

FROM THE PORCH

The start-of-term newsletter from the Director of Boarding at Maritzburg College



Saturday, 25 November 2017

Good afternoon, everyone

The long-awaited break-up weekend is now upon us, and I hope that you and your boys enjoy a long, happy and restful holiday together. Thank you for the ongoing support that you have shown not just your boys of course but the BE itself, and I wish you and your families a happy festive period.

I have put together an annual report of sorts for the BE – which makes for a rather wordy newsletter. It's not exactly Ernest Hemingway, but here goes...

Annual goals

At the start of 2017, a number of goals were set for the BE for the year, including the successful implementation of Project Jimeloyo (relating to the construction of a new boarding house affixed to the old Shepstone's), assisting the marketing department in the promotion of the BE, ensuring that the BE fee increase for 2018 remained more or less in line with CPI, the rolling out of a worthwhile mentoring programme, continuing the fight against drugs (that universal scourge), and carrying out regular inspections and visits of boarding houses and staff quarters. By the end of 2017, all these aims were either met outright or progress was made towards achieving them.

Traditions and privileges

The one issue that tended to overshadow the latter half of the year was the, dare I say it, controversy relating to traditions and privileges. Although some changes to College's traditions system were made at the end of 2014, a number of boarders were determined to continue as if these changes had never taken place, only to find themselves in some trouble this year. The steps taken by the BE caused, at times, unhappiness and the



The "Boarder of the Month for November" was the strapping Head Prefect for 2018, **N Mchunu** (*third left, above*). Following his success for coming first in Form 5, as announced at prize-giving yesterday, the "Boarder of the Month for December" is **C Holloway**, the Head of Clark's for 2018 (*far right, above*). A hearty "Congratulations!" goes to you, Cameron, not only for your academic success announced yesterday, but for your full-blooded commitment to whatever you do – well done! The other boys in the photo above, with the headmaster Mr Luman, are the other Deputy Head Prefects: **J Campbell**, **R Stainbank** (also Head of Nathan's) and **R Zeelie**.

reality is that by the end of the year the morale in the BE had taken a dip. I was very aware of this, as were the housemasters, and steps were taken at the end of the year in an effort to ensure that staff and boys – and, indeed, parents – engaged with each other on the subject and that there was better communication between all the parties. Notably, a boarders' representative council of learners (RCL) was introduced at the end of 2017, and it is hoped that a number of the communications-related problems that emerged this year will be avoided from 2018 onwards.

A makeover for Hudson's

Further attention was paid to the condition of the boarding houses in 2017, especially Hudson's, corners of which had become rather unappealing. The nub is that Hudson's enjoyed a renovation of its entrance hall, masters' study, TV room and living areas, and dormitories, which certainly made it lighter and more attractive.

Progress with Shepstone's

Much to the great relief of many, the construction of the new Shepstone's commenced in October, after what seemed like an endless number of false dawns. The benefits of an increased BE will continue to flow in January 2018, when the first batch of Form 4 boys will take up residence in the old dwelling, until the new boarding house itself is completed at the end of July. At the end of 2017, we were also delighted to be able to announce that the housemaster and deputy housemaster respectively of Shepstone's will be Messrs R Kyle and R Chirengende, and we all wish them well in their roles (see below).

A recent strategic purchase

Another exciting development with the future in mind was the purchase in September of the corner property at 40 College Road, which meant that additional dwellings will in due course be made available to staff. Accordingly, the BE staff compliment for 2018 will increase from 39 to 42, which can only add to the offering that the BE is able to make to the boys and their parents.

BE mentoring

I have to admit that the system of mentoring in the BE shuffled along for much of 2017, but obtained fresh impetus when at mid-year Mr Emerson in Hudson's began experimenting with the holding of mentoring braais at his house. This was enormously successful, and I salute the initiative shown by Mr Emerson and his staff. A similar programme will be encouraged throughout the BE in 2018, as well as the holding of calendarised mentoring sessions each term, dealing with topical issues like privileges, drugs, bullying etc.

Boarder Parents' Committee

It was a real comfort and pleasure to in 2017 work alongside Mr Guy McGladdery, the chairman of the boarder parents' committee (BPC), who was a source of support and strength throughout the year. My thanks go to Guy and his committee for the sterling work that they did throughout the year, even though the discussions held were often robust and provided the housemasters and me with extra homework! Certainly the role that they play is an



College's Sportsman of the Year in both 2016 and 2017 was the ever-versatile **B Sherwood**, who played SA Schools' hockey and was a star performer with bat and ball for the First XI cricket. He ended his cricketing career at College in great style, scoring 100* runs off the last ball of the College innings, in the big win over the Amalekytes of St Charles. Well done, Brad!

important one, as they continue to be the conduit between the BE staff and the parents and, generally, to represent the interests of the BE parents.

