WEST RAND LEGAL PRACTITIONERS' ASSOCIATION

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WEST RAND LEGAL PRACTITIONERS' ASSOCIATION
CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."
— Helen Keller

A SMALL ASSOCIATION WITH A BIG PRESENCE

When reflecting on the past year, I am reminded that the strength of an association cannot be measured by its size alone. It is measured by the commitment of its members, the willingness of its leadership to get involved, and the impact it makes on the profession and the communities it serves.

The West Rand Legal Practitioners Association may be smaller than some of its sister associations, but it has certainly not allowed that to limit its ambitions or its influence. Over the past three years, we have grown considerably – not only in membership and participation, but also in our financial position, our visibility and the role we play in the broader legal profession. Even our bank balance has been moving in the right direction, which is always a welcome indication that something is working!

We are no longer an association that simply observes from the sidelines. We have become an active, recognised and influential voice, with members who are willing to participate, contribute and stand up for the interests of practitioners.

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● Armand Du Plessis 082 821 3584 ● Simonè Denner 081 370 1331
● Christelle De Lange 078 839 3199 ● Jakkie van der Linde 072 939 3635
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● Heinrich Fokens 072 029 9135

Our involvement in the Gauteng Attorneys Association (GAA) has also strengthened this position. Through this relationship, the West Rand Association has become increasingly involved in provincial engagements and discussions affecting practitioners across Gauteng. This has allowed us to contribute to matters beyond our immediate geographical area, while remaining firmly rooted in the needs and interests of our own members.

Importantly, our association has retained its own identity. We are proud of the initiatives we have undertaken independently, the relationships we have built within our local courts and the events we have hosted for our members. Our growth has not been about losing our identity; it has been about giving that identity a stronger voice.

THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE IT HAPPEN

An association is only as strong as the people prepared to give their time and energy to it. I am fortunate to work with a committee whose members each bring something different to the table. Some portfolios are neatly defined; others, as we all know, tend to expand depending on what needs doing!

I would like to acknowledge each member of the committee and the role they have played:

- Marianne Pretorius – Chairperson
- Stef Grobbelaar – Vice-Chairperson and Golf: Responsible for golf – and, as far as the golf day is concerned, practically everything that goes with it!
- Christelle De Lange – Secretary and Roodepoort Court Liaison: Keeping the administrative side of the association in order and maintaining our important relationship with Roodepoort Magistrates' Court.
- Simonè Denner – High Court and Magistrates' Court Liaison, Communications: A portfolio that seems to cover almost everything and often does!
- Jo Eksteen – Magistrates' Court Liaison: Particularly involved with Fochville, Westonaria, Krugersdorp and Oberholzer.
- Jaco Van Staden – Master's Office Liaison
- Armand Du Plessis – Events, Pro Bono and Deeds Office Liaison
- Brandon Deneys – Youth and Liaison with Randburg and Johannesburg Courts
- Heinrich Fokens – Deeds Office and Master's Office Liaison
- Wynand Pretorius – Events, Social Activities and Randburg Court Liaison
- Jakkie van der Linde – Johannesburg Magistrates' Court Liaison and Padel Organiser

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To each of you, thank you. The work of an association does not happen only at meetings. It happens in the telephone calls, emails, court visits, arrangements, follow-ups and countless behind-the-scenes efforts that members do not always see. I appreciate your commitment and the fact that you continue to make yourselves available.

OUR VOICE – CONNECTED, INFORMED AND NOT AFRAID TO SPEAK

One of the benefits of our involvement in the GAA is that the West Rand Association is now part of a much broader network of engagement with institutions and stakeholders affecting the profession.

Through this association, our members have a channel through which concerns can be raised, developments monitored and practical problems brought to the attention of those in a position to address them.

The issues facing practitioners are not theoretical. They affect our ability to run practices, serve clients, meet deadlines and obtain meaningful access to the courts and other institutions. We have therefore sought to remain involved, informed and constructive in our engagements.

We do not always have the answers, and we certainly cannot solve every problem. But it is important that the profession has a voice – and that the voice is heard.

