



Dear Parents

“Whatever you do will be insignificant, but it is very important that you do it.”

*Mahatma Gandhi*

There is success and significance all around me at the moment and I am overwhelmed by the meaningful way our young men and women (and our community at large) have engaged with the learning process this year. As I start this final newsletter of the year I am taking a break from writing my report comments for the 476 talented pupils we have at Oakhill. I am also bombarded by activity around me. Jon Salters sends me something regarding our newly acquired 17 hectares of land, Jenny Gardy hounds me for the brochure about our proposed AstroTurf development on this land, Barbie Leibbrandt pops in to tell me her newsletter to the Old Oaks is ready to go, Justine Edwards emails me for a copy of the 21<sup>st</sup> Birthday invitation for our Oakhill Echoes newsletter and I marvel at the art on the newly designed 21<sup>st</sup> Birthday celebration calendar for 2013.

It is frenetic and I wonder about whether I'll survive the last two days - not because of fatigue but because of the significant joy and immense gratitude I have for the myriads of people around this organization who make an enormous effort to ensure we are not only successful but significant as well. South Africans are prone to moaning about their circumstances but I am overwhelmed at the joy, productivity, commitment and dedication of so many to ensuring that this young school is the special place that it is. Overwhelmed is the word - it comes in waves and it just keeps rolling in because there are so many staff, pupils and parents who have influenced and contributed to our success this year that I honestly am struggling to comprehend it.

I spent yesterday at our Grade 11 leadership camp where 37 teenagers spoke and interacted with me thoughtfully and openly about their dreams and aspirations for themselves and our organization; and last night at our Little Oaks Concert and prize-giving, I was reminded how much our 3, 4, 5 and 6 year olds have taught me this year. This is truly a thinking and learning organization! You cannot help but grow and develop here, you cannot help but stretch yourself and develop your creative and imaginative talents. This is truly a magical place and you cannot put it down to one thing or a group of people - it is the collective whole which makes it so and it is the patience and understanding of all in our community which enables us to allow a learning space which is safe from judgement, harassment and the fear of making mistakes. Thank you for allowing us the space to grow, thank you for allowing us to make mistakes, thank you for confronting us when we have, thank you for forgiving us and buying into the vision which will enable your kids to flourish in a world of hurt and heartache.

These are complex times, but I thank you sincerely for trusting that our hearts truly want what is best for kids. Thank you for giving us the privilege of interacting with the future, thank you for loaning us your most treasured possession as we endeavor to grow a generation which will make a difference and thank you for partnering with us through the good and the bad to achieve this end.

I have just taken a break to listen to the sounds of 'Music with a View' and once again I am thankful that we allow emerging musicians the opportunity to practice their talent on the stage. Some made mistakes. The older College kids teamed up with the younger to give them the courage to step out and try and I am filled with pride in an organization that truly stands for providing opportunities and does not just window dress and display an elite group of talented individuals. There is a bubble of excitement and a sense of expectation as groups and individuals face their fears and suddenly realise they are capable. This is true learning. This is the joy of learning. This is how schools should behave. This is Oakhill!

I am truly humbled to be part of this community at this time and I really look forward to celebrating our successes as we head into 2013.

- **Purchase of 17 hectares of land - Oakhill Sports Campus**

In the words of Peter Wallington:

*In line with a mandate given by parents to the Board at the AGM in 2010, and renewed in subsequent AGMs, we are pleased to confirm that Oakhill has acquired nearly 18 hectares of land along the Welbedacht Road on the western side of Knysna.*

*This brings to a close the first phase of a process that began nearly six years ago when the Board committed itself to developing sports facilities and improving the educational infrastructure as enabling drivers of the School's medium to long term strategy.*

*The process gained momentum when Shane Kidwell took direct control of the search and Paul Kotze assumed leadership of the Planning Committee, and they have guided a dedicated group of people who have assessed some 20 possible partnerships or acquisitions.*

*We believe we have the right property at the right time, and the preparation work to commence the building of the first fields is already under way.*

- **Debentures**

Our Board has been courageous and dogged in their determination to fulfill this mandate given to them by you in 2010. Now that the School has acquired land, we need to redouble our efforts to raise funds. We are finalizing our approach on this, and inter alia, will shortly be coming to parents and interested stakeholders with a menu of investment and donor possibilities, across both the sport and academic campuses, providing the opportunity to directly make a difference in a project of choice.

