In this newsletter we want to share with you our special gala dinner celebrating 20 years of Informatics excellence!

Special guests at the gala dinner included previous Heads of Department: Prof Dewald Roode and Prof Niek du Plooy and his wife Elsa, the Dean: Prof Sandenberg and his wife Corlia, the Chairperson of the the School of IT: Prof Theo Bothma and his wife Petrina, some of our industry friends and also old and current personnel of the department.

In a book written by Paul Arden with the title: It’s not how good you are, it’s how good you want to be, he says: Your vision of where or who you want to be is the greatest asset you have.

The vision of Informatics is to become a department that can make world-class contributions to the field of Information Systems through our educational and research programs.

Although we are the youngest department in the School of IT, we have progressed well over the last twenty years to achieve this goal. It is a privilege to work with a dedicated team of people that are prepared to make the sacrifices it takes to be great.

Congratulations to a great department, may we achieve the unachievable in the next 20 years!

Enjoy the speeches and photos!
On the 1st August, 1988, I started as Head of the Department of Informatics at the University of Pretoria. The Department had actually started earlier, in 1987 as the Department of Business Data Processing, with Prof Gerrit Wiechers as temporary Head of the Department. One of the other temporary staff members was Cees Roon, who had been my boss at the Computer Users Council where I was Executive Director from 1980 – 1983. It was Cees who came up with the name “Informatics” for the Department, based on the Dutch use of the word to describe computer science – the latter anomaly having escaped Cees’ attention. So, the Department started its formal life in 1988 with a new name and a first fulltime Head. Then, and to date, I have had no formal education in Information Systems. I started out studying Theoretical Physics, and then Applied Mathematics, and my PhD, done at the Rijksuniversiteit in Leiden in The Netherlands, was in a very theoretical part of what could be described as Operations Research. Not a bad preparation for the Information Systems field!

In 1989 we had about 500 first year students. Our teaching program was focused on Pascal programming. I decided that the best way to experience the problems that were encountered during previous years would be to immerse myself in the educational programme, and joined the first year group with three other staff members. At the end of the year I wrote a letter to myself, telling myself that this sort of thing should never happen again because it took me completely out of action, leading to a severe inability to attend to more strategic and managerial matters. I took a copy of the letter to the Dean and asked him to file the letter and pull it out if ever I did this again. I shall never forget the face of the Dean when he read the letter I had written to myself. He must have thought that here he had a serious nut case!

That year also saw the publication of the article of Banville and Landry, in which they questioned the nature of the “discipline” of Information Systems, and the article of Klein and Hirschheim on the Four Paradigms of Information Systems Development, both of which would play an important part in the further development of our understanding of what it was that we were trying to do. We had a famous Indaba (the Limpopo Indaba, held in the Limpopo Room at the Farm Inn), at which we formulated the departmental slogan – “Information Systems are made by people for people”, and things began to take shape. We were on our way, and when in 1992 we produced our first doctoral students and in 1993 began to welcome our first international visitors, the department could with right claim that it had arrived on the international scene.

Looking back at those first years, especially at our doctoral degree program that was being shaped, I have to admit that much of that would have been impossible if we had known what we did not know. How else can one explain the audacity to get Dick Boland as one of the external examiners for Lucas Introna’s thesis, and Kalle Lyytinen and Rudy Hirschheim as external examiners for Johan Smith’s? I will never forget a remark that Ian Strydom, who completed his PhD, or rather DCom, in 1994 with Heinz Klein as one of the external examiners, made to me during the course of our journey towards his doctoral degree. “Prof”, he asked one day, “what research approach are we following?” Undaunted, although flummoxed by his remark, I proceeded to draw an elaborate picture which I still have in Ian’s file of what I thought we were doing. It is still an interesting picture! Ah, those were the days when we could still follow our intuition and get away with it!

At the end of 1993 Niek du Plooy and I undertook a round-the-world trip in which we started off with a visit to the London School of Economics, attended ICIS in Orlando and ended up in Australia to attend a conference at Edith Cowan University in Perth where we had three papers accepted for presentation (Madelise Grobler joined us in Perth).
Unfortunately, Niek had to break away in London with a serious back problem. During 1993 we were also honoured to receive as visitors Dick Boland, Kalle Lyytinen and, if my dates are not incorrect, Heinz Klein. In Orlando I also met with Ojelanki Ngwenyama, and invited him to visit us, which led to a long and happy relationship with the Department that has endured until today. Kalle visited us again sometime later, and Heinz became a regular visitor, later receiving an honorary doctorate in Information Systems from the University. His recent death has been a sad loss for the IS community and the Department in particular.

The point in mentioning all this is that we were fortunate, at a very early stage, to cement strong relationships with important players in our discipline. I have no doubt that the international exposure that this gave us, and the immense influence that these actors had on our thinking, contributed in no small manner to the strength and growth of the Department. I have always thought that these relationships were so successful because people were simply overwhelmed by us all of a sudden emerging from darkest Africa, nogal talking the same language as they!

Another factor that contributed greatly to our sense of standing tall in the field of IS, was the development of an involvement by the Department in the Siyabuswa project. This started in 1994 when Jackie Phahlamohlaka, the champion of Siyabuswa, joined the Department. Many of our overseas visitors became involved and aware of the research undertaken at Siyabuswa, and at ICIS 1994 in Vancouver, Carina de Villiers, Madelise Grobler, Jackie Phahlamohlaka and I presented a panel discussion about our work at Siyabuswa. This attracted the attention of Chri-santhi Avgerou, and led to her intimate and continued involvement with the Department.

Although Lucas Introna and Awie Leonard attended the very first ECIS conference in 1993 in the UK, it was with our involvement in the 1996 ECIS in Portugal that our relationship with ECIS really took off. At the Portugal meeting we were involved in discussions about doctoral research in the different regions, and again, it has been a case that people were quite astonished to realize that indeed, ex Africa semper aliquid novi! In Cork in Ireland in 1997 we were involved in the first doctoral consortium organized by ECIS, with Machdel Matthee our first doctoral candidate subjected to the scrutiny of an international panel of facilitators. I served as a facilitator, and met Geoff Walsham who was another of the facilitators, and who has since become a great friend of the Department and a regular visitor. It is a particular feather in the cap of the Department that it will host ECIS in 2010 – the first time that ECIS will take place outside of Europe.

Many if not all of these happenings that have had a great impact on the Department were serendipitous – we did not plan any of them, they just occurred. From this I took the lesson that one has to be open in life for these kinds of things, and many of my doctoral students would testify to this: just when we would think that we have now painted ourselves into a corner, something would unexpectedly come up that would resolve the whole issue!

A non-serendipitous event has been the creation of the School of Information Technology in March 1998, almost at the end of the ten year period that I am supposed to talk about. We had, for a long time, probably since the early 1990s, an informal School of Information Technology that was the brainchild of Roelf van den Heever, and which included the Departments of Computer Science, Informatics, Information Science, and Computer Engineering. We even found a place for Johannes Cronje who had joined the Faculty of Education and was working in computer-supported education. Our efforts to obtain funding for our informal grouping paid off when the University decided to establish the School as a formal entity, consisting of the three departments currently incorporated in the School.

(Continue on page 4)
Sadly, after a relatively short period in which we were promised that the School would attain Faculty status, universities all across the country caught on to the idea of “Schools” as building blocks of Faculties, and everyone, including the University of Pretoria, started establishing Schools left right and centre. Many of these so-called schools are to this day mere groupings of departments, with little synergy being achieved through the intimate togetherness of various departments. In my opinion, a golden opportunity had been lost for the country as a whole, in that these schools do not seem to foster a culture of interdisciplinary research.

This rather superficial overview of the first ten years of the Department covers the period 1988 until 1998. With my appointment as first Director of the School in March 1998, I left the Department in the able hands of my dear friend and colleague, Niek du Plooy. I see that the program provides for Niek to add some spice to what I have recounted, and I look forward to hear what he will tell us.

For me it has been a most rewarding and enriching experience to be involved in the establishment and early growth of the Department. I am grateful to all who have contributed during those early years, and have just fond memories of everything that we experienced together. I am proud to stand here today and share with the Department the celebration of another ten years of success. Thank you for all and everything, and my most sincere wishes that all shall be well with the Department.

Some people are just longer in the student business than others.

Can you believe hard working Dean, Prof Roelf Sandenberg is also having fun.

Lecturers and their partners enjoying the gala evening.

The assistant-lecturers of 2008. What a group to remember...
Memories of the evening
Herinneringe van die Departement.

Prof Niek du Plooy

My herinneringe begin in Januarie 1962 op Potchefstroom waar ek en Dewald mekaar leer ken op die vaandel van Fisika. Daarna het ek en Dewald mekaar so van tyd tot tyd gesien, hier en daar by konferensies. In 1989 vra Dewald my om ekstern eksamintor te wees. Ek was toe by Unisa. Linda ontmoet my toe by die brug om die vraestelle vir my te gee.

