



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

FRIDAY 11TH DECEMBER 2020

COVID 19 PANDEMIC

The South African Government declared the Covid-19 Nation Disaster in March 2020 and in terms of the regulations, the Owl House Foundation temporarily closed its doors to the public.

The first announcement from the Government indicated that the Lock Down would be only 3 weeks and with the announcement that the Lockdown had been extended, the implications of the temporary closure triggered an emergency within the Owl House Foundation.

The Board was unanimous in its effort to ensure that our entire staff, who were all effectively at furloughed due to the Pandemic, were financially secure during this extended period of Lock Down and no work.

In this regard, the Board consulted with our Labor experts as well as the entire staffing team and implemented a strategy that would legally result in the staff's financial security.

The measures the Board undertook were:

1. UIF Temporary Employer-Employee Relief Scheme (UIF TERS)
 - a. We successfully applied for the UIF TERS over the months of April, May, June and July 2020.
 - b. UIF TERS paid approximately 40% of each of our staffs Gross Salary over this period.
2. Leave Pay
 - a. Every staff member had accrued Leave
 - b. After consultations with our staff and legal experts, it was agreed that we would pay out each staff members leave.
 - c. We did so in a manner that would effectively top up each staff member's payment in to 100% of their Gross Salaries.

- d. The leave payments allowed us to ensure that in April and May, every staff member was paid 100% of the normal salary payments.
3. Retrenchments
 - a. As it became clear that the Lock Down was extending even further than May, that UIF TERS only contributed to approximately 40% of the salary bill and that the leave pay out had exhausted the legal remedy of salary “top ups”, we looked at the Retrenchment process.
 - b. Our staff had accrued severance packages while working at the Owl House Foundation.
 - c. By embarking on the retrenchment option, we were able to ensure that our staff again received 100% payments in June, July and August.
 - d. This process was done in accordance with the proper and correct procedures and numerous consultations was had with all the staff and the staff unanimously agreed to the strategy.
 - e. A critical part of the strategy was a commitment to the staff that as the Foundation begins to reopen, it would reemploy the very same people first and foremost on a needs basis in reaction to the Covid Economy.

All of the above meant that the Board was able to ensure financial security to the team of staff during the Lock Down.

It was a fruitful and successful example of negotiations within the legal framework provided in order to ensure that any and all monies paid out from the OHF was not in the form of donations.

In terms of the fiduciary impact on the Foundation, along with the loss of income from the lock down closure, the Foundation did see a technical loss for the last financial year – this will be elaborated on by our Auditors after this report.

It is crucial to note that on the one hand, the pay-outs (and loss of income), created this loss in the financial year but on the other hand, it also completely reduced the staff liability which the Foundation had been carrying and were legally obliged to each staff member. This process reset these liabilities to zero and the Foundation is ultimately in a more solid footing with having paid out this liability.

Covid Economy

In mid-August, President Ramaphosa announced the downgrading to Level 2 Lock Down.

As with all the other emergency meeting that the Board had been conducting since the initial Lock Down, the Board resolved to reopen The Owl House on Thursday 27th August 2020.

Initially, and in response to the Covid Economy, the Owl House was only opened 4 days a week, namely every Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

During September and in response to the visitor numbers, the Board resolved to extend the opening by another day, Monday and over the school holidays, the Owl House was open for the entire week.

