

# GL COTTAGES

GL Cottages has been in operation for the past 3 years since March 2011. The business has been profitable and self-sustaining, with 2014 recording a healthy net profit. This unique, social entrepreneurship model has paid off, with the facility successfully attracting non-governmental organisations (NGOs), conferencing; business travellers; the academic community; donor and faith based organisations to mention a few.

The year 2014 saw the GL Cottages significantly grow its customer base way beyond expectation through various marketing tools ranging from advertising on flights such as Kulula and Mango to strategic distribution of marketing material at sporting facilities. Cricketers, swimmers and rugby players all came on board establishing a whole new breed of clientele for the Cottages. In addition to the marketing efforts targeted at profitability, GL Cottages hosted numerous publicity events such as outdoor games and braais. These provided an opportunity for potential customers to experience the product and service offered at GL Cottages. Nurses from the Mediclinic and students on science expos were among the many that enjoyed such publicity events. Thankfully, it all paid off in rands and cents!

Heavy capital investment towards the end of 2014 included redecorating all 29 guest rooms with an ethnic Afro-chic theme across the Cottages. GLC carpeted and repainted rooms for a cosier feel. Soft furnishing such as curtains, cushions and throws added to the cosier ambience. All rooms now bear names of African countries and display artefacts from all the borders of Africa. Guests have been giving very positive feedback on the new look. It has been a worthwhile investment both as a retention strategy for our existing customers and a way of attracting new customers.

## Service with a smile

The service industry is facing fierce competition as customers are spoilt for choice. Today's customer has very high expectations when it comes to service standards. The old mentality that customers are simply statistics of people who need the goods and services we supply is out. The tables have turned; it is time for a new mind-set. Customers now demand service excellence. Our role in business is to dance to their tune and give them more than they paid for, the priceless smile.

GL Cottages staff received service excellence training in 2014, as well as a team building outing at the Whispering Pines resort, leaving the team ready to take on new challenges with a cheerful grandeur. Building the team spirit among staff members as well as being customer oriented proved to be critical strategies for the GL Cottages throughout 2014 and beyond.

GL Cottages staff serve guests with a smile: every day from dawn to dusk, across all departments. The "service with a smile" has become the Cottages unique signature that makes us stand out. Our guests are our delight; they are the very reason for our existence. The culture of smiling has been embedded in each of the Cottages staff members so much that it has become our second nature. In the hospitality industry every day brings along its own different challenges as we meet different personalities all the time. However, regardless of the challenges faced on any day, the Cottages team has mastered the secret: There is a divine gift wrapped up in every challenge, keep smiling!

Service with a smile has surely contributed to the Cottages success story. As we serve with a smile, we are silently telling our customers that we value their business, no matter how big or small, that we appreciate their support of our vision and that it is our greatest pleasure to serve them. Creativity is also part of this winning formula.



The "service with a smile" GL Cottages staff.

Photo: Gender Links

"I have been head chef at GL Cottages for almost two years. I am still learning, refining my skills and realising my potential.



My job requires both mental and physical strength, but it mostly needs creativity. After two years there is only so much cooking one can do until one runs out of ideas on how to vary menus. We sometimes receive guests with totally different and odd dietary requirements staying for more than two weeks and we must cater for them and keep changing the menu over and over and at the end it feels like we have cooked, what in other hotels is a menu for two years.

It does take strain both mentally and physically, especially since business has definitely picked up and we sometimes feel short staffed when we have to be the chefs, waiters, scullery and also trainers for the help we get when we are busy. But through all the hustle and bustle of the work, you realise the change; most things are now easier to do, it just requires patience; because for some of us it is not just a job it is a career". - Kgomotso Baloyi, Head Chef - GL Cottages

### Looking ahead

GL Cottages as part of the GL Enterprises must be able to make a meaningful contribution for the sustainability of the GLS. The long term goal is that all the enterprise divisions put together should ultimately contribute 25% an equivalent of the total NPO budget. This will be achieved through leveraging, among other strategies. GL Cottages as the physical property will be able to leverage off its intellectual property, GL Advisory services and the Gender Links Training Institute to maximise its profitability. In addition there is a lot of potential locked in the partner relationships with like-minded civil society organisations who believe in the GL social entrepreneurship vision and are willing to support a worthy cause.

GL Cottages will successfully manage to position itself as a venue of choice by leveraging its competitive edge: service excellence, "the home away from home environment" and passion to meet customer needs. GL Cottages management is able to use its vast experience and strategic planning ability to develop innovative and dynamic solutions to counter the market demands of the business. Staff members will also be continuously groomed and trained to maintain the professional image of the organisation.

GL Cottages intends to venture more into new age marketing, with more presence being created online and on various social media platforms. The creation of the new Cottages website showcasing all the

refurbished rooms is also expected to grow sales substantially. Efforts will be focused on continuously growing the main income generating lines being accommodation, conferencing, Ekhaya Restaurant and revenue from special functions.

Aggressive measures will also be put in place to reduce costs especially from the implementation of the energy audit action plan which intends to introduce solar energy to GL Cottages. Effective procurement policies will be implemented and re-enforced to ensure for good "Value For Money". The combination of revenue increase and cost reduction will see the GL Cottages rise to greater heights in 2015 and beyond.



Debrah Mukuku, GL Cottages Manager.

Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna