

Gift of the gab

■ The debaters of Immaculata Girls' High School in Wittebome and Bergvliet High School in Bergvliet has done the province proud. They reached the top 10 of the national round of the South African Schools Moot Court Competition. Danielle Dallas and Olivia Habonimana, from Immaculata won the provincial round in May and came fourth nationally. Thirty-six schools, four from each province, took part in the competition in Gauteng at the weekend. Immaculata's co-ordinator, Bev McArthur, said Red Hill High from Gauteng came first and Durban's Crawford College took second place. Pictured are Danielle Dallas, Anabella Bekker, Erin Malan and Olivia Habonimana. Anabella and Erin are from Bergvliet High School clinched ninth spot in the national round.



Tribute to women at work

I don't know their names. I don't know where they live or go home to at night, but my vote for the Women of the Month, through the 12 months of this year and every year, goes to the group I affectionately call The Black Ladies of Brocker Way.

Three times a week for the past six winters in the pre-dawn light, I have caught glimpses in my car's lights of a group of people on the left-hand side of the road.

They have been dropped off by taxis at the corner of Tokai Road and are now walking the final kilometre to their place of work.

I know by now that they are all women, all large, all wearing black without a hint of a light-reflecting material and carrying big bags.

I quickly switch my lights from dim to bright so that I can see exactly how far away they are and how much road they have taken up and dim them because I know pedestrians hate to walk with strong lights in their faces.

I marvel at the strength of character of these ladies. They probably leave their homes so early for their long train-bus-taxi journey to work that they have left beds unmade, children asleep and supper dishes in the sink.

But when they arrive at their destination they must immediately start cleaning up other people's kitchens and bedrooms and somehow do it with good cheer. When their working day ends around 3.30pm or 4pm, they have to reverse the two-hour process to get home where the beds may still be unmade and their kitchens even more of a mess.

And there is supper to start and kids waiting to be loved. When is there any part of their busy day left for them?

The Black Ladies of Brocker Way are a sample of domestic workers all over the country. They are the salt of the earth and the backbone of thousands of homes and families. They deserve to be honoured.

Preserving history

I dropped into Steps to Health in Diep River to admire some beautiful old apothecary bottles which will have pride of place in Ian Wheeler's pharmacy and health

Out and about



Fiona Chisholm

shop when the dust has settled after renovations to enlarge the premises.

These bottles have a history. They came from A White Chemist, that leading homeopathic manufacturer from 1901 whose premises at 59 Plein Street Cape Town were an institution. Being so close to Parliament the staff has probably helped generations of MPs with medication for indigestion after those heavy lunches in the House or suggested remedies for painful piles from all the sittings.

Ian showed me one dusty old bottle with gold inlay which contained a tincture for varicose veins.

Another large, handsomely shaped bottle in clear glass will be filled with a coloured liquid to decorate a window.

White's closed down about six weeks ago. As well as buying the bottles, some dusty old dispensary books and a vintage apothecary dresser with little drawers, Ian has gained the services of William "Billy" Bannatyne who comes with years of knowledge of homeopathy.

His father, also William Bannatyne, was the second owner of White's which he bought in 1939.

Now 82 and standing upright as a statue in his white coat, Mr Bannatyne ("We are not the whisky people... everybody gets it wrong") told me he had joined his father in 1952.

"That was just before we moved to Plein Street as our building at the top of Adderley Street was knocked down. We moved five times before our final premises in 59 Plein Street."

The good news is that the brand name of White's, which manufactured more than 600 items, will not disappear.

Ian Wheeler has helped to orchestrate the revival of the manufacturing side under the name A White's Naturals in Canal Walk.

As a big step forward he is moving into the city under the name of White's Health Shop situated in Plein Street, not far from Billy's former working home.

There Billy will be "consulting" as well as dispensing and preparing remedies for Steps to Health in Diep River and overseeing manufacturing at AWhite's Naturals.

This synergy between the two shops sounds both a happy and a healthy ending.

Toad alert

August is the month when our natural reluctance to touch large moist toads has to be overcome. We must all do our bit to Save Our Toads as these Western Leopards move around on their bonking business on dark and raining nights.

It's amazing how seriously folk take the cause of this endangered species when we have blithely let pass into extinction so many other more beautiful and lovable creatures.

Still, it's a good thing that people have taken a stand to preserve something as ugly as this toad, accepting that our houses and shops have reduced the places where toads used to live and breed and we have allowed our wetlands to become polluted.

Cape Town is the only city in the world where these toads are found.

So during the breeding season when they migrate to and from breeding sites we must help them to avoid becoming road kills.

Not only are they good insect pest controllers but they indicate that our city has a healthy biodiversity and also well-functioning wetlands and environment-friendly gardens.

Moms and Dads

Sometimes on Sundays I see young men pushing a pram with one, or even two, babies on board, while walking or running with the dog.

As I smile approvingly they say: "It's the wife's morning to sleep late."

There are some great Dads around supporting the great Mums who do this double walking act Mondays to Saturdays.

Double dose

Behind every successful man there is a woman and behind every unsuccessful man there are usually two.

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