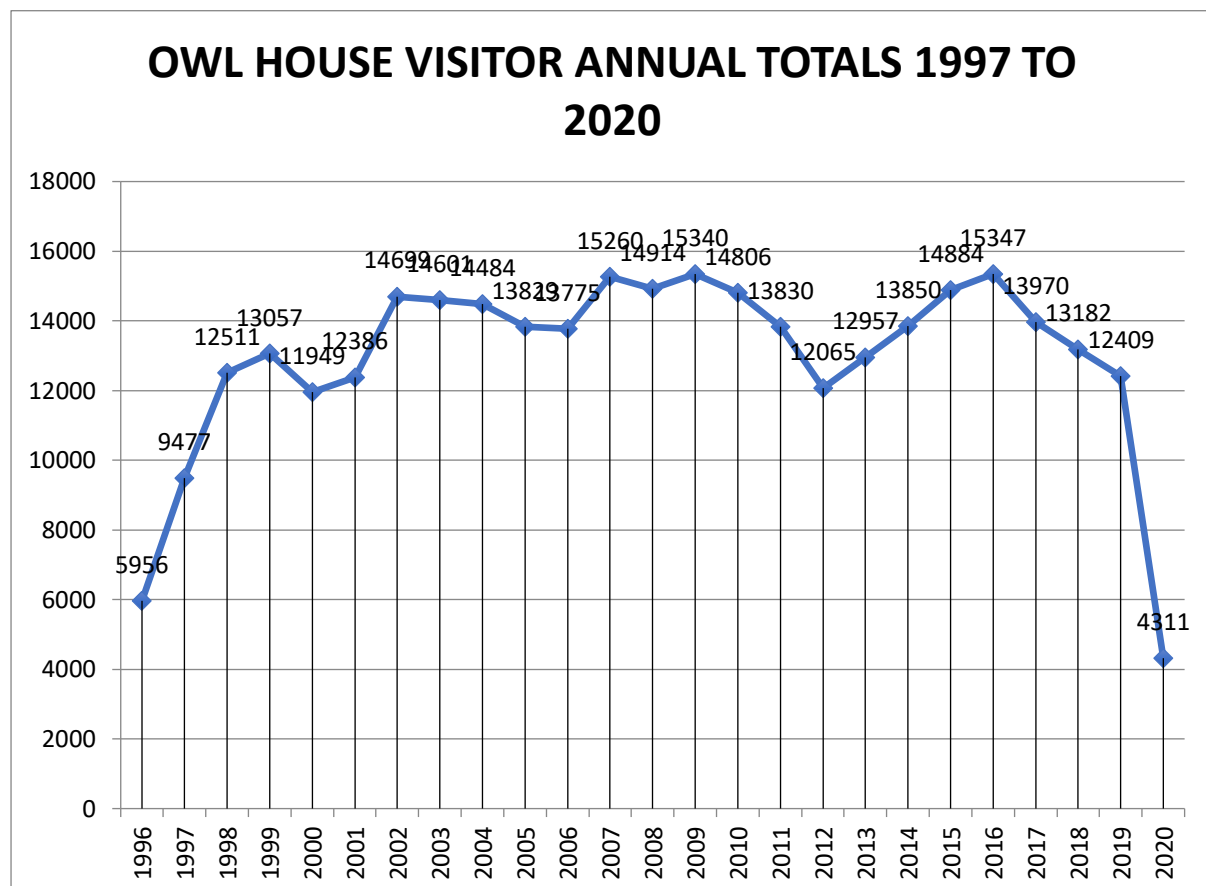
It must be noted that the Board is taking a proactive stance with regards to the economic conditions and is acutely aware of the impact that the Owl House's opening has on the entire Nieu Bethesda economy.

At all times, the Board proceeds on the basis of health and safety of the staff and economic viability to the Foundation for its decision-making process.

The Board agrees that we would want to return to normal operations but such circumstances will only return once the National Disaster Act has been suspended or terminated in line with the ending of the Covid-19 Pandemic. Until then, we are operating in a Covid Economy and respond to those set of circumstances accordingly.

The effect of the Covid Economy on the Owl House Foundation has been dramatic.

As can be seen by the graph below illustrating the visitor numbers to the Owl House since 1998, the Covid 19 Pandemic, Lock Down and Economy has resulted in the lowest recorded numbers of visitors since the data records have been collected.



I would like to extend my sincere thanks to each and every Board member who has continuously made themselves available for the numerous Emergency Board meetings to address and respond to the circumstances that the Pandemic and the National Disaster Act (and all its relevant regulations) has presented.

COMPLIANCE

Lease Agreement

One of the 4 critical structural documents required to be finalized by the Foundation was the formal lease agreement between the Beyers Naude Local Municipality and the Owl House Foundation.

I am very pleased to announce that on the 8th of September 2020, in my capacity as Chairman of the Owl House Foundation and Dr. Edward Ranwana in his capacity as the Municipal Manager of the Beyers Naude Local Municipality, signed the lease agreement between the two parties.

The most significant terms of the lease agreement are that the period of the lease is 9 years and 11 months and the rental per month is ZERO rands payable by the OHF to the BNLM.

This is a significant and extremely valuable achievement for the OHF and solidifies our on-going relationship with the BNLM.

At the point, I must extend my sincere thanks to Ms. Leonie Fouche.

Ms Fouche and I worked on this document almost from the onset when I was elected Chair in November 2018, with both of us identifying it to be a critical, structural document for the Foundation.

When the final document was submitted to the Municipality for approval, if it was not for Ms Fouche's interventions and further submissions as well as perseverance at the various committee meetings, I can genuinely say we would not have concluded the lease on these favorable terms.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, the Members of the Foundation and dare I say the entire Nieu Bethesda village that relies on the Owl House for its main economic touristic activity, we will always be in your debt and I thank you for all of your effort and commitment to seeing us over the finish line with this lease agreement.

