

# **PRESS RELEASE – KLIPTOWN OUR TOWN TRUST**

## **Kliptown – from neglect to respect**

**K**liptown, the village famous for its link with the Freedom Charter, is taking its destiny into its own hands. Self-started initiatives to breathe new life into this neglected and run-down community commenced in 1998 when concerned residents started collecting betterment ideas from residents as well as oral histories, personal experiences of the 1955 Congress of the People, and household and family items including even a (empty) bucket toilet! Together with old and recent photographs of Kliptown's people and places, this material formed the basis of a colourful, fascinating exhibition called "Kliptown our town".

Presented first to Kliptonians in an old municipal store at 58 Beacon Road, its success in bringing local history to life not only for those who lived it but also for outsiders, led to an invitation from the education department to mount it at the Old Fort in Braamfontein for Minister Kadar Asmal's launch of the New History Project on 27 August.

The exhibition was the first building block in a community-driven initiative to make Kliptown a better and happier place to live in through self-started improvements and development. CRIAA kick-started the project by funding the initial research and exhibition materials.

In June this year the Kliptown Our Town Trust was formed to drive the planned development initiatives which include adapting the exhibition for publication as a coffee-table book, a documentary film, further oral history research, a household survey, rehabilitating the Klipspruit to become the picnic spot loved by old residents, reviving the San Souci Cinema, a

famous landmark which attracted many patrons from Soweto and even Alexandra, and various other projects.

There are ten trustees appointed on the basis of their past and present achievements, all Kliptown-born and all sharing a love for this unique community with its cosmopolitan mix of all colours from all parts of the country and beyond, and united in their determination to assist in regenerating Kliptown's heritage. Trust members are Audrey Brown (freelance journalist), Anne Duiker (senior manager at SARS), Eva Mokoka (retired midwife and community worker), Gwen Tarr (teacher), Jeanette Van Zyl (director of the Love and Care crèche), John Arends (insurance broker), Manneljie Bolo (youth leader), Gene Duiker (community facilitator), Thabang Khanye (historian) and Bob Nameng (youth leader).

In June 2002 Johannesburg Unicity allocated R250 000 to fund the Trust's development initiatives. This funding will be used to upgrade the exhibition and renovate its venue to become a well-equipped, attractive "People's Place", combining a living, growing museum and education centre. The Trust has also approached the education department's South African History Project about using exhibition material for a road show to schools, to introduce learners to the Freedom Charter's living heritage, a mixed community whose spirit is very like what was once also found in Sophiatown and District Six as well as a user-friendly formula for reconstruction and celebration of local history.

As well as CRIAA SA-DC's ongoing advisory input, the Trust has been able to access academic resources via the Wits University school of architecture which has involved senior students in project designs for renovation of the community centre. Pretoria University's town planning department is designing alternative layout planning proposals for the south of Kliptown to be combined with a technical evaluation of potentially upgradable old houses. This is in keeping with the community's wish to

restore old Kiptown rather than entirely  
rebuild it. The people do not want to lose  
Kiptown's unique character which has  
survived despite official neglect.

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## Hundredth birthday coming up for Freedom Charter birthplace

In two years time Kliptown the small cosmopolitan town located between Soweto and Eldorado Park will celebrate 100 years of existence. It was in Kliptown nearly 50 years ago that the Freedom Charter was presented to 3000 delegates and signed on 25 and 26 June 1955. Kliptown is a crucial part of our history and our resistance to apartheid. And yet Kliptown doesn't exist on the maps!

Kliptown and its two proclaimed townships called Race Course and Klipriviersoog Estate came into existence in 1903. Soweto was created long after Kliptown. Kliptown did not fall under the jurisdiction of the Johannesburg City Council until 1970. It provided shelter to many new migrants seeking work in Joburg in the 30s and 40s. The community was and still remains very mixed – Africans, Coloureds, Indians, Chinese – with a spirit very much like Sophiatown, District Six or Feetas (Vrededorp). If it was not broken down by apartheid, it is probably because Kliptown was on the outskirts of town and outside Johannesburg municipal boundaries. Apartheid laws were not so strictly enforced there. However there was a silent wish that Kliptown, a place that did not fit with the urban apartheid scheme would just die.

In 1955 Kliptown hosted a momentous gathering. Circulars had been sent out the previous year to townships and villages across the country and people were asked 'How would you set about making South Africa a happy place for all the people who live in it?' The voices of the people and their demands were heard and gathered together in the Freedom Charter. In June 1955 the Charter was presented in Kliptown during the Congress of the People to some 3000 delegates. The Freedom Square, a piece of open veld behind the shops of Union Street has been declared a national monument but the echoes of this people's parliament seem to have vanished.

Kliptown, where the seeds of our new constitution were sown was then forgotten and neglected by the various bodies which administered it: the Peri-Urban Areas Health

Board, the Group Areas Board, the Department of Community Development, the House of Representatives, the South-Western Management Committee and the Johannesburg City Council. But Kliptown remained.

In 1957 Kliptown was proclaimed a white group area and properties were expropriated. Some sections of Kliptown such as Shitno more, No man's friend, Dikatole, Vaarkejaard and Paddavlei were demolished under the Slums Act. The adjacent area of Nancefield made up of small holdings and farms was declared "coloured". It would later be developed and renamed Eldorado Park. In the mid-80s, Kliptown's territory was "eaten away". The government built extensions of Eldorado Park in Kliptown, e.g. Extensions 9 and 10.

