

Monthly Newsletter

OLD UNIONITE ASSOCIATION

31 May 2024



A Word from the Chairman

PHOTO BY
JAN-HENDRIK SWIEGERS

Dear Old Unionites,

I am thrilled to introduce to you the first edition of our monthly newsletter, a new medium through which we aim to keep our cherished Union community connected and informed.

As Chairman of the Old Unionite Association, it brings me great joy to launch this initiative that will enable us to stay in touch with all the incredible happenings at the Union Schools.

This newsletter will serve as a platform to share exciting updates, upcoming events, achievements, and opportunities for our alumni to reconnect and stay involved.

Whether you matriculated recently or years ago, we want to ensure that you remain a part of our vibrant community.

I encourage each and every one of you to get in touch with the Old Unionite Association.

Share your stories, accomplishments, and memories with us.

Let us know how we can better serve you and enhance your connection to the Union Schools.

Together, let's celebrate the rich history and bright future of our beloved Union Schools. Stay tuned for more updates and enriching content in the upcoming editions of our newsletter.

With warm regards,

Chairman, Old Unionite Association

Contact us:

EMAIL:

oldunionites@
unionschools.co.za

WEBSITE:

www.oua.co.za

FACEBOOK:

Old Unionites,
Union High School,
Graaff-Reinet

WHATSAPP:

072 178 7699

Say 'Hello' to...

We are delighted to announce the appointment of Mrs. Tess Neill as the Association's new liaison with the Old Unionites.

In her new role, Mrs. Neill will also spearhead the Association's fundraising initiatives, aiming to enhance support and resources for our community.

Mrs. Neill is a dedicated parent to Union learners Joshua, Alex and Kenza and has recently completed a term on the School Governing Body (SGB). Currently, she is employed as the Assistant Debtors Clerk for Union.

Mrs. Neill's deep ties to the school community ensure that she understands the values and needs of our Old Unionites.

Originally from Parys, Mrs. Neill and her family moved to Graaff-Reinet from Tarkastad in June 2019. Her husband, Dave, assumed ownership of Radium, a well-known home and industrial cleaning enterprise. The Neill family's relocation has been a positive addition to our community, and we are thrilled to welcome Mrs. Neill in this new capacity.



Mrs. Neill holds a BComm degree and brings a wealth of experience from her involvement in various entrepreneurial ventures, as well as the hospitality and service industry.

Her background and skills are perfectly aligned with the needs of the Old Unionite Association, and we are confident that her leadership will be instrumental in driving our initiatives forward.

Old Unionites can be assured that they will hear from Mrs. Neill soon. We are excited to have her on board and look forward to the growth and strengthening of our Association under her guidance.

Stay connected

The Old Unionite Association is dedicated to fostering greater connectivity and celebration among past learners of the school.

To stay connected, we encourage you to visit our website at www.oua.co.za, follow our Facebook platform or sign up as an AlumNet member. It's as simple as 1, 2, 3. Just click on this link <https://unionschools.alumnet.co.za> to register. And the best part is, it's absolutely free of charge!

We also welcome you to get involved and share your news with us.

Whether you have achieved something remarkable, reached a significant milestone or made a valuable contribution, we want to hear from you. Your achievements, milestones and contributions serve as a source of inspiration for generations to come, embodying the spirit of excellence that defines us as Old Unionites.



The Union Schools' Museum

The **UNION SCHOOLS' MUSEUM** - located within the school's foyer - serves as a cherished repository of the institution's rich history, traditions and the indomitable spirit of its learners.

Old Unionites in possession of cherished memorabilia or artifacts of historical significance to the Union Schools, are warmly invited to contribute to our ever-expanding collection.

Please reach out to Mrs Mariëtte Burger at uhsmarketing@unionschools.co.za to explore how you can help preserve our shared legacy for generations to come.

Old Unionites in the news



Megan Doyle

In the aftermath of the tragic building collapse in George on Monday, 6 May, the resilience and heroism displayed by individuals from all walks of life have been nothing short of remarkable.