Staffing 2017

On the staffing front, a number of changes were made at the start of the year. Sr Lauren Richmond joined the sanatorium staff and soon settled into her role at College and formed a key part of that important team. The other newcomers at the start of the year were Messrs Steve Botha (a most welcome returnee, after time spent in the Middle East), Brandon Swart and Ryan Kyle (other welcome returnees, after brief stints on the South Coast and in the Cape, respectively), Richard Moolman (who returned after a brief sojourn overseas), Sanele Ngema (a former attorney-in-training, who “saw the light”), Lukas Booysen, Scelo Zuma, and my old classmate, Dave Pryke. World-class paddler Mr Brandon van der Walt joined the boarding team midway through the year and slotted in smoothly. Sadly, at the end of the year we bade farewell to Messrs Ruan Lombard, Gavin Jelley, Robin Jones and Mario Baptista – we wish them well as they forge new paths for themselves.

Staffing 2018

The new staff joining the BE at the start of 2018 are:

- **Dylan Coombes** (*photo right*), who is a current SA men’s hockey player and has considerable experience, having coached the First XIs at Parktown, Jeppe and St Stithian’s. He will take over as the Director of Hockey.
- **Jason Greeff**, the school’s bemusclcd biokineticist who is well known to many of us already.
- **Sheldon Bosch**, an Old Collegian judo international (don’t mess with him!) who will be doing duty in Clark’s, alongside his brother-in-law, Mr Barbour.
- **Anthony Sparrow**, who brings vast experience from Wynberg Boys’ High School in Cape Town and will be teaching EGD.
- **Ngcebo Thembela**, who joined the academic staff of his old school at the start of 2017 and has already shown himself to be a passionate, dedicated teacher. A member of the MCOBA executive committee, he is shown in the *photo below* leading out other senior Old Collegians, at the 2017 Induction Ceremony.
- **KG Shezi**, another Old Collegian, who will be continuing his duties in the school’s sports department.
- **Chris Nevay**, who comes to us from Selborne College,



where he was coach of that school's high-riding First XI cricket side (*photo right*).

- **Ryan Toombs**, the youngest of the bunch, who matriculated from College in 2015, worked as a boarder master at Merchiston in 2017 and is employed in the IT department.

An unchanged foundation

As is apparent from the above, there was in 2017 again a relooking and improving of certain thing in the BE. But what was not changed, and this must be stressed, were the great foundations of the BE and the school. Again and again, the staff continued to emphasise to the boys the truly great, often unique, aspects of a Maritzburg College education – the powerful mix of striving for excellence across all endeavours and the emphasis on team spirit and group participation; this coupled with the virtues of a traditional education that caters for all types of boy; a shared collective philosophy that is innovative and forward-looking, yet paradoxically also acutely aware of tradition and heritage. Despite various misconceptions, what did not change in 2017 was the overriding striving towards a school that fosters a strong sense of identity and belonging, and is one that is geared (hopefully) towards making young men who after school are ready to make their marks in a dynamic, challenging environment.

A final tribute

While progress was one of the hallmarks of the year, for much of the time it was of course “business as usual” in the BE, as the boys each day went about their school-time, sports duties, prep (*like the boys in Clark's, below*) etc. I pay tribute to the boys for just “cracking on” with things over the course of the year, and of course to the BE staff, who worked hard in the interest of the BE.



My thanks

I salute the four housemasters and the 35 resident staff for all that they did in 2017 for the College boarders. I in particular also thank the good ladies in the sanatorium, the admissions staff, Mr Ken Hackland and his Estates Department, as well as Mrs Heather Lawson and her catering staff. We continue to look to the future with quiet confidence.

Meet the new leaders of Shepstone's

The BE is delighted to be able to announce that the new housemaster of Shepstone's will be passionate Old Collegian, **Mr Ryan Kyle**. The son of Peter and Heather (nee Walsh), Ryan is a born-and-bred south coaster, having been born in Port Shepstone in 1982. He matriculated from College in 1999 and comes from a rather famous College clan. His brother Brett finished at College in 2001, but there has been a whole HOST of Kyles to attend College over a number of generations. Ryan has especially fond memories of the 1st XV rugby tour to New Zealand of 2000 and of being a College boarder – he did a post-matric in 2000 so that he could participate in the millennial tour to the fabled Land of the Long White Cloud. Not surprisingly, for someone who represented the 1st XV on the wing and was a notable athlete, Ryan comes from well-known athletic stock and his father, who matriculated at College in 1974, still holds the 100m record – set on a grass track with a time of 10.6 seconds. Ryan is married to Myrlin and they have two children, Ella-Mae (5) and Brogan (3). Interestingly, Ryan is through his family connections related to the Thompsons and the Hoatsons, both of whom are also formidable College tribes. Ryan is also the 1st XV coach at College, is a dyed-in-the-wool “College man”, and has an enviable standing amongst the boys. His philosophy for Shepstone's is to create legacy so that Shepstone's is the first choice for boys leaving Nathan's at the end of Form 2. He says that the most important attributes for a housemaster are commitment and the building and maintaining of relationships.



