

Grocott's Mail Tuesday, 26 March 2013

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**TROUBLE DOWN THE LINE...** Workers use a digging machine to plough a trench for new sewage pipes to repair breaks that are polluting the city via a suburban dam in Somerset Heights. Photo: Bridgette Hall

## Sewage leak fouls city suburbs

ANELE MJEKULA AND SIM KIYAZZE

He has been walking his dog (and his children) around the Military Base area for years.

But even Somerset Heights resident Dean Haeefe could not have predicted that Lucky, his two-year-old bull terrier would dive into a 'pool' of human waste for a drink last week.

"He was thirsty and didn't listen to me when I called, 'No Lucky, don't jump - no!'," Haeefe said. Lucky jumped in a metre-wide and metre-deep channel dug up about 18 months ago, when the main sewerage line from the Military Base was blocked.

"He was full of s\*\*t and I had to wash him with Dettol; and I even gave him mouth-wash!"

As distressed as Haeefe is with his dog's day in the muck, he is more worried about the impact this black, gooey, and untreated waste is having on Grahamstown's water system. Gravity appears to have taken the sewage down from the Military Base, through the soils on the outskirts of Somerset Heights and into the wa-

terways that pour into Selworthy Dam, then on to the fields of Graeme College and all the way into Belmont Valley on the outskirts of Grahamstown East.

Residents on Selworthy Road say it's unusual for the Selworthy Dam to be so full at the height of summer (as it is now), and they suspected that some of the water was being flushed from baths, toilets, showers and kitchens at the military base, and ending up in the dam.

Grocott's Mail photographer Bridgette Hall got a bird's eye view of the problem when she flew in a microlight plane with Sharon McGillewie of Larry McGillewie Outdoor Adventures, and photographed the black-and-green mess snaking its way down from the Military Base.

From the dam, the water makes its way into Belmont Valley, where some of the vegetables sold in Grahamstown are grown.

"When you see how green your veggies are, now you know why," Haeefe laughed, "s\*\*t makes things grow."

Contractors working on replacing a section of the sewerage on Thursday said they had a 60m section to complete by this week, but would have to replace the entire length of this line (about 800m).

"This pipe was made of concrete and obviously it broke down after years of use," said Eugene Derrida, a contractor with Peninsular Pipeline Service from Cape Town, via Port Elizabeth. The contractors said they were doing exactly what Makana had asked them to do and could not be drawn on why there was a 30-40 metre section of open sewer.

"We don't know why the soil was not buried after the new pipe had been laid," Derrida said, "or why this area was not fenced off, if the soil is still on the sides."

As it is, there are little mountains of soil on either side of a metre-wide gap in the shrubbery down from the entrance of the Military Base. It's not clear who the previous contractors were, but residents in the area say the open sewer has been this way for almost two years.

Municipal officials were unavailable for comment at the time of going to press.

## Schools weather water cuts

DUMISA LENGWATI

BEING prepared was what saw Grahamstown schools through last week's water outages. Kingswood College, the Diocesan School for Girls and Hoërskool PJ Olivier said they'd had contingency plans in place that allowed them to continue throughout the week-long city-wide water cuts, without compromising their pupils' health and safety.

But they warned that poor communication from the municipality could have disastrous consequences in similar future crises.

Together with St Andrew's College, DSG and Kingswood are still in session. PJ Olivier, Victoria Girls' High, Mary Waters, Nathaniel Nyaluza and Nombulelo close on Thursday. Graeme College and Outlands closed last Thursday.

All have had to rely on alternative water sources, including boreholes, back-up storage units and reservoirs.

For normal activities to continue, some even sought help beyond the school walls from the community.

"Many boarders were able to shower and bath at nearby homes that had water throughout, and also resorted to regular swims in our pools," said Derek Braans, Headmaster of Kingswood Junior School. He also served as Acting College Head at the height of the water crisis last week.

Fortunately, Kingswood was without water for only three days - a much lighter dry spell than was experienced at PJ Olivier. The school, which has been struggling with its municipal water supply since the beginning of the year, is situated on high ground.

To overcome this logistical problem, there are six 10 000 litre reservoir tanks on the school grounds to supply water for the pupils and staff.

"Without these, the continuation of education would have been impossible," said PJ Olivier principal Piet Snyders.

There have also been concerns about the consequences of poor physical hygiene.

"The ablutions aren't always running and this has a

massive impact on the boarding school especially, which accommodates 80% of our 350 enrolled students," said Dave Jarvis, Business Manager at Diocesan School Girls.

"We are disappointed with the municipality from an infrastructural perspective, because there are regular breakdowns, not only in water but electricity as well.

"We need more communication - we never know what's happening, so we can't plan ahead. It's hard to understand what's going on," Jarvis said.

Braans is concerned about the impact on his school's viability.

"We believe this situation is not acceptable and we are concerned about the long-term effects this could possibly have on future enrolment," he told Grocott's Mail on Friday.

Snyders expressed similar sentiments about the town's viability.

"Grahamstown will otherwise be in a very bad situation if something is not done soon," Snyders said.

## Speaking out online

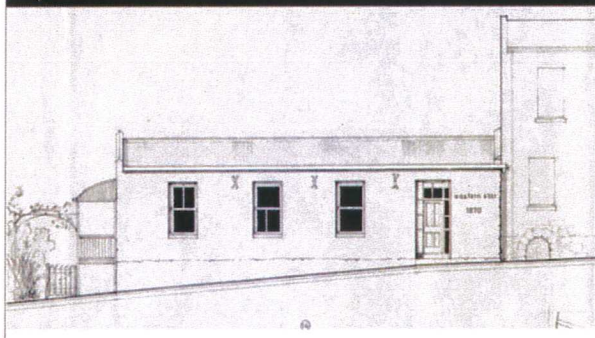
The brutal murder of Grahamstown woman Thandiswa Qubuda once again brings to light the disturbingly regular occurrence of violence against women in our country.

As the voices of Rhodes University activists grow louder in the weeks before the seventh Silent Protest, showing solidarity with survivors who speak out, organisers emphasise the need for stricter media control and sensitivity towards survivors.

Go to Grocott's Online to see a video assessing the rape culture in Grahamstown through the story of rape survivor, Tarryn de Kock. In an interview filmed by Rhodes TV journalism students, De Kock shares her story and her thoughts on the effects of the Silent Protest.

## Eastern Star Gallery

PRINTING AND PRESS MUSEUM



The newly revamped Eastern Star Gallery is situated in Anglo-African Street in Grahamstown city centre. Come and see a working 120 year-old Wharfedale printing press, the same model that was used to print *The Eastern Star*, as well as an antique editorial desk which belonged to John Fairbairn who co-founded the *South African Journal* and *South African Commercial Advertiser* with Thomas Pringle.

There is also an interesting collection of type and printers' tools. Guided tours and school programmes can be presented but please let us know in advance.

OPEN WEEKDAYS 09.00-13.00 & 14.00-16.00 TELEPHONE 046 622 2174

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## BATHURST SHOW

WHERE TOWN AND COUNTRY MEET

**Fri 5th to  
Sun 7th April**  
*Fun for the whole family*

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