Among these unsung heroes stands Old Unionite **Megan Doyle**, from Union's Class of 2019, whose selfless dedication to the welfare of our four-legged companions has shone brightly amidst the darkness.

Megan, who is employed at A.C.E - Veterinary Physiotherapy in George, stepped forward without hesitation to offer her expertise and support during this trying time. *Recognizing the vital role that canine detection dogs play in search and rescue efforts, Megan embarked on a mission to ensure the well-being of these extraordinary animals as they tirelessly worked through grueling shifts, navigating treacherous terrain and debris with unwavering determination.*

From comforting the canine heroes to providing essential care and support, Megan exemplifies the spirit of compassion and solidarity that defines the Union community.

Our thoughts remain with all those affected by this tragedy, and we extend our deepest gratitude to Megan and others like her for their invaluable contributions to the recovery efforts.



Gerrit Brink

In the realm of academic excellence, one name shines bright among the alumni of Union High School.

Old Unionite **Gerrit Brink** has recently marked a series of remarkable achievements, solidifying his place as a rising star in the field of engineering and data science.

Gerrit's journey began with his matriculation from Union High School in 2017. Fueled by a passion for innovation and technology, he embarked on a path of higher education, culminating in a Bachelor of Engineering degree specializing in Mechatronics, Robotics and Automation Engineering, which he obtained in December 2021.

Undeterred by the challenges of advanced study, Gerrit continued to push the boundaries of his academic pursuits. **His dedication and hard work paid off when he graduated with a Master of Engineering degree in Industrial Engineering with a specialization in Data Science from the University of Stellenbosch on 28 March 2024.**

Gerrit's master's research, titled "Multi-Objective Evolutionary Optimization Algorithms for Truck and Drone Delivery Systems,"

garnered acclaim for its innovative approach and practical applications. His outstanding achievement was reflected in his impressive score of 83%. Throughout his academic journey, Gerrit delved into a diverse array of subjects, including Big Data, Machine Learning Algorithms, Optimization and Data Analysis, among others. *Armed with a comprehensive skill set that encompasses both theoretical knowledge and practical expertise, Gerrit is well-equipped to tackle the complex challenges of the modern world.*

Not content to rest on his laurels, Gerrit has already begun making waves in the professional realm. Since February 2024, he has been contributing his expertise as a Business Analyst at Zutari Engineering in Cape Town, further solidifying his reputation as a valuable asset in the industry. *As Gerrit continues to chart his course in the realms of engineering and data science, his alma mater, Union High School, stands proud, knowing that one of its own is making a significant impact on the world stage. With his passion, dedication and relentless pursuit of excellence, Gerrit serves as an inspiration to aspiring scholars everywhere, proving that with determination and hard work, anything is possible.*



Sisanda Henna

Well done to Old Unionite **Sisanda Henna** (Class of 1999), whose latest accomplishment saw him co-starring in the hit Netflix drama series, *Soon Comes the Night*.

The gripping crime-drama bagged the top spot on Netflix within three days of its launch as the number one most-streamed series on Netflix South Africa.

Click on the following link to read the full article: <https://www.dispatchlive.co.za/news/2024-01-26-eastern-cape-born-actor-henna-stars-in-hit-netflix-series/>



Kyle-Luke du Preez

Congratulations to our Old Unionite, **Kyle-Luke du Preez**, on the remarkable achievement of obtaining his multi-engine, instrument-rated, commercial pilot's license earlier this year!

(Kyle-Luke was the Head Boy of Union's Class of 2021.)

Mihlali Tyanase

Former Union High School 1st XV captain **Mihlali Tyanase**, (Class of 2021), once again represented the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in this year's edition of the Varsity Cup competition.



Lynn Naudé

The Old Unionite Association is thrilled to acknowledge the remarkable success of the recently concluded Betway SA20 cricket league. Why, do you ask?

