

Newsletter

OLD UNIONITE ASSOCIATION

December 2025



📷 UNION HIGH SCHOOL'S CAMPUS COVERED IN A SEA OF TENTS AS THE GRAVEL BURN RACE VILLAGE TOOK SHAPE ON OUR FIELDS IN COTOBER THIS YEAR.

Thank you for your support in 2025

As we reach the close of another year, it is fitting to pause and reflect on the journey that 2025 has taken us on.

It has been a year marked by many joys and, sadly, many moments of loss.

A year filled with hard work, dedication, and also immense frustration as we continue to navigate the complexities and challenges of the school system.

Through it all, the spirit of the Old Unionite Association has remained steadfast.

May I take this moment to wish each of you, your families and your friends a wonderful season of togetherness and peace.

May the small, quiet moments of joy remind you daily of the blessings that surround you and may they give you the encouragement to step into 2026 with enthusiasm, renewed energy and hope.

Thank you for your unwavering support, your commitment to our Union community, and the heart you bring to this Association.

Rhett Newton

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Chairman's Report 2025

The 2025 year has been one of both challenge and cautious optimism for the Old Unionite Association.

While several initiatives have shown promise, our overall income streams have shifted significantly, most notably due to the impact of the liquor ban by the Eastern Cape Department of Education, which has affected our key traditional revenue source, as well as our ability to gather as a connected community of Old Unionites.

There is still a legal case in process, but we don't hold out much hope for the foreseeable future.

The introduction of the new fundraising platform has been moderately successful, though not to the extent we had hoped. Uptake has been slow, with most sign-ups only achieved through direct, one-on-one engagement during Interschools.

Clearly, our alumni base responds best to personal connection rather than broad-based appeals - an important lesson for how we approach fundraising in future.

Highlights and Key Achievements

Despite the challenges, the OUA has made a total investment back into the school during 2025 of R220 000, excluding the Bursary below and the Class of 1975's donation, which we feel is very significant.

Some of the more significant highlights follow below:

Investment into Cricket

A major highlight this year has been the investment into Union's cricket programme, driven directly and largely funded by William Copeman (Class of 1998).

His contribution has made a tangible difference to the development of the sport at the school, and we are incredibly grateful.

- We have been able to host Gary Kirsten and his team again for valuable insights and lessons, for parents, learners and coaching staff.
- We have upskilled our coaching staff by funding CoachEd level 1 and level 2 courses.
- Carl Bradfield, a former First-Class cricketer and one of South Africa's most meticulous schoolboy coaches, has hosted 5 coaching sessions at Union.

The Van Schalkwyk Recurring Bursary

The incredibly generous Van Schalkwyk Family have created an ongoing bursary fund which will literally change lives. The current learner who has been awarded the bursary is an avid sportsman, and a true Unionite in every sense of the word. The bursary has facilitated the removal of some overwhelming obstacles from his path, and he is absolutely flourishing with the opportunity.

Class of 1975 Contribution

The Class of 1975 generously donated R50,000 towards the refurbishment of the school's pianos. This investment has been warmly received by the Culture Department, who have expressed sincere appreciation for the support, and we applaud the Class of 1975 for their massive commitment to our school.

Gravel Burn & Interschools

Interschools was a great highlight for us, as we hosted it on home soil again. Financially, it was not a massive money spinner, as due to the government school liquor ban, all festivities and hosting of Reunion Groups had to be moved to an alternative venue.

This resulted in many expenses that were not previously incurred in the Union (rent of facilities, security etc), but we were none-the-less very grateful to still be able to host this event, and reconnect with everyone. Gravel Burn proved to be an absolute lifesaver this year, providing the OUA with some additional income, and also the opportunity to support this fantastic inaugural race.

The dedication of everyone involved cannot be overstated, with many Old Unionites and parents working incredibly hard to ensure the success of Gravel Burn and we look forward to partnering with them for a number of years to come.