Integrated Conservation Management Plan

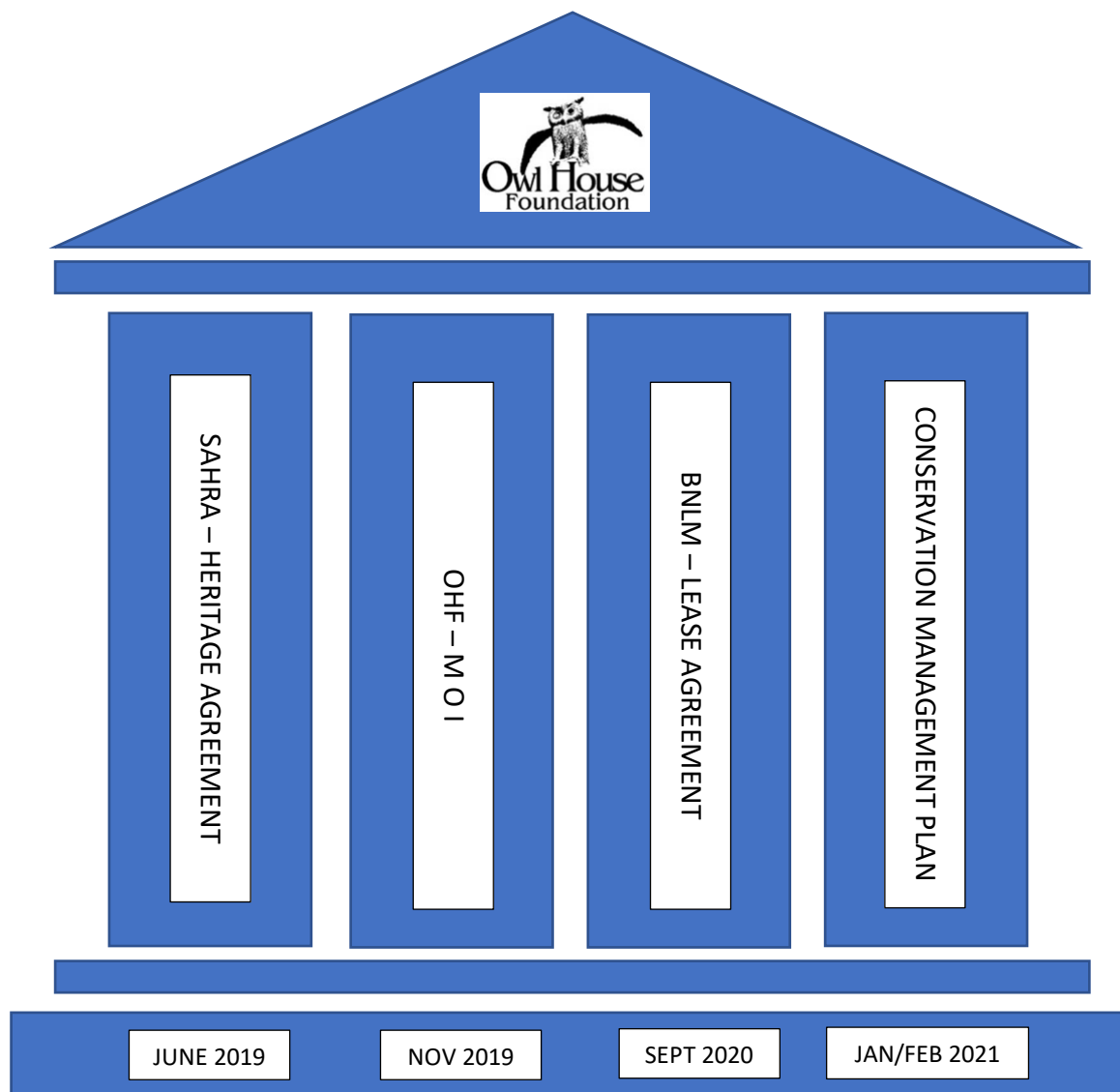
The draft document of the ICMP has been completed but was awaiting one section which was delayed due to the Covid.

I can report that this section has been completed this December and the Conversation Management Plan will be submitted to SAHRA for vetting and approval with the first few months of 2021.

SUMMARY

When I was elected onto the Board and Chairman in November 2018, I was of the opinion that the Foundation was not on solid ground in terms of compliance and organizational structure.