This event, which captivated cricket enthusiasts of all ages, may seem unrelated to the Union Schools at first glance. However, **the Association is delighted to reveal the integral role played by one of our own, League COO and Old Unionite Lynn Naudé** (Class of 1994), in orchestrating the entire tournament from start to finish, alongside Graeme Smith and their team. The magnitude of organising such a prestigious event cannot be overstated. From coordinating air travel and accommodation to ensuring security, catering and ticketing at the six different venues, Lynn had to manage an extensive list of tasks. It is truly awe-inspiring how she flawlessly executed each responsibility, resulting in a seamless and successful tournament. Lynn's exceptional efforts have not only made South Africa proud but have also elevated the stature of SA Cricket.



Old Unionites give back...



We are proud to announce the generous sponsorship of Union High School's 1st XV rugby team by two Old Unionites, Mr Philip Putziger and Mr Frank Elliot-Gentry.

Members of the Class of '85 and '91 respectively, they have exemplified the spirit of giving back to their alma mater.

Their sponsorship has provided the team with new tog bags, jerseys and shorts, ensuring they

are fully equipped for success on the field.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Mr Putziger and Mr Elliot-Gentry for their dedication to our alma mater and its learners.

Their generosity not only enhances the school's sports programme but also inspires future generations to invest in the legacy of the Union Schools.

The Old Unionite Association is – once again – eagerly anticipating this year's **INTERSCHOOLS** and the annual class reunions associated with it! We extend a warm invitation to all reunion groups to join us for this special occasion. *It is our hope that all class groups planning on hosting reunions will be able to participate and make this event even more memorable.*

To ensure a smooth planning process, we kindly request all reunion groups to complete the following link at <https://forms.gle/BSbyTZLsZgArJihAA> or email us at oldunionites@unionschools.co.za

Please take note that despite it being a public holiday, the traditional Interschools' Assembly will still take place on Friday, 9 August. We encourage everyone to mark their calendars and be part of this special celebration.

Spotlight on current projects



A legacy written on the walls

Picture a wall filled with hundreds of plaques inscribed with moving, humorous and inspiring messages at the heart of our campus.

Union High School's new **LEGACY PROJECT** will serve as a continuation of our 'Legacy Plaque' project featured on the perimeter wall of our school and will provide additional opportunity for alumni, staff, learners and families to make their long-lasting mark and to become part of Union history, at the same time boosting support for Union's fundraising endeavours.

At a cost of R500 per plaque, your personalised metal plaque (sized 15cmx15cm) can record you or your child's time at the school; celebrate your reunion; carry an inspirational message to future learners; contain a fun quote, or a dedication to the person(s) who most inspired you here or elsewhere.

As Old Unionites, parents, extended family and friends of the school, you are the foundation upon which the Union Schools thrive. Now you can support the school whilst making a lasting mark on our beautiful campus, leaving a timeless message for future generations of learners, educators and and leaders.

To purchase your plaque:

Make an EFT payment to the following account (please send a POP and inscription through to uhsmarketing@unionschools.co.za)

BANK DETAILS FOR EFT:
U.H.S. Clearing Account
Standard Bank, Graaff-Reinet
Acc no. 082528330
Branch code 050116
REF: Name & Legacy

So, remember friends and loved ones, say thank you, or simply share a memory or leave a message - by doing so you will be helping to support future generations of learners at Union.

PLEASE NOTE: The Legacy Project will be unveiled during this year's Interschools. Deadline for this year's plaques is June 30th.

Contact uhsmarketing@unionschools.co.za with any queries.



1st XV Locker Room Plaques

In 2022, Union High School embarked on a mission to redefine the essence of the locker room for their 1st XV players. **Today, that vision stands tall in a space that symbolizes pride, camaraderie and tradition.**

The revamped locker room is more than just a physical space; it's a sanctuary for the players, equipped with top-of-the-line lockers that exude a sense of ownership.

But it's not just about aesthetics. The locker room underwent a comprehensive makeover, including fresh paint, plush carpeting and personalized perspex name plates, creating an environment where every player feels valued and inspired.

What truly sets this locker room apart, however, is its homage to the past. **Small brass plaques adorn the lockers, bearing the names of former Union 1st XV players.** These plaques serve as a bridge between the past and the present, honoring the legacy of those who came before while inspiring the players of today.

