

Chairman's Report



THE THOMAS MORE COLLEGE PAST PUPILS' ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

In my closing remarks of last year's Chairperson's Report, I stated that we hoped to see you all in person in future, on the other side of this pandemic, well tonight is our first step in that direction. We welcome you all this evening and beg your patience whilst we take advantage of the ability to host both a physical and virtual AGM simultaneously and learn what we can from this post-Covid world of hybrid experiences!

Whilst the Covid pandemic robbed us of many more serious things, its biggest impact in the Past Pupils' Association space was robbing us of the opportunity to directly interact with our newest group of members. The 2021 Matric Farewell was a closed, limited attendance event which left the greater community without our share of the usual tear-jerking moments. We watched from cyber space as the Class of 2021 were held spellbound by yet another Past Pupil speaker in the form of Sihle Ntuli. We saw them have their opportunity to measure their imprint during the Hands of Time procession. We experienced a video of the unveiling of the PPA Legacy Vault and saw their excitement at the opportunity to seal in those memories and make a commitment on the legacy of their future selves. We heard their war cry over the airwaves and watched a reel of that tearful and yet joyful farewell tunnel to leave the world of Thomas More and join the big wide world out there.

And with that we welcomed in 2022, and the 60th Anniversary of the founding of Thomas More College. The Past Pupils' Association was fortunate to play host to the very first event on campus in honour of this momentous year, and that event was Association Day which was held on the afternoon of Friday the 21st of January and the morning of Saturday the 22nd of January.

It was undoubtedly the most well attended Association Day ever and based on the feedback that we received from attendees it was thoroughly enjoyed by all. No Thomas More related anything is complete without some lessons learnt, and Association Day was no different – we will continue with this timing and format into 2023, however Friday sport will only start at 6pm and we will move more of the events into the Saturday line-up to accommodate our hardworking Association Members. 2023 will also see the introduction of Basketball to the scheduled sporting fixtures match on the Saturday, as well as Association Day forming part of the Grade 8 orientation week.

After a 2-year Covid-enforced hiatus the PPA annual Pub Quiz was held on the evening of Friday 4th March. In honour of the 60th anniversary, the theme for the evening was “All things TMC”. Our attendees enjoyed Pub Fare, surrounded by the TMC colours, and were treated to some entertaining quizzing of their General Knowledge by our quizmaster extraordinaire Gary Green. I hope it is safe to say that such fun was had that everyone will be back next year, with more friends in tow!

2022 has seen us bid the High School Headmaster Dave Wiggett farewell. Dave left us to embark on a teaching career in Korea, and we take this opportunity, on behalf of all of our members, to again offer him the PPA’s sincerest thanks for his enthusiasm, tireless efforts on our behalf and support in his 6 ½ years with us. Into that role the PPA now welcomes Matthew Davies, and we are exceptionally excited to learn from the wealth of experience that Matthew brings to our table.

It was also wonderful to see that there were once again three fourballs containing Past Pupils who turned out in support of the Parents’ Council Golf Day this year. May the fun of the day continue to encourage our members to participate in TMC events.

The TMC Foundation was also launched in 2022, and the PPA look forward to working with its director, Ghislaine Riceman, on this initiative as we endeavour to improve the lives and situations of the greater Thomas More family and its surrounding communities through the work that has been planned.

Country Fair 2022 was another resounding success. The demanding work of the Parents’ Council paid off with the most successful and well-attended iteration of the event in the school’s history. The PPA, with the added lure of our travel mug giveaways saw approximately 170 past pupils – more than double our previous visitors, with at least ten more spotted in the Beer Tent who did not pay us a visit. The opportunity to update the records of those 170 members, as well as gain the required POPIA permissions is always an invaluable one for the PPA.

It was with sadness, but respect that the PPA supported the Long Walk Committee in the announcement of the cancellation of the 58th annual Long Walk this year. It is with excitement that we can confirm that the Long Walk will return on Saturday the 25th of March 2023. We would also like to take the opportunity to publicise to our members that any student who was in the High School in 2020, 2021 and 2022 and who aspires to be recognised on the 3- & 5-times Long Walk 80Km Boards will still get the opportunity post-matric to reach those goals should they wish to.