I made it a priority of my Chairmanship to resolve long outstanding issues and ensure that these compliance and fundamental structural matters were concluded, thereby setting the OHF onto solid foundations for the future.



These structural pillars have all now been built with the final pillar, the Conservation Management Plan, completed and in place hopefully by February 2021.

It has been an extremely long and arduous process but I am grateful for the support and commitment by everyone involved in finalizing each of these Structural Pillars.

CRAFTERS

In November last year, when the OHF adopted the new MOI, our 2nd Objective of the Foundations states:

1.1 The Secondary Object

The Company hereby recognizes its social responsibility towards the community of Nieu-Bethesda and undertakes to sustainably support the community and in particular also the crafters and informal traders in promoting “the Owl House” as a tourist attraction, as it endeavors to fulfill its primary objective.

As Covid-19 struck South Africa and the country went into Level 5 Lock Down forcing the Owl House to close, the catastrophic impact on the ability of the Crafters to earn any income became a major concern by the Board.

In line with our 2nd Objective, the Board set about spearheading various initiatives and fund-raising activities to assist the Crafters to survive during the Lock Down.

The Board was able to buy, assemble and hand-out 5 sets of hampers to all the Crafters over the Lock Down Period.

These significant hampers included food for a family of 4 for a month, firewood and electricity.

The Board would like to thank every organization, members of the Foundation and Public who contributed their time, efforts, resources, networks and funds to this urgent and critical need that was brought on by the Covid-19 crisis.





CRAFTERS PRECINCT

It has become a primary focus and priority of the Foundation to improve the standing and dignity of the Crafters within the context of The Owl House.

These humble yet talented individuals have spent years creating cement sculptures and selling them as souvenirs to visiting tourists. It is quite possible that small cement owls with large glass eyes adjoin gardens and homes around the entire world as memories of Helen Martins Owl House.

However, the fact remains that these Crafters sell their wares out of sub-standard structures enduring the harsh Karoo elements to ensure that they provide a service to the Owl House visitors and make a self-sustaining living through their craft.

No one can dispute the inhumane conditions that the Crafters have operated in for over a decade and the Foundation, with its newly adopted MOI and Objectives, resolved to ensure that their Precinct is improved in such a way that will bring much pride, joy and dignity to their trade and position.

Some pictures of current informal structures used by Crafters to store their Craft and protect themselves from the Karoo elements are included below and illustrate how these structures are very susceptible to damage especially with the strong winds that often beset the Village.



The first part of process is the Town Planning process with the Municipality and submission of the Application for Rezoning and Consent Use to build formal, legal and permanent structures to constitute the Crafters Precinct.

The Application was fully supported by the Board of the Owl House Foundation, the Mayoral Committee of the Beyers Naude Local Municipality, the Crafters themselves, SAHRA (South African Heritage Resource Agency), the Nieu Bethesda Community Tourism Organization and significant majority of residents in Nieu Bethesda.

The Application received 5 formal objections from residents and business owners in Nieu Bethesda.

The five objectors were:

1. Ian and Katrin Alleman – Residents and business owners The Backpackers Accommodation (and various others)
2. Andre Cilliers – Resident and business owner - The Brewery and Two Goats Deli
3. Idil Sheard- Resident and business owner - The Village Inn Restaurant
4. Christa Scholtz – Resident and business owner – The Pienaar Family Heritage Museum
5. Reinet le Roux – Resident and business owner – The Reinethuis Honey Company and Blue Cupboard Honesty Shop

We rebutted these objections and submitted these rebuttals to the Municipal Town Planners.

