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THE JOHANNESBURG ATTORNEYS' ASSOCIATION

REPORT BY CHAIRPERSON ON ACTIVITIES OF JAA

SEPTEMBER 2022

To all of our valued members who could be with us today, I thank you. The success of the JAA depends on our members and your participation in making a difference, not only to the JAA, but to the legal profession as a whole.

Many of the challenges that our profession faced in 2021 has flowed over into the current year, Covid and its effects being the most obvious. I am glad to see that we are getting to a position of normalcy again regarding in-person court appearances, but we can all safely assume that virtual court proceedings are here to stay – something some embrace and others not.

The "digitisation" of court processes have come to the fore in its strongest application this year. The Caselines system, rolled out in the Gauteng Division of the High Court, and its transition into the Court Online portal has proven as much ground-breaking and revolutionary as it has been challenging. It has revolutionised how we conduct our businesses as legal practitioners and importantly the necessity of being computer literate legal practitioners, up to speed with all the innovations in this regard. The JAA has been working actively and indeed very closely with the Judiciary in easing the teething-problems that come with change and we have been encouraging all our members to take advantage of any training that is available for our new normal.

Inasmuch as the JAA lauds the revolutions sweeping through our profession, some advents have had a significant impact on the JAA's ability to earn revenue. Historically, our main revenue stream was the income earned at our offices. Digitisation has completely devastated this income-stream.

Nonetheless the JAA is constantly reconfiguring the very way in which we do business and are adapting our business model to ensure that we not only stay relevant but particularly to ensure that we remain financially viable.

Over the last 18 months we have been hard at work to ensure that we offer real and tangible value to our members in this, the new normal. We have (as you may already know) laid on some new products such as our Courtonline/Caselines helpdesk and our digital file upliftment at the High Court.

We are working with several partners to look into new ways of bringing tangible value to our members. You may have already seen how we have negotiated discounts for members on several initiatives that have taken place to date. We aim to continuously offer this 2-tiered pricing model to members so that over a course of a year, these offers greatly offset the annual membership fee.

In terms of our financial sustainability we owe a lot of gratitude to our treasurer, Katherine Gascoigne in steering this ship through these turbulent seas. She will go into our finances at the appropriate juncture during this AGM.

We are embarking on various initiatives such as revamping our website and are very excited about the various initiatives that the JAA has embarked on during this year, which is mentioned in more detail in this report.

We are excited that, for example, our Student Chapter has proven to be a valuable asset to our profession, with the students assisting in filing of the documents at the High court and Magistrates Court. The students who attended at the Magistrates court were offered a tour of the court afterwards as a show of thanks and interacting with them has shown us the enthusiasm of the forthcoming candidates.

The JAA is a constituent member of the GAA (The Gauteng Attorneys' Association), which is a constituent member of the LSSA (Law Society of South Africa – it is the Gauteng Independent Association). We liaise with PAA, GAA, NADEL, LSSA, PIPLA, SAWLA, LPIIF, sheriffs, the judiciary, Masters Office, Deeds Office, and various other associations on a daily basis. We hope in the future to strengthen relations with other professional organizations. We are doing all that we can to maintain and form stronger networks of professional relationships across the board.

That being said, the JAA committee members cannot magically solve the problems of the world on their own. We need help. We need volunteers to sit on our various committees, and to work, in various respects, with other organizations and government to resolve the issues that are affecting our profession. We need sponsorship, funding and income to keep our organization running and our staff's salaries paid. We need support from all of our members in the form of responses to the various surveys and newsletters we send out, and feedback in relation to challenges that they are experiencing, as they serve as our eyes and our ears in the trenches. We need greater numbers of attorneys to join us and subscribe to the JAA, to strengthen our voice at the regional and national level.

To those of our members who have shown us support, in any of the ways mentioned above, thank you for your contribution towards the fostering of justice in South Africa. Please continue to support us, and encourage your colleagues to join us too, in order that we can raise our voice in solidarity with the continued strength and passion that we need to keep fighting against injustice and unlawfulness.

I would like to thank each and every committee member, who has given tirelessly over the last year in making the JAA work and getting us through these turbulent seas.

I would like to also thank those committee members and the members of the Judiciary who meet every month and are always looking at ways we can improve all services within the legal profession.

In this voting year we wish to extend a big thank you also need to be given to our previous chairperson, Chantelle Gladwin-wood for initiating many of these changes and we wish her

luck in her new appointments within the industry, and we are extremely glad that she continues her availability as an executive member of the JAA.

Please continue to support the JAA as without you, this 86 year old association would not be possible.

In closing, thank you for your attendance at this years AGM.