OUR YEAR IN REVIEW – THE MATTERS THAT AFFECT OUR PRACTICES

1. *Our relationship with the Legal Practice Council*

Engagement between the profession and the Legal Practice Council remains important, particularly where regulatory decisions have a direct financial and operational impact on practitioners.

Through the GAA, we participated in discussions with the LPC on matters including practitioners' fees, legal education, regulatory requirements and the need for meaningful consultation before changes are introduced.

Our position remains that the interests of the profession, particularly smaller practices and candidate legal practitioners, must be considered when decisions are made. Regulation is necessary, but it must also be practical, proportionate and informed by the realities of practice.

2. ***The High Courts – Johannesburg and Pretoria***

Our relationship with the High Courts remains an important part of our provincial engagement.

We have been involved in ongoing engagements with the Johannesburg and Pretoria High Courts, including discussions aimed at improving court efficiency and addressing the practical difficulties experienced by practitioners.

The High Court Efficiency Enhancement Committees provide an important forum for raising issues such as delays in obtaining hearing dates, case management, the allocation of matters, taxation difficulties, RAF litigation and the functioning of electronic court systems.

These engagements are particularly valuable because they create an opportunity for practitioners to raise operational concerns directly with the relevant judicial and administrative stakeholders.

3. ***The Provincial Efficiency Enhancement Committee***

The Provincial Efficiency Enhancement Committee provides a broader platform for considering issues affecting the administration of justice across the province.

Matters discussed include the challenges within the criminal justice system, court delays, the position of remand detainees, overcrowding and the need for better coordination between the various role players.

The importance of effective case management and improved communication between stakeholders cannot be overstated. Delays in the justice system have consequences not only for practitioners, but also for litigants, accused persons and the public.

4. ***Our Magistrates' Courts – keeping close to home***

While provincial engagement is important, our local courts remain at the heart of the West Rand Legal Practitioners' Association.

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We have continued to strengthen our relationships with the Magistrates' Courts in our area, recognising that these are the courts in which many of our members spend a substantial part of their working days.

Our liaison arrangements include:

- Johannesburg Magistrates' Court: Through Jakkie van der Linde and Brandon Deneys.
- Randburg Magistrates' Court: Through Brandon Deneys and Wynand Pretorius.
- Roodepoort Magistrates' Court: Through Christelle De Lange.
- Krugersdorp, Fochville, Westonaria and Oberholzer Magistrates' Courts: Through Jo Eksteen.

These relationships allow us to remain aware of the day-to-day challenges experienced by practitioners and to raise concerns where necessary. Whether the issue relates to court administration, the availability of files, delays, facilities or general service delivery, it is important that practitioners have an accessible point of contact.

We would like to see these relationships continue to develop, with regular **communication** and practical cooperation between the courts and the profession.

5. *The Roodepoort Magistrates' Court beautification project*

One of the initiatives of which I am particularly proud is the beautification project at the Roodepoort Magistrates' Court.

The project was about more than simply improving the appearance of the court precinct. It was about taking ownership of the environment in which we work and recognising that a court should be a place that is welcoming, functional and dignified for practitioners, court staff and members of the public.

The initiative included gardening, planting, cleaning, painting and general improvements to the surroundings. It also demonstrated what can be achieved when practitioners, the judiciary, court management and other stakeholders work together towards a common objective.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to making this project possible. It is a practical example of the difference a local association can make.

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We hope to build on this success, with Krugersdorp Magistrates' Court identified as a possible next project.

6. ***Taxations – a continuing challenge***

The taxation process, particularly in the Johannesburg High Court, continues to present challenges for practitioners.

Backlogs, difficulties in securing taxation dates, matters that do not appear as expected on the system and delays in the issuing of allocaturs all have a direct impact on the administration of legal practices.

These are not merely administrative inconveniences. They affect cash flow, the finalisation of matters and the ability of practitioners to provide efficient service to their clients.

The issue remains part of the ongoing engagements with the relevant court structures, with the objective of improving the process and ensuring greater reliability and transparency.

7. ***Court Online – progress, but still work to be done***

Court Online remains an important part of the modernisation of the court system. However, the experience of practitioners continues to highlight areas requiring attention.