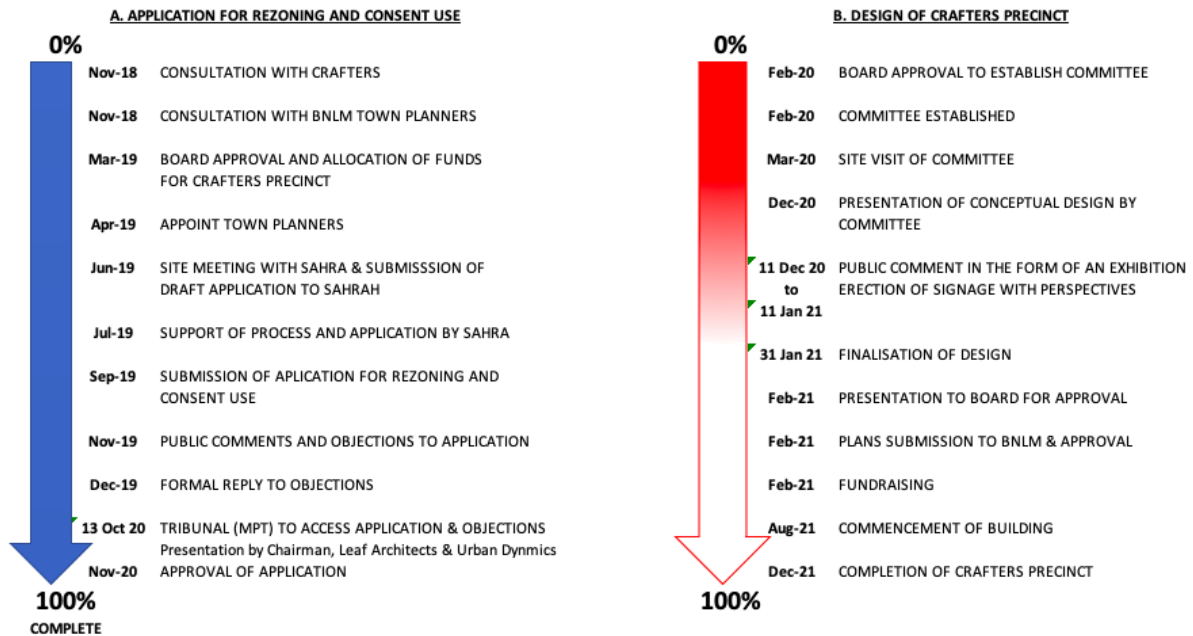
As Chairman of the Owl House Foundation, I attended in person the Municipal Planning Tribunal meeting, along with our fellow Director Daniel Van Der Merwe of Leaf Architects who attended via Cyber Video link up from Pretoria and our Town Planner who also attended via Cyber Video link up from Port Elizabeth.

I am extremely happy and proud to announce to the Members that the application has been formally APPROVED by the Municipality.

This is a major and significant achievement and a major hurdle has been overcome.

It is also with great pride that I can announce that the Crafters Precinct was submitted into Afrisam-SAIA (South African Institute of Architects) Sustainable Design Award and it has elected as one of the finalists in the Award.

Procedure and Progress of Application and Design of Crafters Precinct



CRAFTERS PRECINCT EXHIBITION

We now proceed to the second phase of this crucial endeavor:

The presentation of the various design options of the Crafters Precinct.

The Committee looking at these various options was constituted in February 2020 and comprises of Angus Taylor, internationally renowned Artist and Sculptor, Daniel Van Der Merwe, Professional Architect and Board Member and Fulvio De Stefanis, Chairman of the Owl House Foundation.

The Committee met and consulted with the Crafters to establish their fundamental needs and requirements, concerns and wishes. Their primary needs summarized are they wanted a stall that was lockable, weatherproof from rain, snow and sun, a cement floor, a shelf and a space of 3m x 3m. The Crafters also importantly agreed that the Precinct cater to only the historical Crafters who have spent years in the location selling their crafts and thus limited the amount of stalls to 15 stalls.

The Site Plan as well as 2 design options has been presented and is on display as an exhibition in our Board Room at the Owl House from today.

The purpose of the exhibition is to afford Members of the Foundations, residents of Nieu Bethesda and Interested Parties to participate and comment on the various design options.

This Public Participation Period will last 1 month after which a final design will be submitted to the Board for approval to submit plans to council.

FUNDRAISING

The Crafters Precinct will rely heavily on the kind donations of the public as well as a financial commitment from the Owl House Foundation in order to realise the building and completion of the Precinct.

The Foundation will be opening a separate and sub account with the Financial Institution ABSA.

This account will solely and primarily be used to receive donations and pay expenses for the building and completion of the Crafters Precinct.

In terms of good fiduciary governance, this ring-fenced account will be audited and reported as a special report by our audit firm once the process and building of the precinct has been completed.

We will begin the fundraising initiative once the final designs of the Crafters Precinct have been approved by the Board and a Funding Document has been generated. This document will be distributed and we hope our Members will all assist in disbursing it to their networks.

We will be building a Donors Wall at the Precinct and all donations will be acknowledged.

We have established a Tiered Donor Structure as follows:

Bronze	up to R15 000
Silver	from R15 000 to R25 000
Gold	from R25 000 to R50 000
Platinum	more than R50 000

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

During this last year, we received a R15 000 donation from the Graaff Foundation to be utilized towards the glass restorations in the Owl House.

We thank members of the Graaff Family and their Foundation for their continued support and donations.