In conformity with the aforementioned I turn now to deal with our most important projects and interests in the past year.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

1. CASE LINES / COURT ONLINE

The migration from Caselines to Court Online has, as expected, had its own challenges, ones that the JAA continues to work hard to resolve / assist with. We created a Helpdesk to assist members with challenges, questions, queries and concerns in this transitional period, which included a pilot project / training environment program pertaining to Court Online. We furthermore instituted very assistive whatsapp group communication lines with members, groups which included Roanne Brandaw, the Chief Registrar, as of April 2022. The purpose was to consider and roll out Court online training, meeting with law firms to promote the said training, proposing training to the LSSA, within its PVT programs for Candidate Attorneys, and for members to raise their concerns and challenges with the system.

The Judiciary heeded the JAA's calls for proper training as a foundation to the profession, and on 30 August 2022 conducted the first of its workshops for legal practitioners pertaining to Court Online, with huge interest and attendance from the profession.

The JAA continue to encourage practitioners to keep up to date with the changing practice directives, as we often find that practitioners complaining of the system not working, are not following the instructions given on how to use the system. We also encourage practitioners to

make use of the training facilities so that they are upskilled on how to navigate the system. The JAA opened its Caselines Help Desk in 2021, and this has been operating successfully for most of the year.

2. WHATSAPP GROUPS

In this age of technology and more effective communicative tools the JAA has embarked on what has become a very effective mechanism to communicate with members about matters that affect their everyday practices. In this regard it has established the following whatsapp groups:

- JAA High Court;
- JAA Masters;
- JAA Deeds;
- JAA Properties; and
- Court Online

The JAA furthermore has active participants in a JAA High Court Precinct group, which deals with all manner of issues pertaining to the High Court Precinct.

Through these whatsapp groups members are able to not only engage the JAA but each other on matters pertaining to the various fields and dynamics of laws that they find themselves in. Indeed, a very effective communicative and assistive tool within the Johannesburg legal space.

3. COURT TOURS AND THE JAA STUDENT CHAPTER

The JAA has embarked on Court extensive and comprehensive tours for candidate attorneys and students at both the Magistrates and High Court. The tours are facilitated by the JAA but conducted in conjunction with court functionaries, to whom we are most grateful. This has proven to be an invaluable impartation and guide to the candidate attorneys and students, an initiative which we intend continuing with great vigour and drive in the future. Court knowledge and the understanding of the lay of the court land is an important tool of equipping the up and coming attorney.

4. MASTERS' OFFICES

The JAA continues to work with several regional and local associations, some voluntary associations of attorneys and some private businesses, to address challenges through the Dept of Justice. We have very capable EXCO members who are best suited for addressing any matters of concern pertaining to these offices.
Furthermore, our whatsapp communication platform provides valuable assistance to members who experience daily challenges in this regard. the JAA is putting its best foot forward in addressing any areas of concern herein.

5. JHB DEEDS OFFICE

We continue with our efforts in doing our best to attain the best outcomes for our members. Our whatsapp communication platform once more also offers assistance and valuable interaction to members for their daily concerns to be addressed. This is an essential service that many conveyancers would not be able to do without.

6. RAF AND RABS

The saga remains ongoing. The JAA has most competent EXCO members such as Yusuf Wadee at the forefront of developments and information within this space. The PAA (Pretoria Attorneys Association), one of our fellow constituent attorney associations at the GAA, remains actively involved in ongoing litigation and we are also in regular communication with the LSSA's RAF committee with regards to all developments.

7. WEBSITE REVAMP

We remain in the process of finalizing our plans to revamp our website to make it more accessible to members, and to include a member portal with additional new and cost saving features, hopefully including electronic research facilities, electronic meeting rooms (that are not limited for time), and other useful tools that not all attorneys might have access to.

8. CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Our monthly EXCO meetings continue on a virtual basis and remains effective in this regard. it remains to be seen whether there shall be an appetite in future to revert back to physical meetings, but the assignment in terms of the efficacy of the monthly meetings remains resolute. These meetings also serve as a good platform for EXCO members to connect and engage on day-to-day profession matters.

We have engaged in various calls for commentaries on legislative developments within the legal regulatory framework and have received good and substantive input from our members.

We hosted a very successful Wine Tasting event at Schindlers Attorneys in Melrose Arch on 7 July 2022. It was well attended by the legal profession, individual attorneys and members of various associations. These platforms prove invaluable in strengthening networks between attorneys and associations aligned with the JAA. We are most grateful to our EXCO secretary Hilde Eksteen for spearheading this and many other engagements to the benefit of the JAA.

We have also engaged in a number of partnership projects with stakeholders who aim to utilise the JAA leverage for mutual benefit. We continue to engage them in streamlining these relationships, which auger will for greater exposure of the JAA.

