoo said: "The award shows our depth as a city and our constant effort to make a better life for our citizens."

MchunuK@durban.gov.za

May I say a few words, Mr Mayor?

SIYABONGA MAPHUMULO

ETHEKWINI officials are usually quick to extol the virtues of the city and hold it up as a model for its counterparts elsewhere in the country to emulate.

But at a recent council executive committee meeting, it was to best practice in Johannesburg that Mayor Obed Mlaba turned for guidance.

DA caucus leader Cllr John Steenhuisen had just finished expounding in detail on the merits of a

R150-million loan to uShaka Marine World, when Mlaba suggested if Steenhuisen did not keep his comments brief and to the point, he (Mlaba) would seriously consider consulting the Jo'burg Metro.

The City of Gold's council has introduced a rule drastically limiting the time opposition councillors may speak, based on their number of seats.

With tongue apparently in cheek, Mlaba promised to consult Johannesburg Metro Speaker Nkele

Ntingane on the matter.

Mlaba's light-hearted threat seemed to have the desired effect for later in the meeting when Steenhuisen asked to speak he first said: "And I shall try to limit my comment to exactly four seconds Mr Mayor."

A tongue-tired Mlaba provided more humour in the meeting when he let slip a malapropism.

"Let us not shoot from the whip regarding the (uShaka) issue," quothed the mayor.

He later corrected himself: "Rather, let's not shoot

from the hip," he said.

After the meeting, when it came to Madiba's belated birthday celebrations, City Manager Michael Sutcliffe saw an opportunity to tease the opposition.

"Come on John (Steenhuisen) have a slice, we all know you've always wanted a piece of the ANC," said Sutcliffe.

He was referring to the birthday cake that was decorated with both the South African and ANC flags.

MaphumuloSiya@durban.gov.za