Over and above the acknowledgment in the Chairman's Report, we will be installing an Acknowledgement Board within the Visitor Centre to formally acknowledge past and future donors – these plans have however been delayed due to the unforeseen challenges brought on by the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Another acknowledgement I must make as Chairman is that to Charles Graham.

Charles has been the absolute bedrock of our Foundation in terms of administration and financial governance.

With the retrenchments that took place due to Covid, this included Charles and when we re-opened, Charles indicated that he would not take up his full-time employment again.

True to Charles' character, he did not leave the Foundation in the lurch but instead offered, to which the Board accepted, that he assisted the Foundation in a much more limited capacity until his position is replaced.

I would like to formally expressed my sincerest thanks on behalf of the entire Board, the Foundation and the members of the Owl House Foundation: key to the success of any organization is its people – and Charles, your dedication, institutional knowledge, integrity and loyalty to this organization has been a key and major factor to its success of these last years that you have been in the administrator position.

We look forward to your involvement albeit it in new and different way but for now, we thank you for your time, work and dedication.

JOINT VENTURE WITH OTHER CENTRES

Nieu Bethesda, as a small Karoo Village, is in a unique and fortunate position that not only does it have the Owl House, a formidable tourist attraction, but it has two further centres of excellence which add immense value to the tourist attraction of the village, namely The James Kitching Fossil Centre and The Bushman Heritage Museum.

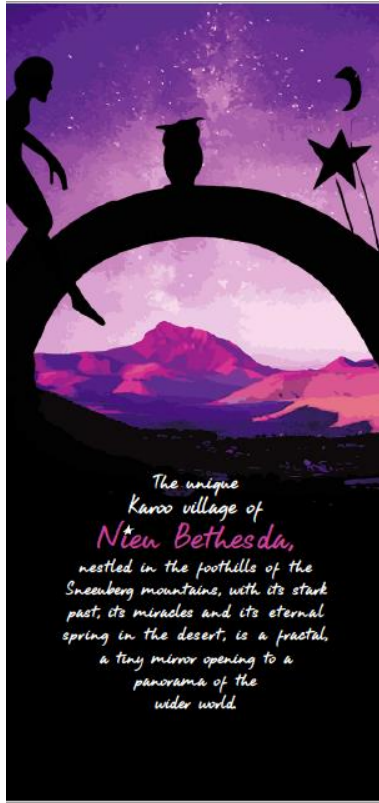
As Chairman of the Owl House, I approached the two other centres to establish a formal working relationship.

This outreach was immensely successful and it has initially resulted in a single advertising brochure of all 3 centres of excellence jointly and equally appearing on a Nieu Bethesda advertising brochure.

It was evident that the thread that links the 3 centres is the thread of Time in Nieu Bethesda, starting 250 million years ago up until present day.

Uniquely, the brochure now showcases Nieu Bethesda tourism and includes Art through the Owl House, History through the Fossil Centre and Cultural Heritage through the Bushman Heritage Museum.

The brochure is the cornerstone to build a Tourism Package that will be attractive to both local and international communities and we hope to be working with both the CTO and LTOs of our village and district to unlock more tourism potential.



The unique Karoo village of **Nieu Bethesda**, nestled in the foothills of the Sneezberg mountains, with its stark past, its miracles and its eternal spring in the desert, is a fractal, a tiny mirror opening to a panorama of the wider world.

Timeline

DATE	Event
252 000 000 BC	Continents of Gondwana were joined Fossils proving this theory were found in the Karoo Basin by James Kitching
71 000 BC	First drawing on rock made by homo sapiens (discovered in Blombos caves, 2010)
30 000 BC	Early rock paintings made by Bushmen
10,000 – 5,000 BC	Numerous Rock Paintings made by Bushmen
1652	DEK establishes a station in the Cape
1696	First official Commando against Khoikhoi
1795	First Dutch farmers settle in the Sneezberg and Camdeboo district
1877	DEK officially sanction indiscriminate killing of Bushmen
1878 – 1879	Kabbo, Naarokoo's, (his two sons) (Zemphoyah) last descendants of the [Xam Bushmen
1876	Death of [Kabbo
1878	CREATION OF NIEU BETHESDA by Dutch reformed church as Centre for local farmers
1900	Extinction of the [Xam language
1911	Publication of Specimens of Bushman Folklore by Bleek and Lloyd
1935	James Kitching discovers fossils in and around Nieu Bethesda
1964 – 1966	Helen Martins creates The Owl House and Camel Yard
1966	Death of Helen Martins
1992	Helen's home, now The Owl House officially opened as a museum
1999	Bethesda Arts Centre established offering art classes to the indigenous community
2003	Owl House Foundation is founded and Visitor Centre created
2005	James Kitching Fossil Exploration Centre established
2011	James Kitching Fossil Exploration Centre moved and expanded
2018	Bushman Heritage Museum officially opened in Bethesda Arts Centre
2020	Bushman descendants in Nieu Bethesda begin to reconnect with their ancestry
2020	James Kitching Fossil Centre, Owl House Foundation and Bushman Heritage Museum begin to work together

