



THE JOY OF LEARNING

8 December 2011

Dear Friends

This has been the best of years for Oakhill.

Our students have excelled in the classroom, on the sports fields, behind the easel and on stage, and even further beyond – Nik Martin (Grade 11) has just co-delivered a paper at the COP-17 conference; and Olivia Gardy (Grade 9) won the Royal Society of South Africa's Premier Science Prize for a research document. And two Oakhill teachers – Amy Nuttall and Peter Vieyra – were celebrated in Jonathan Jansen's book, "South Africa's Great Teachers".

These references are a taste, no more, of a busy, happy year on campus, and one which contrasts with the deepening concern about the state of education being offered to many South African children. Jansen is the Vice Chancellor of the University of the Free State and has written often on the education challenges in SA. We're inspired by his passion and commitment to education, and we are in the position we're in because of the extraordinary work and dedication of many people.

Oakhill has made important strides in recent years, and there is evident progress across every aspect of the School. These achievements – particularly over the past three years, under Shane's leadership – are laying the foundations of something truly special. Or, more special than it is! Blending what is essentially a philosophy of openness and respect with rigorous learning, competitive sport and freedom of expression (in art, music and drama, but also in so much more) means that Oakhill is offering its children something quite special. As we close the classroom doors until 2012 we need to thank some of the many people who make our School the magical place it is:

- **Teachers:** In his book, Jonathan Jansen categorises teachers ... the subject artist ... the courageous activist ... the inspiring mentor ... the life performer ... the soft disciplinarian ... the tough love coach. We have teachers that fit each category (Amy the life performer, Peter the inspiring mentor), and it is they who do so much to shape the minds and hearts of our children through great dedication and commitment.
- **Shane and Robyn Kidwell:** It has been three years since Shane left St Alban's for Oakhill, three years in which we have done what we originally thought might take five years or a little more. And there is more to come in the years ahead. A Headmaster's task is all-consuming and so we thank Robyn for her support too. Without it, Shane could not do what he does, and Oakhill would not be where it is. It is no easy task. I think an institution which is governed by a strongly developed sense of history and future is much easier to manage. But learning and education are not by definition easy, and creating an environment where children can learn by pushing and pulling is an achievement in



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itself. The past is not always what it seemed and the future is what our children will make. That is the gift that Oakhill, through Shane's leadership, gives to all who pass through it.

- **The Board:** Laurent Belet, Jackie Kalani, Steve Carver, Guy Thesen, Eric Watson, Anne Clarke, Suzi Giliomee and Jon Salters have provided many hours of counsel; in Jon's case, many more hours than most because he has tirelessly managed the finance portfolio and led the capital fund raising project with our external advisors. (You will hear more of this in due course as the sports fields project comes to fruition!). In addition to the elected representatives, Shane sits on the Board, and is supported by Suzanne Griffin, our Bursar, and teacher representatives BA Hayward and Juliet le Fleur. Their perspective is complemented by the SRC's representatives who attend Board meetings and their collective view is one we all value greatly; we are not allowed to fall into the trap of talking on behalf of a constituency when they are able to speak for themselves – which new SRC President, Lulu Read and her colleagues are doing with as much vigour as their predecessors.
- **The Planning Committee:** Paul Kotze (Chair), Rob Hyde and Ian and Merinda Brymer have formed a powerful team, and have devoted considerable time and expertise in the search for land to accommodate sports fields. It is a journey that has taken us to many parts of Knysna and beyond, and we hope to conclude this process in the first quarter of 2012. The Committee also works with the ongoing – and considerable, as the ever-changing face of the campus demonstrates – infrastructural needs on campus.
- **The PTA:** Cindy Paggis (Chair), Susan Kotze, Lea Dawkins, Bridget Lupton, Nathalie Belet, Stacey Campbell, Gail Sofianos, Shirley Redman, Debbie Nicoll, Linda Lifson and Linzie du Toit continue to play an invaluable role and we are looking forward to integrating its activities even more closely with the School's strategic objectives. Cindy has joined our Board meetings to facilitate this.
- **Class Moms:** Too many to mention but the glue that holds so much together!
- **Clothing Shop:** Stacey Campbell, Elizabeth Walk, Zelda Vosloo, Lea Dawkins, Vero Leach (with Heather Mayne and Catherine Brodie always in tow).
- **Justine Edwards:** Justine's energy is everywhere ... the Class Mom Coordinator, a Class Mom, School Photographer, Coordinator of Oakhill Echoes and Old Oaks Newsletter; and assisting PeeBee with photographs for Oakhill's 21st anniversary book. Justine also assists in the clothing shop.
- **Vanessa Eyre** is making a huge difference as our Bursary and Development Officer. She is also involved in community outreach and manages the My School project, and will become more involved in our capital raising work in the months ahead.
- **Petra Quinlan and Monique Bayes** are involved in community outreach.
- **Brenda McKechnie** is again masterminding our yearbook, along with Sheila Pasio (College coordinator) and Julie Stevenson (Prep coordinator).
- **"Tree Families" and the Hockey/Art Tour Committee (Spain 2012)** - Vanessa Eyre, Mandy Cameron, Ilse van Staden, Sharon Lughton, Michelle Spilsbury, Gill Williams, Trent Read, and from Oakhill Sharon Brown, PeeBee, Amy Nuttall, Chicco Ponela, Dave Pryke and finance officer Catherine Brodie!
- **Photographers:** Petra Quinlan, Jolanda Meyer and Penny Foyn.
- **Muir Optometrists** for free eye screening of Little Oaks.



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- **Gunter and Alison Pichler** of Lagoon Inn, our boarding house parents.
- **Viv and Robyn Patz of Teniqua Tree Tops** for donating and hosting the two SRC breakaways this year.
- **Oakhill's administrators:** Our administrators create the space in which teachers work. Barbie Leibbrandt continues to work her magic in the marketing office; Philip Stewart and his team have created one of the more attractive school campuses; Suzanne Griffin, Catherine Brodie, Heather Mayne and Philip Mangiza manage the finances and Elna Brown, Shobana Moodley and Lizanne Hafner provide support to teachers and the Headmaster.
- **Janine:** My wife's love and support has made my five years of involvement possible.
- **Parents:** A school cannot function without the dedication and support of parents, and children cannot grow and flourish without them.

While it has been a good year, there has been sadness too. The Rheenendal bus disaster hurt deeply because those who died were part of a broader communion of children in the region, and as it happened, they were part of a school with whom we have been steadily building a strong relationship. Sadly, too, Pam Muir, a founder parent of our school, and mother of past pupils Matthew and Rob, and wife and business partner of Andy, died of cancer a short while ago. Soon after that, Laurie McRae, mother of Chris and Sandy, and wife of Dave, also died of cancer. Just recently Jannie Prinsloo, father of Damian and wife of Linda, passed away, also of cancer. As we head off to share our holidays with those we love, we remember those who have gone, and importantly, we wish their families love and strength over this period.

Depending on your line of work, the school holidays are either a time of intense work or a time to rest and reflect. Whichever it is, may you get what you are looking for. And if this is a time of religious or spiritual significance, may your blessings be plentiful.

If you would like to share any thoughts or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me on 083-252-0597 or peterwallington@telkomsa.net.

With best wishes

Peter Wallington
Chairman | Oakhill School Board of Governors