In 1990 word ek besoek by Unisa onder valse voorwendsels deur Dewald en hy bied my ‘n pos in sy department aan. Geen getob en wroeging was nodig nie. Kort daarna word ek gevra om deel uit te maak van sy bestuur. Vanaf daardie dag het die departement sy rigting bepaal en dit is: “Rekenaargebaseerde stelsels (inligtingsstelsels) word deur mense vir mense gebou.”

Die leuse of kern-missie van die departement word vasgepel. Dit is: “Rekenaargebaseerde stelsels (inligtingsstelsels) word deur mense vir mense gebou.”

Vroeg al belangrik, die heel vroeë klem op die ‘mense’, wat ook voorgestel word deur die embleem wat deur die grafiese kuns – departement uitgedink is, en nou nog gebruik word!

Die leuse is later uitgebrei na “Informatics is a multidisciplinary subject, where information, information systems, and the integration thereof into the organization, are studied for the benefit of the entire system (individual, organization and community)”.

Ons beskou ons studente so: “Students are a selected, intelligent group of people, who can read. Classes should not be a repetition of what is written in the textbook. Our students have opinions on topics discussed during lectures. We are interested in hearing those opinions, especially because we, as lecturers, do not have all the answers. Students, may differ from us, and may know more about certain topics than we do. Students would like to be personally responsible for developing their own knowledge”.

(Vervolg op bladsy 5)


En toe verander alles weer. Dewald was nie besig genoeg na sy sin nie, en hy aanvaar ‘n vir al die nie! Ons studente! Ek onthou My po Makone, ‘n briljante, intelligente student en die eerste swart vrou wat ‘n BCom (Hons) in Informatika in 1997 behaal het. En Pieter Joubert, Mauritz, en ‘n sekere Mnr Weilbach wat nie kon stil sit in die klas nie, en vele ander wat ek graag sal wil onthou! En die doktersgraadstudente wat nou die wêreld vol sit. Linda met haar akku- raatheid en geheue, Anine met haar, vir my, onverwagte kreatiwiteit. Julle was goud.

En dan is ek nou aan die einde. Ek het goeie tye hier bele we. Dewald was ‘n uitstekende leermeester, as kollega, promotor en vriend. Iemand wat ek steeds met waardering onthou en nog baie aan dink. Ons en hy het suksesvol as ‘n hegte span saamgewerk.

In al hierdie jare het daar dosente gekom en gegaan. Ek dink aan Helana Scheepers wat na Australië toe is en Herna Victor in Kanada, Carina, Trish, Machdel, Hugo, Johan, en Jackie Phahlamohla (die man wat die gemeenskapswerk SEIDET hier by ons aangedra het) en Wayne Motha uit George, ens.

Vreemdelinge, ingeniers, wiskundiges, IT bestuurders, ens., almal het iets toegevoeg tot die department. Hulle het die wêreld bereis, voordrags gelewer en ons naam hoog gehou. En die liewe Dewald het die land bevolk met doktorandi van UP en Kaapstad.

Ek vra liewer nie hoeveel nie! Ons studente! Ek onthou My po Makone, ‘n briljante, intelligente student en die eerste swart vrou wat ‘n BCom (Hons) in Informatika in 1997 behaal het. En Pieter Joubert, Mauritz, en ‘n sekere Mnr Weilbach wat nie kon stil sit in die klas nie, en vele ander wat ek graag sal wil onthou! En die doktersgraadstudente wat nou die wêreld vol sit. Linda met haar akku-raatheid en geheue, Anine met haar, vir my, onverwagte kreatiwiteit. Julle was goud.

En dan is ek nou aan die einde. Ek het goeie tye hier bele we. Dewald was ‘n uitstekende leermeester, as kollega, promotor en vriend. Iemand wat ek steeds met waardering onthou en nog baie aan dink. Ons en hy het suksesvol as ‘n hegte span saamgewerk.

Ek is trots op hierdie department. Dewald, bravo, jy het hierdie department op die wêreldkaarte geplaas. Carina, jy het met baie groot sukses voortgebou daarop. Julle bied dan nou al internasionale konferensies hier op jul agterplaas aan! Weer eens, aan julle almal: BRAVO!