"The Owl House is admired as one of the best examples of Outsider Art in the world but it's historical context must never be forgotten nor understood. Helen Martins lived in a rigid time made even more difficult by her remote location in the Karoo, almost isolated from the outside world. Yet she had to create her world and for that she enlisted talented men of colour to assist her to bring her imagination into reality. These relationships were controversial for their time and place but Helen persisted, believing in human potential over segregation. In truth, the Owl House represents an early example of Ubuntu.

In this spirit, we embark on a new chapter in the Owl House's history and align ourselves with two other centres of excellence in Nieu Bethesda - The James Kitching Fossil Centre and The Bushman Heritage Museum, all three centres focused on illuminating the wonderful, rich history in one of earth's most spectacular landscapes."

*Ruvinio De Stefanis,
Chairman of the Owl House Foundation*

Knowing ones origins is understanding one's place in the Universe.

Bruce Riddidge, Palaeontologist, Founder, Kitching Fossil Exploration Centre.

Nieu Bethesda takes its name from the Biblical Pool of Bethesda, by the sheep gate in Old Jerusalem. According to the story, when an angel stirred the waters, anyone entering would be healed. This was the place where a Christ told the sick man to take up his bed and walk, but it was also the place where his persecution by the elders began. So darkness and light crashed together. So it is in Nieu Bethesda.

An immersion in its three remarkable Centres, woven together by the mysterious forces of history, makes a visit to the village an unforgettable experience.

Nieu Bethesda is in an area of the Karoo famous for its fossils, the oldest visible in the rocks that survived the extinction poetically called "The Great Dying" 250 million years ago. James Kitching, a famous palaeontologist, discovered in the Karoo proof that the continents, now severed, and separated by mighty oceans, were once joined. His work is celebrated in the **KITCHING FOSSIL EXPLORATION CENTRE**.

A second momentous event memorialized in Nieu Bethesda arose from severance, a great dying, and a magical healing. It was the genocide of the [Xam Bushman of the Eastern and Northern Cape. They lost their land and way of life, their language, and their identity with the invasion of the Dutch and English settlers. Their scattered descendants, after generations of suffering and exile in their own land, have come together around a rare manuscript that recorded their culture, establishing the **BUSHMAN HERITAGE MUSEUM**, where their profound creation mythology is celebrated in giant tapestries.

A third unlikely healing occurred in the home of a woman who found no place amongst her stern church-going neighbours, and fled in Nieu Bethesda in troubled isolation. She had a wild imagination, a terror of the dark, and a love for eastern religion. She was blessed in finding and employing a gentle Bushman sheep-shearer, who turned out to be a talented artist, deeply rooted in the natural world. He was able to transform her visions into remarkable, ornate sculptures, giving meaning to her un-namable yearning. In an act of brutal despair, she took her own life, but after her death her home became a famous museum of "outsider art" known as the **"OWL HOUSE."**

The weaving together of these three events, and the Centres that celebrate them, have perhaps given the village its reputation for being a "power point" of the human spirit.

Jeni Couzyn
Founder, Bushman Heritage Museum



The Kitching Fossil Exploration Centre

Explore deep time and the distant past

Imagine Nieu Bethesda 255 million years ago and meet your distant ancestors! Trapped in the rocks of Nieu Bethesda and surrounds are the ancestors of mammals, tortoises, dinosaurs and more. They tell the story of climate change, moving continents, evolution and dramatic extinctions when most of life on Earth simply disappeared - paving the way for change on an enormous scale.

- We Offer:**
- Short guided tours to the rock formations that clutch the fossil treasures
 - Life-sized models and fossils of the animals that once inhabited the area
 - Unique paintings and illustrations to help you imagine the distant past
 - A hands-on experience of working with fossils
 - Friendly and knowledgeable tour guides local to Nieu Bethesda

The Kitching Fossil Exploration Centre is a section 21 company which commemorates the famous palaeontologist, James Kitching. A former resident of Nieu Bethesda was said to have the power of X Ray Vision because he was so good at finding fossils. It is a joint project of the University of Witwatersrand (Johannesburg) and the Albany Museum (Miskanda).