In Closing

While 2025 has been a testing year, it has also reaffirmed the strength and commitment of our Old Unionite community. The financial challenges have forced us to think differently, collaborate more closely, and recommit to the purpose of the Association - to support Union High School and learner who still has the privilege of walking these halls.

With gratitude to all who contributed time, effort, and resources this year.

Here's to rebuilding, reinvesting and refocusing in 2026.

In Memoriam

As this year draws to a close, we pause to honour and remember the Old Unionites who are no longer with us. For some, theirs were long, full, and richly lived lives - legacies marked by wisdom, service, and decades of connection to our Union community. For others, their time with us was heartbreakingly brief, their stories cut far too short and their absence felt deeply.

This year, we pay tribute to:

George Watermeyer, Darren Maher, Sakhi Matross, Tony Burrell, Jenny Dodds, Jerry Rose-Innes, Arthur Knott-Craig & Andre Bekker. We hold each of them in our thoughts with gratitude for the impact they made, whether over a lifetime or in a few precious years.

May the memory of those we have lost remain a comforting light - reminding us of the ties that bind us as Old Unionites, across generations, across time, and beyond their earthly journeys.

Gravel, Grit and a Whole Lot of Heart



When the Gravel Burn event rolled through the magnificent Karoo recently, the Union Schools were privileged to be part of the action - not on the bikes, but very much at the heart of the operation.

The Old Unionite Association was gifted the rather minor task of feeding 450 hungry crew members lunch and dinner... and in true Union fashion, instead of panicking, we pulled together and rose to the occasion with aplomb.

A fabulous team of Old Unionites and parents of current learners stepped up without hesitation, sleeves were rolled, hairnets donned, and a production line of note was born. Meals were prepared, plated and served with efficiency, enthusiasm and more than a few jokes along the way.

What could have been a long, exhausting logistical challenge turned into a day (and night!) filled with laughter, banter and that unmistakable Union camaraderie.

Yes, it was a very long day. Yes, there were tired feet and late-night pack-ups. But there was also immense pride, genuine connection and a reminder of what makes our community so special. Events like Gravel Burn don't just pass through the Karoo - they bring people together, strengthen bonds and shine a light on the incredible spirit that lives within Union Schools.



Upcoming events

Founders' Weekend 2026



Members of the Union community are requested to please **SAVE THE DATE** for the Union Schools' annual **Founders' Weekend** celebrations to be held on Friday and Saturday, 23 and 24 January 2026. **The event will mark the founding of Union High School 107 years ago.**

Full details about the weekend's programme will be made available early next year.

Join us for our first steak evening of the year!

The Old Unionite Association is hosting a **STEAK EVENING** at the Tony Burrell Union on Thursday evening, 08 January, during Union's 19th annual Senior Cricket Festival.

Contact Mrs Suzanne Marais at 082 823 8286 to reserve your ticket. *All are invited!*



Welcome back!

It has been an absolute joy to welcome Old Unionite **Musa Zweni (Class of 2023)** back to our campus during the official Grade 12 marking centre, where she is working as an assistant to the markers.

Seeing her beautiful smile and vibrant energy lighting up our corridors once again has been a reminder of the exceptional young people Union is proud to call its own.

Musa has just completed her second year at Rhodes University, where she is majoring in Biochemistry, Human Kinetics and Ergonomics. Her academic dedication and discipline continue to shine: she was awarded a Rhodes Scholarship and achieved a place among the Top 5 academics in her residence during her first semester - a remarkable accomplishment that speaks to her work ethic and focus.

True to form, Musa has also continued to pursue her love of hockey, a passion she nurtured for many years at Union as our steadfast 1st team goalkeeper. Her commitment to the sport has seen her selected to represent Eastern Cape Hockey in both 2024 and 2025, competing in Johannesburg and Pretoria. In recognition of her sporting excellence, she was also awarded a Rhodes Sports Bursary.

Musa, we are incredibly proud of you. Your consistent growth, humility, and determination reflect an upward trajectory that inspires everyone who crosses your path. We cannot wait to see where your hard work and commitment take you next. May you always remain the humble star that you are - and know how proud we are to call you an Old Unionite.

