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## **ROTARIANS AT WORK**



Some of the delegates at the first Building Better Business Symposium in Pretoria. This event was staged by the Rotary E-Club of Southern Africa D9400, the Rotary Means Business Fellowship, The Townships Project, the University of South Africa and the Sešego Foundation

## **INSPIRING ENTREPRENEURS**

**About 150 entrepreneurs were given a unique opportunity to meet each other, learn from leading business experts and find mentors at a Building Better Businesses Symposium held in September at the Holiday Inn Express in Sunnyside, Pretoria.**

This free symposium was funded by The Townships Project, a non-profit organisation based in Canada that has been jumpstarting the creation and development of small businesses in South Africa. It began in 1998 when Martha Deacon answered a call to action by the late President Nelson Mandela in Harare.

This connection started the movement to make a difference in the businesses of young entrepreneurs in South Africa. Deacon was inducted as a Rotarian of the Rotary E-Club of Southern Africa D9400 by DGN Annemarie Mostert 18 months ago.

Led by the DGN, the team, comprising Deacon, other Rotarians and members of the Rotary Fellowship, Rotary means Business, worked to make the first symposium a reality. Partnered with the E-Club, The Townships Project, the University of South Africa and the Sešego Foundation sourced excellent speakers, moderators and facilitators who donated their time and expertise to this outstanding cause.

The symposium was launched with an electrifying address by UNISA's Prof. Esther Kibuka-Sebitosi that clearly outlined the many processes required to start a new business enterprise. Canadian McKinley Ambrose, a volunteer and director at The Townships Project, told his story of determination and persistence which took him from a childhood in Trinidad to a top accounting position in Canada with the world's largest retailer of alcoholic beverages.

There were four moderated sessions, Spotting an Opportunity, Finding the Capital, Sustaining Your Business and Growing/Scaling up Your Business. Each featured an extensive round table discussion giving entrepreneurs the opportunity to tell their stories and to test their ideas.

Some of the interesting and relevant presentations included: Jo Anne van der Walt from Sage Foundation on the importance of accounting software and an offer to provide a year's free access to each participant; Robert Botha the Founding Director of James Social and Ethical Consultancy (JSEC) on business leadership, including a unique take on how to convince shareholders of the viability of social enterprise investing, Nong Serote, MBA, founder Nong Serote Communications on managing cash flow; Christine van Heerden, Rotarian and the owner of International Protocol with a step-by-step presentation on creating and sustaining customer relationships; Phindy Msomi MBA, business woman and philanthropist with her story of multiple start-ups and scale-ups growing organically from one another.

Excitement mounted when Martha announced that one entrepreneur would win R20 000. The winner will be announced in January 2019, after the entrepreneurs' business plans and their progress reports are received and evaluated.

One of the highlights during the symposium was the visit by DG Charles Deiner who assisted President Shirley Downie with the induction of two new members of the Rotary E-Club of Southern Africa D9400. Rams Mabote prominent businessman, change agent, journalist and presenter at Metro FM Talk and Sonja van Rheede van Oudtshoorn, global leader at Water Aid Incorporated (an international development agency, headquartered in London, that brings water, sanitation and hygiene to poorest communities in various countries around the world). They received a warm welcome that resulted in various young entrepreneurs asking more about Rotary and how they can get involved. Some of the entrepreneurs who attended left with spot cash prizes as well as office furniture which will be donated to those in need to equip their offices on an on-going basis.

In September 2019, the Rotary E-Club of Southern Africa D9400 and The Townships Project will hold a second Building Better Businesses Symposium.

Both organisations see this initiative as a unique way to assist small business leaders while introducing them to the principles and volunteerism of Rotary International's 1.2 million members worldwide.