I would encourage you to take up the voluntary debenture offered by the school at this time. If you would like further information regarding this debenture please contact Jon Salters at [jon.salters@gmail.com](mailto:jon.salters@gmail.com) or Gordon Shutte at [gordon@aihproperty.co.za](mailto:gordon@aihproperty.co.za). Further information can also be found on our website: [www.oakhillschool.co.za](http://www.oakhillschool.co.za).

- **Good byes**

We will not only be saying goodbye to our Matrics this year, who have closed out their careers with us in a magnificent fashion, but we will also be bidding farewell to three staff members who have made a significant difference in their time with us. **Stefan Weyers** was employed here three years ago when sport in our Prep School was non-existent. When I first interviewed him I immediately knew that we needed this passionate bear of a man on our staff. His enthusiasm and passion oozed from every part of his being and this passion has certainly transformed sport at our small school. I do not know a kid who does not love him and ultimately that's all a great teacher would ever want. He knew how to get the best out of your sons and daughters and he certainly knew how to annoy you with conflicting dates, times and venues, but when all was said and done, our young men and women grew under his tutelage and thrived under his mentorship. He is a mountain of a man, but more than that, he is a thoughtful intellectual, a gentle compassionate friend and a true clown. We will miss his larger than life presence on our campus next year. I will miss his booming voice, his engaging smile, the naughty glint in his eye, his willingness to stand up for what he believed in and his capacity to make me laugh no matter the situation. Go well my friend!

We also bid farewell to **Jill Warne** who is retiring. She has spent 15 years at Oakhill and has had a significant impact on the young men and women who have engaged with her unique teaching style. She is a master teacher who has had an enormous impact on the boys and girls who have come through her classes. Her passion to prepare young men and women for life, her empathetic approach, her love of learning and exceptional connection with kids has ensured that she has made a significant impact on the way we do things at Oakhill. Most recently she has been the lead-thinker in English and has asked difficult questions and established exciting opportunities for learning in this area in the past year. We will miss her infectious laugh, her incisive questions, her determined approach to always include kids in the decision making and most of all I will miss her challenging the status quo. Thank you Jill for all you have done to enhance the joy of learning here - I continue to learn from you and I have no doubt that the many you have taught here will continue to appreciate that they benefited from your tireless effort over many years.

**Peter Bishop** will also be retiring this year and although this has been a difficult process for him he leaves behind him a career that has spanned five decades. He has had a significant impact on the life of Oakhill since he first arrived here and has influenced the lives of many. He has always been controversial, but his heart was always for the kids he taught and coached and there is no doubt that any teacher worth their salt would appreciate that compliment. More recently, Peter has been working on the School history and has helped research a wonderful coffee table book which will be published next year as we celebrate our 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary. While this was an important task for our young school, Peter missed the interaction with the kids and it is for this that he will be most remembered. He has been a wonderful schoolmaster and his presence will be sorely missed on our campus. We wish him every blessing.

We also say goodbye to many families who will be relocating and I would like to wish them every blessing as they settle in their new homes.

- **Staffing for 2013**

We will double-stream in each class in the Prep School next year which will mean that **Deborah Seager** will move from Grade R to Grade 2 to teach along-side B-A Hayward. With Jill Warne retiring we will also move **Julie Stevenson** to Grade 5 to teach alongside Angus Bridge, and **Matthew Schoeman** will facilitate the Grade 6 classes with Herman Hardick.

**Arthur Vhiza**, who has been trained internally as an IT technician, will start full-time in this position in 2013 and I have no doubt that he will provide the necessary support for Philip Mangiza.

**Alistair Trafford** will join our sports department to replace **Joanie van Straten**, who has been appointed as the new Director of Sports in Stefan Weyer's place, and I have no doubt that she will help us to be more efficient in this area. She has vast experience in logistics and organization in complex systems and this is just what we need as we gear up to developing our own sports facility.

**Julie Stevenson** has been appointed as Head of Department: English in the Prep School and I look forward to working alongside her to develop strategies to improve reading and writing for all in our Preparatory School.

**Sheila Pasio's** portfolio will also change from 2013. She will devote all her time to developing student leadership facilitations which will enable our young men and women to grow their self-awareness and confidence throughout the school.

**Riaan van Straten** has been appointed as the lead Mentor in Jubilee House to replace the vacancy left by Sheila and we are excited about his involvement in this area of our school.