En toe verander alles weer. Dewald was nie besig genoeg na sy sin nie, en hy aanvaar ‘n vir al die nie! Ons studente! Ek onthou My po Makone, ‘n briljante, intelligente student en die eerste swart vrou wat ‘n BCom (Hons) in Informatika in 1997 behaal het. En Pieter Joubert, Mauritz, en ‘n sekere Mnr Weilbach wat nie kon stil sit in die klas nie, en vele ander wat ek graag sal wil onthou! En die doktersgraadstudente wat nou die wêreld vol sit. Linda met haar akku- raatheid en geheue, Anine met haar, vir my, onverwagte kreatiwiteit. Julle was goud.

En dan is ek nou aan die einde. Ek het goeie tye hier bele we. Dewald was ‘n uitstekende leermeester, as kollega, promotor en vriend. Iemand wat ek steeds met waardering onthou en nog baie aan dink. Ons en hy het suksesvol as ‘n hegte span saamgewerk.

In al hierdie jare het daar dosente gekom en gegaan. Ek dink aan Helana Scheepers wat na Australië toe is en Herna Victor in Kanada, Carina, Trish, Machdel, Hugo, Johan, en Jackie Phahlamohla (die man wat die gemeins- kapswerk SEIDET hier by ons aangedra het) en Wayne Motha uit George, ens.

Vreemdelinge, ingeniers, wiskundiges, IT bestuurders, ens., almal het iets toegevoeg tot die department. Hulle het die wêreld bereis, voordrags gelewer en ons naam hoog gehou. En die liewe Dewald het die land bevolk met doktorandi van UP en Kaapstad.

Ek vra liewer nie hoeveel nie! Ons studente! Ek onthou My po Makone, ‘n briljante, intelligente student en die eerste swart vrou wat ‘n BCom (Hons) in Informatika in 1997 behaal het. En Pieter Joubert, Mauritz, en ‘n sekere Mnr Weilbach wat nie kon stil sit in die klas nie, en vele ander wat ek graag sal wil onthou! En die doktersgraadstudente wat nou die wêreld vol sit. Linda met haar akku-raatheid en geheue, Anine met haar, vir my, onverwagte kreatiwiteit. Julle was goud.

En dan is ek nou aan die einde. Ek het goeie tye hier bele we. Dewald was ‘n uitstekende leermeester, as kollega, promotor en vriend. Iemand wat ek steeds met waardering onthou en nog baie aan dink. Ons en hy het suksesvol as ‘n hegte span saamgewerk.

Ek is trots op hierdie department. Dewald, bravo, jy het hierdie department op die wêreldkaarte geplaas. Carina, jy het met baie groot sukses voortgebou daarop. Julle bied dan nou al internasionale konferensies hier op jul agterplaas aan! Weer eens, aan julle almal: BRAVO!
Informatics Care

Carina de Villiers

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence is then not an act, but a habit!” (Aristotle)

I have been part of the Department of Informatics for the past 13 years and I want to share with you how I see the Department. I can summarise it in two words: Informatics care.

We have a number of caring habits in our department:

**We care about our students:**
Excellence in teaching:
We are strict but fair. We do not compromise high standards – Project Day 22 October is an example. We help to ensure jobs via industry connections. We have International accreditation. We are involved in university wide teaching through the Computer and Information Literacy courses.

**We care about our personnel:**
We negotiated external funding from industry to enable salary supplements and overseas travel. We are creating a nice working environment.

**We care about our industry:**
We do research about the ICT skills shortage, trends and new developments in ICT.
We regularly interact with industry via our Strategic Directions Group. We do consultation.

**We care about our community:**
We established the SEIDET project at Siyabuswa. We are involved in the Tugela Ferry project in KwaZulu Natal.
We present short courses for Industry and Community members (Mamelodi). We are involved in government projects (ICT Skills Shortage).
We established Izandla Zethu, our own BEE company.

**We care about Africa:**
We are involved in a Ghana project in cooperation with the Netherlands. We are established a similar Uganda project.

**We care about research:**
We regularly present papers at international conferences.
We just hosted an international conference for IFIP WG 9.4. We will be hosting ECIS 2010. We regularly host international visitors of high standing. Prof Roy Johnson (Fulbright scholar), Carol Saunders, Eileen Trauth, Mike Myers, Ojelanky Ngwenyama and many more visited us in 2008. We are involved in international journals (publications and reviewing).

Informatics care!

“What lies behind us – and what lies before us – are but tiny matters compared to what lies within us!” (Oliver Holmes)

**Enjoy your festive season just like some of the people in our department (picture above)! Regards, the Department of Informatics (right)**

Geniet u feesseisoen net soos sommige van die mense in ons departement (foto bo)! Groete, die Departement Informatika (regs).