But the story doesn't end there. These commemorative plaques aren't just tokens of history; they're a lifeline for the future of Union rugby. Plaques are available for purchase, with proceeds going towards supporting the school's rugby programme. Furthermore, Old Unionites and supporters are invited to immortalise their connection to the team by adding their names to the locker room walls, ensuring that their legacy lives on for generations to come.

Seen here in the accompanying photo stands young Murray Hope, a Grade 7 learner and aspiring 1st XV player. Representing Union as a u/13A player, Murray carries with him the dreams of following in his father's footsteps onto the 1st XV team. **With his father's plaque proudly displayed in the locker room, Murray embodies the spirit of Union rugby – a tradition of resilience and unwavering passion.**

To be a part of this legacy, contact the school at uhsmarketing@unionschools.co.za



Old Unionites out and about

In support of our neighbours

In a show of camaraderie and sportsmanship, the Old Unionite Association proudly entered a team into Hoër Volkskool's annual hunting competition held on Friday, 17 May.

The team, comprised of Old Unionites George Hope, William Copeman, Rhett Newton and Richard Collett, gladly shared in the spirit of friendly competition.

In a close-knit community like Graaff-Reinet, where traditions run deep and relationships are cherished, events like these strengthen the bonds between schools and their alumni.

We hope that the Old Unionites' day in the field was both successful and memorable.



Blast From The Past



Oh captain, my captain

Union has a rich rugby tradition, and at the heart of its early days stands a remarkable figure: **Ted Slater**.

A passionate rugby enthusiast, Ted played in the school's 1st XV until 1924 and holds the distinguished title of being **Union High School's first official rugby captain**.

Union's first recorded rugby match was played on 15 April 1922 against Aberdeen, with Ted leading the team as captain. Ted's leadership on the field set a precedent for future generations of rugby players at Union. *His dedication to the sport and his team was evident in his performance and the respect he garnered from teammates and opponents alike.*

The Slater family's contributions to rugby and education extend beyond Ted's achievements. Ted's brother, Jack Slater, achieved national recognition as a Springbok and later contributed to education as the Headmaster of Kingswood College in Grahamstown.

Their father, WP Slater, was one of the founders of Union High School, demonstrating a strong commitment to education and community. Additionally, their grandfather, Josiah Slater, was a foundational member of both Kingswood College and Rhodes University, cementing the family's legacy in South African education.



In memory of Melody Charles

Union High School **has always been a very happy school with a warm and friendly atmosphere.**

Similarly, Graaff-Reinet has built an enviable reputation as a hospitable town with a unique old world charm. But both the school and town have experienced days of extreme sadness. We'd like to recall one today.

This one concerns **Melody Charles**, a lovely schoolgirl who attended Union in the early 1950s.

She was a warm, loving person, a good student and an excellent tennis player. When she was in Std 9 she returned to the Union House hostel from a leave-out weekend, and within days took seriously ill with diphtheria. Tragically, she died. The school community was devastated.

Now, at the time the school had no adequate changing facilities for sports teams. Players had to change in the nearby classrooms. The Graaff-Reinet district was experiencing the famous wool boom just then and there were already plans in the pipeline for a pavilion with suitable changing-rooms and a tuck-shop on the ground floor.

Aptly, it was to be built to the north of the main tennis courts. The Rev. Wilfred Hartley, the Methodist minister in town, launched a fund to finance the building of the **Melody Charles Pavilion**.

Melody's father Harold opened the fund with a donation of five hundred pounds - a great deal of money in those days.

Generous donations were received from many quarters, and soon the Melody Charles Memorial Pavilion became a reality.

A plaque was placed prominently in memory of Melody. *(The plaque and a photo of Melody can today be found in the tennis clubhouse among the photographic tennis archives adorning the walls.)*

The building was later extensively rebuilt to become the magnificent Union the school has today, but the little tennis pavilion and clubhouse is still there.



Major Player



Lex Bremner

Introducing our new series 'Major Players' spotlighting the influential figures who have shaped the landscape of the Union Schools throughout its history.