Following the establishment of the Court Online working group, regular engagements have taken place with the Office of the Chief Justice and the relevant stakeholders.

Issues raised include system responsiveness, duplicate notifications, matters not appearing correctly on dashboards, difficulties with uploading and downloading documents and the reliability of notifications.

We recognise that the transition to electronic court processes is a substantial undertaking. Nevertheless, the system must ultimately make the work of practitioners easier and more efficient, rather than create additional administrative obstacles.

We will continue to support improvements while ensuring that the practical experiences of practitioners remain part of the conversation.

8. ***The Road Accident Fund***

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The challenges associated with the Road Accident Fund continue to affect practitioners and their clients.

Delays in payments, difficulties in implementing court orders, the management of litigation and the ongoing impact of the Fund's operational challenges remain matters of concern.

These difficulties have consequences for firms, claimants and the administration of justice. It is important that the practical realities faced by practitioners are communicated to the relevant stakeholders and that meaningful solutions are pursued.

9. ***The Master's Offices***

The Master's Offices remain an important point of contact for many of our members, particularly those involved in deceased estates, trusts and insolvency matters.

Backlogs, delays in appointments, staffing constraints, administrative difficulties and the implementation of electronic systems continue to affect service delivery**.**

Our liaison through the relevant committee members allows us to monitor these issues and contribute to discussions aimed at improving the experience of practitioners and the public.

10. ***The Deeds Office and property-related processes***

The Deeds Office and the broader property registration environment remain central to the work of many practitioners.

The move towards electronic processes, including the electronic Deeds Registration System, has the potential to improve efficiency. However, technical difficulties, delays and document-related challenges continue to require attention.

Our engagement in this area is aimed at ensuring that the transition to electronic processes is practical and that practitioners are able to obtain the support and information required to complete transactions efficiently.

11. ***The Companies and Intellectual Property Commission***

Developments at the CIPC have also remained on the agenda.

Concerns have been raised regarding the functioning of its electronic platforms and the practical difficulties experienced by legal practitioners and other professional service providers.

These include issues relating to director verification, foreign directors, director removals and access to company information and searches.

As more regulatory and administrative processes move online, the reliability of these systems becomes increasingly important. Practitioners must be able to rely on the information and services provided by the Commission.

12. *The Sheriff's Banking Forum*

The annual discussions surrounding sheriff tariffs and related banking processes remain relevant to the profession.

Proposals considered for the 2026 adjustment included a CPI-based increase of 3.2% and an alternative proposal based on a 4.3% increase together with an additional 3%. The discussions also included the treatment of storage-related provisions.

Although these matters may appear technical, they have a practical impact on the costs of litigation, execution processes and the administration of legal practices.

It is important that the profession remains involved in these discussions and that any changes are properly considered and communicated.

13. *Security around our courts*

The safety of practitioners is an issue that can no longer be treated as an afterthought.

Incidents involving practitioners being shot in the vicinity of courts have highlighted the risks associated with attending court and carrying out our professional responsibilities. The shooting incident near Booysens Court, although not fatal, was deeply concerning. The tragic shooting of Chinette Gallichan, who was shot in broad daylight while on her way to a CCMA hearing, brought the seriousness of the situation into even sharper focus.

A WhatsApp group has been established to improve communication, and a committee has also been formed in relation to security at the Johannesburg High Court precinct.

These are important first steps, but much more needs to be done. Practitioners must remain vigilant, report suspicious activity and participate in discussions aimed at improving safety around our courts.

Our profession should not have to accept that attending court comes with an unacceptable risk to personal safety.

14. ***Youth and the future of the profession***

The future of the profession depends on the opportunities we create for those who are preparing to enter it.

Through the GAA, the Youth Committee has continued its collaboration with the University of Johannesburg, including its Student Legal Council and Student Representative Council.

The initiative provides students with practical exposure to the legal profession and assists in developing an understanding of disciplinary processes, procedural fairness and the responsibilities that accompany professional practice.

Workshops, practical skills development and mentorship remain important components of this work.