- **Facilities**

As we gear up for growth we will continue our improvements of the Coffee Shop area for your convenience and I am delighted to announce that we will also be upgrading the current Art block to include two research hubs and modern libraries to ensure we prepare our students for 21<sup>st</sup> century research and investigation. This block will also provide new state of the art classrooms for Art and Drama as well as general Prep School classrooms.

- **Technology**

All classrooms have either an interactive mimeo board or a data projector. This was the first step to ensuring that our classrooms reflect a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment but now we have upgraded our network by laying more fibre optic cable to ensure faster and more reliable connections throughout the campus. All classrooms will now be connected and we will be purchasing tablet computers for the College phase of our school and tablets for the Preparatory phase to ensure that we continue to keep your kids at the cutting edge of teaching and learning in the modern age.

We will be converting the current Prep IT classroom into a new Grade 2 classroom for 2013. This will only be made possible through the introduction of these tablet computers in the Preparatory School. These tablets will be easily transported between classrooms for students to use at their convenience.

These tablets will provide a bridge on our journey to encouraging all students to have their own device by 2014. A reasonable goal for most 21<sup>st</sup> century education systems might be 50% of time available for inquiry, design and collaborative project learning using modern technology, and 50% for more traditional direct methods of instruction. We will be aiming for this balance.

- **21<sup>st</sup> Birthday Celebrations in 2013**

Oakhill turns 21 in 2013 and I am delighted to announce that there will be a number of functions to celebrate this momentous occasion. The main BIRTHDAY BASH will be on **Saturday 2 March at 18:00** in the form of a Gala Dinner at Thesen Harbour. The cost of the tickets are R250 per person and we ask that you please make a booking for this event by speaking to **Catherine Brodie** in the finance office on 044 382 6506 or email her at [c.brodie@oakhillschool.co.za](mailto:c.brodie@oakhillschool.co.za). Tickets will be on a first come first served basis and numbers are limited. Please book early to avoid disappointment!

A formal invitation for this event (and others) is included in your report envelope with your diary cards for 2013.

- **Finally...**

Oakhill should be judged on how our pupils do once they leave the confines of our beautiful school and I am excited to be able to celebrate the achievements of the following Old Oaks: **Theri Rossouw** (née **Horn**) has just been awarded the South African Entrepreneur of the Year award. We are incredibly proud of her achievements in the establishment of her company 'Therific Naturals'. You can view her products at [www.therific.co.za](http://www.therific.co.za).

We also celebrate the election of our first Oakhillian to the Democratic Alliance council in Plettenberg Bay. Congratulations to **Wayne Craig**, we are proud of the difference you are making in our community.

And lastly, you can view our very own 'Dividable Grand' (**David Vermeulen, Gabi Buchalter and Lindi van Blerk**) performing at the Lost Plot at Brenton Hill on 22 December 2012. There will be arts and crafts for the younger kids and the adults can enjoy the music. The doors will be opening from 12:00.

We are also celebrating the selection of two of our 1<sup>st</sup> XI cricketers to the Coca Cola Khaya Majola Provincial Cricket Week in Potchefstroom this month. This is a first for Oakhill and we are extremely proud of **Joshua Pieters** and **Christopher Marrow** who will be representing us there. Please watch the press for details of their achievements.

And so we come to the end of a watershed year in the life of our young institution. Those of us who have left - all the Old Oaks - wish that we were at school in this era. All of us who are presently involved, either as parents, teachers or pupils have a unique responsibility to give of ourselves and to build a sustainable future for the Little Oaks to come. We hold the torch for future generations and I have no doubt we are building an exciting vibrant and unique model for the future.

As we progress into our 21<sup>st</sup> year our future beckons and it will be on our shoulders that future generations will stand and celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2042. Once again, thank you to **Peter Wallington** and our Board for being bold and for sacrificing of themselves for our children. Thank you to our team of teachers, administrators, ground and domestic staff who amaze me with their professionalism and dedication towards the kids and families of Oakhill - I am humbled by your dedication, your commitment to excellence and your celebration of the joy of learning. Thank you to all the parents who trust us with creating and shaping the future and, most of all, thank you to the young men and women of Oakhill: you are an inspiration and your passion, your joy and love of life emboldens us to make a difference.

Enjoy the company of your kids. If you are travelling, please do so safely and if you celebrate Christmas we wish you many blessings.

Kindest regards

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shane". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Shane Kidwell**