Opening Times:
9:00am to 12:00pm out of the school holidays.
8:00am to 18:00pm during the school holidays.
Tel: +27 (0) 84 500 3902 | +27 (0) 49 849-1733



The Bushman Heritage Museum

An Immersive experience into the wisdom of the [Xam Bushman

For thousands of years the [Xam Bushman lived in the Great Karoo. Within 250 years of the coming of the Dutch and English settlers, they had been driven into extinction. But they had a profound understanding of the creation of the sun, moon, and stars, and the relationship humanity is supposed to have with the natural world. Their stories are startlingly relevant in our current times of environmental catastrophe. They were saved by a sort of miracle, in a manuscript that has been studied and interpreted in giant tapestries at the Bushman Heritage Museum for twenty years by Bushman descendants.

- We Offer:**
- Galleries of tapestries, with a guide to explain the stories.
 - Accommodation for up to 16 guests. Our rooms, from our quirky round bed in a three story tower, to a luxurious heritage house, are all full of contemporary Bushman art.
 - A licensed restaurant with famous Karoo lamb, and vegetarian dishes made with our home grown produce.
 - A gallery shop to purchase original linocut prints and textiles made at the museum.
 - Warm hospitality and a chance to talk with our Bushman artists who run the Centre.
 - A spacious courtyard, that can be hired for events for up to 250 people.

Opening Times:
8:30am to 20:30pm Monday to Sunday.
Tel: +27 (0) 49 841 1731 | +27 (0) 73 028 8887
Email: info@bethestadtower.co.za | www.bushmanheritagemuseum.org



The Owl House

An Immersive experience into a world of visions

The Owl House is Helen Martins' masterpiece of art that took decades to create. It is regarded as one of the most outstanding examples of Outsider Art in the world and is a South African National Heritage site - a true Karoo Gem! The inside of her home has been kept intact - every surface expressing, in disturbing images of ground glass, her yearning for light in an encroaching darkness. Her garden, the Camel Yard, is quite different in atmosphere. Inspired by William Blake and Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat, here Helen unleashed her imagination, filling her Camel Yard with cement and glass sculptures. But Helen's vision could not be executed alone and she was blessed in finding an artist whom she called "her hands" to work with her. Koox Malgas brought to life the many mermaids, winged camels, lions with huge dark eyes, angels, prophets, and many others characters from Helen's imagination. An unlikely and controversial couple, a white Afrikaans woman and a Bushman, together they worked for twelve years to create Helen's Camel Yard.

- We Offer:**
- Visits to the Owl House and Camel Yard.
 - An insightful museum of Helen's handwritten letters and persona items on display
 - A film about Helen Martins
 - A Visitors Centre with Gallery Shop featuring local Artists who produce art in Nieu Bethesda.
 - Books, cards, and information about Helen Martins.

Opening Times:
9am to 16:30pm Monday to Sunday.
Tel: +27 (0) 49 841 1733
Email: admin@theowlhouse.co.za | www.theowlhouse.co.za

Visitor should confirm Opening Times before travelling to Nieu Bethesda as the above information is subject to change due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

LOOKING FORWARD

I would recommend to the new Board that the main priority and focus of 2021 would be the completion of the Crafters Precinct.

A concerted effort by every member and Director could result in the finalization and resolution of this decades long outstanding matter and it cannot be underestimated enough how the current status quo is a liability to the integrity of this village.

Business owners, whether it be guest houses, restaurants or shops as well as us, the Owl House Foundation cannot continue to benefit from Helen's creation and then continue to allow the Crafters to exhibit their crafts in their current conditions.

Not only would this resolution of the Precinct bring much deserved dignity and respect to the Crafters but it we too would be able to take pride in the entire precinct and set us on a path to be taken seriously as a world class tourism destination.

CONCLUSION

It is important to acknowledge my fellow Directors on the Board.

I am honored and proud to serve alongside a group of people that shares a passion and dedication not only to The Owl House but to the village of Nieu Bethesda and our broader area.

As a Board, we have found much common ground and we have all worked together, pulling in the same direction.

There is still much to be done but what has been achieved in these last 2 years has been remarkable.

It is said that we must learn to crawl before we walk before we run and before we sprint.

I believe that we have finally transitioned from crawling into the walking phase and hopefully, it won't be too long before the Foundation is running and sprinting.

Thank you

FULVIO DE STEFANIS
Chairman
Owl House Foundation