Join us on a journey through the lives and legacies of the visionaries, reformers and educators who have left an indelible mark on the local education system.

Major Player: Lex Bremner

The playing fields at Union have been described as some of the best in the country. The late Charles Fortune, a South African sports broadcaster and writer, thought the playing fields one of the most beautiful he had ever seen. Much of what the learners of the Union Schools enjoy today, is owed to legendary groundsman, Mr Lex Bremner.

Originally part of the Glebe Lands owned by the Anglican Church, the Union High School grounds were purchased in 1925. Featuring a quadrangle layout, surrounded by classrooms, the school initially boasted a solitary sports field, now named Puttick Field after its first headmaster, Mr Arthur Puttick.

The original field was nowhere as verdant and lush as the present day one. It was hard, thinly covered with grass and clover, and rugby players had to learn to cushion their falls during tackles.

Over time, this field evolved into a verdant haven for sporting endeavours.

The transformation of the grounds owes much to the visionary leadership of Mr H.W. Arnott, headmaster for 25 dynamic years. His commitment to enhancing the school's facilities sparked a wave of development. With the assistance of local farmers, equipment was borrowed to overhaul the fields, while learners diligently planted grass under Arnott's guidance. Arnott's drive, however, extended beyond the

fields, fostering the creation of additional amenities like swimming baths and tennis courts, as well as beautifying the surroundings.

In 1958 Mr Lex Bremner - a man cut from the same cloth as Arnott, tirelessly dedicated to his craft – took up the position as the school's groundskeeper. Together, they reshaped the landscape, including the establishment of the Minnaar field. Bremner's commitment was palpable, his devotion reflected in every blade of grass he nurtured. His blood, sweat and tears saturated the grounds.

Yet, challenges arose - floods, sewage mishaps, and unauthorized trespassing tested Bremner's resolve. Nevertheless, his unwavering dedication remained steadfast, earning him the admiration of the school community.

It was with much sadness that the Union High School took its leave of this man with green fingers, ready hands and perceptive brain who could go straight to the pith of a problem.

Among the footprints left by Headmasters and teachers, one man will stand out for giving the Union High School sports grounds of which it can be proud.

Personal Life

Lex Bremner's impact on Graaff-Reinet is indelible, painting him as one of the most vibrant personas in the town's history.



His multifaceted contributions to community, spanning sports, agriculture, commerce and culture, resonate deeply.

A naturalist, artist and amateur paleontologist, Cape Town-born Bremner nurtured his affinity for nature in his youth in the Graaff-Reinet area on the then Thornton family farm, Blaauwater. Educated at Queen's College, his prowess in sports, particularly sprinting, shone brightly.

The ebb of the Depression led Bremner away from his beloved Graaff-Reinet, steering him towards employment in the mines near Johannesburg. Despite this detour, his spirit remained resilient, propelling him to join the armed forces during World War II, where his piloting skills garnered acclaim.

Returning to Graaff-Reinet, where he transitioned to groundsman at Union High School, Bremner's talents flourished, sculpting

the school's landscapes into verdant marvels. His expertise in sports field layout and coaching tennis catapulted several learners to Eastern Province junior tennis acclaim.

Retirement didn't dim his passion; instead, it fueled his pursuits in paleontology and anthropology, with notable discoveries earning him scientific accolades.

A prolific writer, Bremner's contributions to the Graaff-Reinet Advertiser spanned nature conservation, history and societal reflections. His love for the outdoors extended to hunting, where his prowess and agility were legendary. His legacy lives on through his surviving family and the Lex Bremner Fossil Collection, a testament to his boundless curiosity and dedication to preserving history.

As he peacefully bid adieu in 1992, his memory continues to inspire generations.



 **CHERISHING THE TIMELESS CAMARADERIE AND SPORTSMANSHIP OF DERBY DAYS AT UNION.**

Good memories never fade..

In the next issue:

Interschools: the what, the when and where

The White Jersey

An exciting raffle that begs your support

The way forward for the Old Unionite Association

Thank you for reading!
