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THE JOHANNESBURG ATTORNEYS' ASSOCIATION

REPORT BY CHAIRPERSON ON ACTIVITIES OF JAA

SEPTEMBER 2023

I wish to thank all our valued members who took the time out to be with us today. Your participation and effort in making a difference is the cornerstone of the success not only of the JAA, but the broader legal profession. Thank you.

It is pleasing to note that we are moving more and more to normalcy regarding for an example 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 continued "digitisation" of court processes continues to be at the forefront of our court experience, as it was the previous year. The Caselines system and its transition into the Court Online portal has proven as much ground-breaking and revolutionary as it has been challenging, some would add deeply frustrating. 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, once more, 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, again, 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 continues to devastate 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 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 continue to look at ways to revamp our website to make it more friendly for the end user 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. Court tours are some of the most innovative and value-add experiences for all who attend.

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 solve the problems of the world on their own. We require assistance. We continue to 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, we thank you once more 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 tough times.

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.

Please continue to support the JAA as without you, this 87 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 have a WhatsApp group for our executive to communicate real problems with the relevant departments on behalf of our members, making members issues a priority. very assistive whatsapp group communication lines with members. 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.

Our committee members were very active in advancing concerns around Court Online for its members on platforms such as inter alia:

- The GLD Efficiency Enhancement Committee meetings;
- Stakeholder liaison meetings involving the OCJ, Registrar and Court Managers;
- Extensive and regular communication with the office of the Chief Justice. Distinct matters were raised with this office during the year under review and in particular May and June 2023;
- The Court Online stabilisation plan presentation of 17 August 2023. JAA's calls for proper training as a foundation to the profession, and on 30 August 2023 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

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;

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. We are very happy to note the collegiate assisting that attorneys give each other on these groups and I wish to thank all those who have made this such a worthwhile project by offering their learned advise to other members of the group. If you are not on any of our groups, please pop and email to viv@jaa.org.za and we will add you to the group or groups.

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 new features and useful tools that not all attorneys might have access to. This is an exhaustive and expensive project and we have held back until now due to budget constraints.

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 Judges Function on 16 March 2023 at the Houghton Golf Club. Our guest speaker was the Chief Justice, Raymond Zondo, together with the attendance of the Judge President of this Division, Dunstan Mlambo, Deputy Judge President Sutherland and Deputy Judge President Ledwaba and many judges of this Division. A special mention needs to be made to EXCO member Hilde Eksteen, who spearheaded this event. Thank you Hilde!.

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. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our executive member, Azhar Aziz-Ismail form his hard work on these strategic alliances.

The JAA has incorporated the Eastrand Attorneys Association ("**EAA**") within the JAA as a sub-committee, and aims to maximise this geographical area to provide the same quality service that we provide to our traditional base. Thanks to Dominique Aricum and Petro Verster for heading this worthwhile working sub-commitee.

9. INFORMATION SHARING AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The service providers utilized by the JAA to keep its social media, website and newsletters current are working well to spread the relevant information. The JAA has seen an incredible increase in engagement on social media platforms from practitioners, members of the public and advocates. 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 continues to engage robustly with the LSSA on matters of 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. 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.

e. MAGISTRATES COURT LIBRARY

We continue to attend meetings with various magistrates courts when they are called.

f. 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.

g. PROBONO.ORG

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

h. 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.

i. LPFF AND LPIIF

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

j. 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.