The JAA has partnered with the Legal Technology and Innovation Institute ("**LTI**"), powered by Forte Markets in London for a conference and bootcamp in Johannesburg as part the LTI's Global Roadshow on legal technology and innovation. Lexis Nexis South Africa have also partnered with the LTI for this event, which will be hosted from 19 to 21 October 2022. A big hats off to our EXCO member Azhar Aziz Ismail for spearheading this initiative on behalf of the JAA.

The JAA has met with a key representative of the Eastrand Attorneys Association ("**EAA**"), Ms Dominique Aricum, with the aim of exploring the incorporation of the said organization within JAA structures. This exciting and ground-breaking initiative is in its development stages.

The JAA will host its annual and prestigious Judges Function of 17 November 2022

9. INFORMATION SHARING AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The service providers utilized by the JAA to keep its social media and website current are working well to spread the relevant information over social media and through newsletters. The JAA has seen an incredible increase in the amount of engagement that we received from practitioners and members of the public (as well as advocates) through social media. We have also seen an incredible increase in the manner in which the information posted is 'shared' throughout the profession at such rapid speed, owing to the frequency with which our posts are read by those following us. This is largely the work of our social media manager, Laura Gladwin, whom the JAA thanks for her tireless devotion to the cause. We hope to continue to be responsive to the needs of our members and to use the benefits of technology as much as we can to promote our members' interests and share relevant information.

10. LIASONS WITH STAKEHOLDERS

The JAA continues its regular liaison meetings with the following persons/departments/ entities/forums. Reports on the critical issues in these meetings are often included in our email newsletters to our members, and so what is below is rather abbreviated. Anyone who requires a fuller report of the year's activities can contact us for more information.

a. LSSA

The JAA and GAA have met in the last 2 years with the LSSA to discuss collaboration between the various organisations for the mutual benefit of our members. The JAA thanks the LSSA for its willingness to engage and its continued dedication to the interests of the members of our profession.

b. NADEL AND BLA

NADEL (national), NADEL Jhb and the JAA continue to collaborate wherever possible to promote the mutual interests of our members. In our view, the more collaboration we have with all interested stakeholders in our profession, the better.

Our EXCO will endeavor to meet again with the BLA leadership in an effort to formalize (or if not formalize, at the very least strengthen) the relationship and collaborate efforts between our two organizations.

c. PAA, WAA, SLF, GAA AND EAA

The JAA continues to work in close proximity with these organizations at the GAA for the interests of all attorneys. The GAA is an incredible vehicle that the JAA and all other local attorneys' associations can and do utilize to collaborate and realise the benefits of 'strength in numbers'. The JAA would like to thank the GAA, and all of its constituent members, including the WAA, the PAA, the SLF and soon to be the EAA as well, for their continued collaboration in this regard.

d. CAPE TOWN, LEGAL PRACTITIONERS ASSOCIATION, AND KZN LAWYERS

During the last 2 years, and as reported by the previous Chair, the EXCO has started liaisons with the Cape Town Attorneys' Associations and the Cape Town Legal Practitioner's Associations, as well as several other associations including Goldfields, the Cape and Winelands Attorneys, and two other associations to be established in Pietermaritzburg and Limpopo. At these liaisons we discuss issues of mutual interest (such as the failures of the Master's' offices country wide) and we collaborate to resolve them.

e. HIGH COURT PRECINCT

Key members of the EXCO are on very effective whatsapp group communication platforms, with all the relevant stakeholders, to keep the precinct clean and safe. Daily reports are provided as to safety, cleanliness and security. There is a more visible police presence, and vehicles and pedestrians are being better policed.

f. HIGH COURT LIBRARY

We continue to attend meetings of the Library when they are called.

g. MAGISTRATES COURT LIBRARY

We continue to attend meetings of the Library when they are called.

h. COURT LIAISON MEETINGS

The JAA attends regular liaison meetings with the Johannesburg and

Randburg Magistrate's Courts. There are also regional court gatherings, such as the PEEC GLC meetings, which we attend.

i. PROBONO.ORG

We maintain regular liaisons with Probono.org to collaborate to solve problems facing the profession.

j. MASTER'S OFFICES

Katherine Gascoigne and her staff members continue to meet with the Masters' offices on a regular basis, raising issues reported by members, and giving feedback to the EXCO. Our more specific report on the issues experienced and the efforts made to address them are included above.

k. LPFF AND LPIIF

We continue to foster relations between our respective organisations and attended a very informative session with the LPIIF last month.

l. SUB-COMMITTEES

Several sub-committees continue to function independently of the EXCO, reporting back to it through the EXCO members. Feedback is given at each EXCO meeting.