Brandon Deneys, who holds the youth portfolio on our committee, plays an important role in ensuring that the West Rand Association remains connected to these initiatives.

We must continue to encourage young people to become involved in the profession and to ensure that they have access to guidance, mentorship and meaningful opportunities.

15. ***Emeris Community Law Clinic***

The launch and development of the Emeris Community Law Clinic is another important initiative in which we have taken an interest.

The clinic provides an opportunity to strengthen access to justice while exposing students to the practical realities of legal work and the needs of the communities they will ultimately serve.

It is encouraging to see institutions recognising the importance of practical legal education and community engagement. The profession has a responsibility not only to develop competent practitioners, but also to ensure that access to legal assistance remains part of the broader conversation.

SOCIAL EVENTS – BECAUSE WE ALSO NEED TO HAVE FUN!

An association should not only be about meetings, reports, court problems and institutional engagements. We also need opportunities to get together, enjoy ourselves and build relationships outside the courtroom.

This is something the West Rand Association has embraced wholeheartedly.

Our social calendar has been a highlight, with events that have brought members, friends and family together. We firmly believe that an association is about people, and that the families and friends who support our members should also be part of the experience.

During the year, the West Rand Legal Practitioners Association, hosted a number of successful events:

- Vat-'n-Biki: An opportunity to relax, socialise and enjoy good company.
- Barnyard: A particularly successful evening, with more than 140 members, friends and family joining us. It was wonderful to see such a strong turnout and to have so many people enjoying the evening together.
- Padel: We hosted two well-attended padel events. Whether participants arrived with serious sporting ambitions or simply to see how long they could keep the ball in play, the events brought plenty of energy, laughter, raquettes and pure adrenaline!
- Golf Day: The golf day remains one of the highlights of our calendar. This year's event was our best yet, and the enthusiasm and support from members and sponsors made it a tremendous success. A special word of thanks goes to Stef Grobbelaar for the enormous amount of work that goes into making the day happen.

The golf day was hosted by the West Rand Legal Practitioners Association in collaboration with the GAA. The collaboration has allowed us to broaden participation, strengthen relationships between associations and create opportunities for members to connect across the profession.

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I would like to thank everyone who supported, attended, sponsored and assisted with these events. They are an important part of what makes our association a community rather than simply another professional organisation**.**

LOOKING AHEAD

As we look towards the year ahead, our intention is to build on the progress already made.

We want to continue strengthening our relationships with the local Magistrates' Courts, maintain our involvement in the High Court and provincial structures, and ensure that the concerns of our members are communicated to the appropriate stakeholders.

We would also like to continue with practical initiatives such as the Roodepoort court beautification project, with Krugersdorp as a possible next step.

Our social programme will remain an important part of the association, and we hope to continue creating opportunities for members, friends and families to participate.

Most importantly, we must continue to grow without losing the qualities that make the West Rand Legal Practitioners' Association what it is: a committed group of practitioners who are prepared to get involved, support one another and make a difference.

We may not always have the largest delegation in the room, but we have certainly shown that we can make our presence felt.

A WORD OF THANKS

To our committee members, thank you for your time, energy, commitment and willingness to get involved. I know that much of the work takes place behind the scenes, often at times when everyone is already busy with their own practices and professional responsibilities.

To our members, thank you for your continued support and participation. An association can only be as active as its members allow it to be, and your involvement makes all the difference.

To the GAA, thank you for the opportunity to work together on matters affecting the profession and for providing a platform through which the West Rand Association can contribute to

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provincial discussions. Our collaboration has strengthened both associations, while allowing us to retain and develop our own identity.

To the judiciary, court management, institutional representatives, sponsors and all those who have worked with us during the year, thank you for your cooperation and support.

I am proud of what the West Rand Legal Practitioners Association has achieved. We have grown in stature, strengthened our relationships, taken ownership of meaningful local initiatives and created opportunities for our members to connect.

We should not underestimate how far we have come. We are a smaller association, but we are certainly not a small presence.

Let us continue to build on that – together.

Marianne Pretorius
Chairperson
West Rand Legal Practitioners Association

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