We have so far hosted, in loose terms, two reunions this year, with 2 more scheduled in the months to come. The Class of 1981 40-year virtual reunion consisted of a 2–3-minute video from each participating member catching their classmates up on where they are now and sharing their fondest or most memorable moments from their time at TMC. Our thanks go to Gary Green for both the idea, initiation, and introductory video, as well as to the talented Terence Robertson of Dad on a Leash media, who edited and collated these clips into the masterful end product. The members of the Class of 1981, spread across the globe as they are, thoroughly enjoyed this out of the box method of overcoming the pandemic-related travel restraints, and still having the opportunity to reconnect. The class of 2000 held a more traditional reunion, but delayed 20-year reunion on Saturday the 5th of February, consisting of a campus tour and reconnect session followed by a lively meal at a restaurant owned and run by one of their classmates. Saturday the 12th of November saw the 20-year reunion of the Class of 2002 hosted on campus, with the 10-year reunion of the Class of 2012 scheduled for 16 December. These reunions are a wonderful trip down memory lane, and more importantly a reminder of the wonderful individuals that Thomas More College has a hand in shaping.

The remaining months of 2022 will see the PPA transition to the use of a new database system in the form of Alumnet. This transition will see the transfer and cleaning up of the 8654 records currently held, as well as bringing with it a whole host of new possibilities in terms of database management and use in our future endeavours.

With the continued absence of the traditional events on which the PPA would normally spend some of our annual budget in 2021, as well as the half normal year that 2022 has been, the PPA were also able to contribute towards some of the desired projects within TMC, namely:

- The framing of the various items of South African kit donated by our national representative pupils and past pupils for display in the iKhwezi centre. These national colours cover sporting disciplines such as rowing, sailing, cycling, hockey, water polo, triathlons, and rugby legends. We encourage you to visit the iKhwezi centre to see the displays for yourselves.
- The mirrors in the Habberton Hall bathrooms have undergone a facelift of sorts and are now worthy of this public space.
- The PPA has commissioned a project whereby the spoken word of past and present heads is captured on video for the school archives – who better to articulate why Thomas More College is such a special place than those Heads who have helped make it so!

The last remaining PPA project for 2022 is the rollout of a “Get-to-Know-Us” tour of sorts whereby the PPA will be hosting events in some of the major centres in South Africa to re-acquaint those members that live outside of Durban with the PPA, it’s calendar and events, as well as the various other opportunities available to keep in touch with their classmates, Thomas More College and the greater Thomas More College community.

We were fortunate in 2021 to have the pleasure of two new committee members in Dr Ravel Ramlakan & Dion Ndaba. These gentlemen, as gentlemen they truly are, represent the Classes of 1990 and 1996 respectively. Together with our remaining stalwart members, Rene, Amy, Bronwyn, David & Steve for whom I am so grateful, we also cover the Classes of 1979, 2002, 2006, 2012 and 2016 which supports the aim of the Committee in ensuring that our thoughts and actions align with the full range of past pupils whom we represent.

It is with the hugest, most profound gratitude that we announce the resignation our treasurer Colleen Woodley. Colleen has resigned as the school’s Business Manager effective January 2023, and with that resignation will end her tenure as our Treasurer. Colleen will be thanked appropriately closer to that time however it would be remiss of me not to re-iterate to all our members in this forum how much Colleen will be missed. The effort that she has put into the PPA in her 10 years at Thomas More College is profound and each member should know that the sound state of the PPA, finances & trajectory alike, is in most part due to her sound guidance, and ever-patient explanations!

As always, at this point, we voice our thanks to our sole employee – I should point out to all of you that when I wrote this, I spelt sole s, o, u, l, unintentionally & yet so fitting. Rae, you are the face of the PPA and the soul of this living entity. You work tirelessly for our cause, as if it had been yours from day dot, and we are ever grateful for the circumstances that gifted you to us!

We thank you all for attendance, and your patience as we attempt new formats for these traditional events. There is a saying that says “Old ways will not open new doors” and whilst it is our job at the PPA to protect and cherish the old ways, it is also incumbent upon us to find ways to open those new doors and we must therefore strike a hard-fought balance if we are to succeed in our mission of ensuring that every single Past Pupil maintains their connection with Thomas More College, whether they have walked the school’s 60 year journey or are part of the about to graduate Class of 2022.

Melanie Kuster
Chairperson

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