Kliptown still does not have a legal existence but it does exist in the minds of many Sowetans who come here for shopping, who used to come here to watch movies at the San Souci bioscope, ... And it exists in the hearts of all the Kliptonians who still live here or have moved to Eldorado Park, Klipspruit West or Soweto.

Living conditions have not really improved since 1994. Shack settlements such as Charter Square, Chrisani, Mandela Square, Angola and Johnson's Stop have expanded. Kliptown's population is approximately 30,000 inhabitants compared to 13,000 in 1977. They either live in shacks or in old houses built in the 30s, 40s and 50s e.g. Tamatievlei, Geelkamers, Swaziland, First Gate, Race Course, Twist Lane, ... Residents use buckets or portable toilets. They have communal standpipes and refuse skips but rubbish is often dumped in open spaces.

The people who have made Kliptown their hometown in the recent years are from Soweto, Eldorado Park, the former homelands of Transkei, Gazankulu, KwaZulu Natal, Bophuthatswana as well as from Mozambique and Lesotho.

Many residents believe that Kliptown could rise as a vibrant African town through self-started improvements and have started taking action accordingly. With this community-driven

impetus for regeneration combined with the Johannesburg Unity plans, Kliptown may have a better future.

## Kliptown speaks

- “Kliptown is a town not a location. Here, we have many shops, an open market, workshops, a police station, a post office, our own court of law, a movie theatre, a train station and even a river! We are surrounded by townships – Chiawelo, Dlamini, Eldorado Park, Klippruit West – which were established long after Kliptown came into existence.”
- “My parents came to Kliptown because when they were young, they used to hire a horse cart between Feetas and Kliptown. They had picnic at the river. And those trees along the river were beautiful willow trees.”
- “Why have they left Kliptown out? It has been in the same condition for many years, let alone when there were heavy rains and it was flooded. I regret that at my age I’m not yet pleased about the living conditions in Kliptown.”
- “Kliptown gave refuge to a lot of criminals on the run, freedom fighters and homeless people because Kliptown was not in the Jo’burg Municipality. That is why it became a slum.”
- “There was an influx of people when Sophiatown was removed. There were lots of coloured people coming from Alexandra and Protea who moved here. When children got married, they always knew that Kliptown was the easiest place to find somewhere to live because there were no strict rules like in Coronation or Noordgesig where you had to make applications and get a house through the Council.”
- “Two bioscopes served our community for many years. People came from Pimville. So, we never bothered to go to town. Kliptown was such a good place. On New Year’s Day people used to come from all over Johannesburg to picnic out here along the river. I learnt to swim in that stream.”
- “I will never move out of Kliptown. Kliptown is the welcome that you get. It is the love that we show each other that counts. In Kliptown, there are certain people who will help you. I am part of Kliptown because I grew up here. In Kliptown, you can’t fake your life. We live what we are. I’ve got a lot of friends who live in the suburbs but during the weekends, you will find them here. They still miss this place. Kliptown is where our roots are.”
- “Eldorado Park found Kliptown here. Soweto found Kliptown here. Neglecting to develop Kliptown is one thing, but taking away the name bit by bit is another matter. They can delay building houses by 50 years but to take away our name is a big problem. This name is very big and we are losing it bit by bit.”
- “The toilets! We had to fight for them. I remember we even hired some taxis through our pockets to take us to Johannesburg TMC with buckets full of shit to show them that we were tired

of the bucket system. We wanted toilets now. We had to go there and toyitoyi. Then we got these toilets. It is not fair that before you get something you must fight for it.”

- “Life in Kliptown is cheap. Everything is nearer – shops and all that.”
- “If they could say we must upgrade our houses, I think that would be better. It will give us that confidence to know that we are staying here. Some of the people are scared to renovate their houses because they keep on telling us we are moving.”
- “People come and buy here to go and sell in Soweto, in Freedom Park, ... Kliptown is like a mother town. If they could give us at least real toilets and electricity, we would be happy. But now since all these eye-ears, we must still live like our forefathers and mothers. If they can put me a toilet here in the yard, I will say: “No thank you for an electrified house elsewhere!”

## Photos:

**New-8:** Spazashopin  
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**RuphinCoudyzer**

- 003:** KiptownOurTownexhibition
- 006:** Chartersquareinformal  
settlement
- 008:** WinnieCamp
- 016:** anoldresidentonherstoep  
in“Swaziland”
- 017:** anIndiantraderinBeacon  
road
- 019:** HouseofGerardSekoto
- 020:** OldresidentathomeinRace  
Course
- 021:** Shackinterior
- 038:** Oneofthemanydilapidated  
housesinRaceCourse
- 039:** Insideashack
- 040:** Chartersquare
- 041:** Chartersquare

- New-1:** Chartersquare
- New-10:** Childrenvisitingthe  
exhibition
- New-11:** AhmedKatradavisiting  
theexhibitionatthe  
OldFo rt
- New-16:** Welcometogarden  
city(ChrisHani  
settlement)
- New-1x:** SanSoucibioscopein  
1974(byRuphin  
Coudyzer)
- New-2x:** SanSoucibioscope  
today
- New-5:** Childrenvisitingthe  
exhibition
- New-6:** Chartersquare