Working immediately beneath Ryan will be the strapping, ever-popular Zimbabwean, **Mr Ricky Chirengende**, who has been appointed the deputy housemaster of Shepstone's and will be managing the house for the first seven months of the year, as he will be living in the old dwelling with 28 Form 4 “pioneers”. Ricky was born in 1989 in Chiredzi in Zimbabwe and enjoyed an upbringing in Harare, having attended Watershed College in Marondera, where he was a prefect and the captain of the 1st XV. His parents are Ricky and Elizabeth and they are retirees, living in Marondera. Ricky, notably, captained the Zimbabwean U21 rugby team, and was a stalwart of the local Impi rugby team at the University of KZN. His desire, too, is that Shepstone's becomes the house of choice for boys and that it becomes one of the flagships of the boarding establishment.



We wish both men all of the very best as they take up their command from January 2018 onwards, when the first batch of 28 Shepstone's boys in Form 4 will move into the old dwelling that for many years was school sick bay. There, Mr Chirengende will be the hands-on manager of the boys, who will have with them three prefects under the leadership of the head of house, N Radebe.

The building of the new Shepstone's: update:

On 17 November, Mr Ken Hackland was with barely contained excitement able to announce that the slab for the ground floor had been laid. Despite the recent rains, building has continued seven days a week and is currently ahead of schedule.

The new boarding house itself is expected to be completed at the end of the 2nd term of 2018, upon which more boys will be allocated to the house.

We wish all associated with Shepstone's a long and happy association with the house, and we look forward to the exciting developments to be kicked off at the start of 2018.



Communication, disagreement and debate

I have already discussed in great detail in my most recent issue of *From the Porch* the issue of traditions and privileges, and briefly referred to it again above. Another issue that in the last two weeks of the year generated similar emotion and comment was that relating to dorm allocations specifically for the Form 4 boys, as for 2018 we reintroduced the practice of allocating the dorms ourselves, on a rotation basis. I'd just like to reassure the parents of the boys involved that the two housemasters and I had for some time been faced with some past problems regarding dorms, that we discussed those problems over some months, weighed up the to's and fro's and collectively made a call, based on our professional opinion and our own best interest for the BE. It certainly was not a decision that we made lightly, and was one based on the best interests of the BE.



As with so many things, we, the BE staff, had to juggle a number of priorities and interest groups, but still had to make a call, based on our own knowledge of things.

But this decision – to an extent echoing the debate around privileges and traditions earlier in the year – generated further well-intended opinion and advice, as well as criticism.

I do think that there is a bigger issue at play, which we (the housemasters and I) face every day of every week. And it doesn't matter if it's about privileges and traditions, dorm allocations, closed weekends, Games-room, bolts, special leave etc. – we regularly have to engage in a very steady stream of explanation, justification etc. for the decisions that we make. That task has this year especially been a very big part of my job.

I stress that this engagement on important issues is not necessarily a bad thing – it is after all a by-product of a modern, inter-connected world – but it certainly does make the running of a modern boarding house or a BE a massive, time-consuming exercise in correspondence, justification, argument and debate!

To try and resolve this issue – and try and instil and reinforce confidence in the decision-making by the BE leadership on *some* issues – will certainly be a challenge for us for the new year.

The inaugural boarders' RCL was elected in the penultimate week of 2017. Under the chairmanship of **R Stainbank** (*back row, centre*), the committee will meet regularly with me from January 2018 onwards. Also on the committee are the members of the 2018 Elliott House committee under S Elliott as well as the head prefect, N Mchunu (not pictured)

Important dates for the start of 2018:

- 13 January: *New Form 2 boarders arrive*
- 15 January: *Borver Week starts*
- 16 January: *All other boarders to have returned by 19h00*
- 17 January: *Term 1 starts*
- 19-21 January: *Closed weekend for all boarders*
- 16-18 February: *Free weekend / Meeting of the BPC*
- 10 March: *Final weekend of summer sport fixtures*
- 17 March: *Winter sports fixtures commence – against St Charles (H)*
- 21 March: *Public holiday – Human Rights Day. The boarders will remain “in”.*
- 24 March: *Rugby and hockey vs Glenwood (H)*
- 28 March: *Term 1 ends*

Closure

Have a great Christmas holiday everyone, and thank you for your support, encouragement and general input throughout the year.

Matthew



A sentimental picture to end on off on, from the 2017 Induction Ceremony: outgoing Head Prefect, Ross Williamson, signs his pledge certificate on the back of his father, Selby.