

# Absa Jewish Achiever Awards 2024



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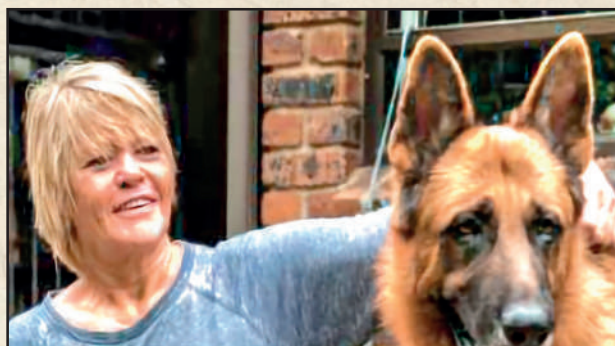
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**The Absa Jewish Achiever Awards 2024**

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*The information in these profiles has been supplied by the people nominated, and has not been independently verified*

**Mazaltov**

to all the  
**Nominees & Winners**

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## SA's backbone and proud of it

Last year, we gathered for the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards in the shadow of a looming war. Our wounds were wet, our grief was real. Over the past year, so much and so little has changed.

It's said that Jews don't have history, we have memory.

We commemorate and celebrate our past as if we ourselves were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt; as if we ourselves were the victims of the attempted genocide of Haman in Persia; as if we ourselves were banished to exile and our temple destroyed. Next month, we will light the candles of Chanukah as if we ourselves were liberated from colonial occupation and were rekindling the oil lamps in our temple 2 200 years ago.

Our past is our present, our lives inextricably intertwined in a mosaic that blends our rich 3 000-year old history, our inspiring present, and our dreams for the future.

Although we have been celebrating these Jewish Achiever Awards for the past 25 years, our community has nourished the dusty red soil of Africa for the past 125 years. Our hearts beat to the rhythm of the soul of Africa. In that time, we have built this country and dug deep into its earth. We have been its refugees, its labourers, its trade-union movement. We have fought in its wars, we rose in the streets in revolt against injustice, we built its stores, healed its sick, drafted its laws, and fed its poor.

It's with unabashed arrogance that I ask where this country would have been today if not for its Jewish community. A community that has woven itself into the very fabric of our nation's identity.

Today, we stand on the shoulders of the giants who came before us, unbridled by our nation's dark history, and enormously proud of all we have done.

We didn't land on these shores as privileged colonialists; we arrived as penniless refugees fleeing pogroms and persecution. In an inhospitable land, in a troubled divided nation, the Jewish community took root and flourished.

We travelled from town to town smousing goods; and we laboured on farms, in sweatshops sewing suits, and selling coal. We didn't just build businesses, we built a society, a nation.

Just as John Vorster and Hendrik Verwoerd protested our arrival in this country, so did the clubs of privilege deny us entry and proclaim, "No Jews; no dogs." Barney Barnato, who donated the land to build the Rand Club, was denied membership to the very club who took his land as a gift.

So we built our own, we sought not their approval, their status, or their largess. We didn't seek their approval then, and we don't seek it now. Our community has been a beacon of light in this country.

So, at the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards, we celebrate not only our new winners but the remarkable South Africans we have recognised over the past 25 years. It is with unabashed arrogance that we ask the question, "Where would South Africa be without us?"

Where would the mining community be without Barney Barnato, Ernest Oppenheimer, Lionel Phillips, Sir Mick Davis, Ivan Glasenberg, or Gary Nagle? Would we have a stock exchange or a manufacturing sector without Sammy Marks?

Would we have supermarkets without Checkers, Shoprite, Pick n Pay, Woolworths, Clicks, Dis-Chem, KosherWorld, and OK Bazaars? Where would we shop without Mr Price, Foschini, Woolworths, Truworths, Ellerines, Core Group, or @Home? Would we have had shopping malls without Donny Gordon and Michael Rapp?

Where would we insure without Liberty or Discovery, or holiday without Sol Kerzner and Arthur Gillis?

Would we have internet without Dave Frankel and the Apteker brothers, or hospitals without Jackie Shevel and Richard Friedland?

Where would the struggle against apartheid be without Joe Slovo and Ruth First, Arthur Goldreich and Harold Wolpe? Who would have stood up against apartheid if there was no Helen Suzman? These are some of many who risked everything so the nation could be free. Would we have a Constitution without Arthur Chaskalson and Albie Sachs, or even have written the Freedom Charter at Kliptown?

Where would we eat without Nando's, Spur, or McDonald's? What would we drink without SAB Miller, and who would have given our people water to drink if not for Sivan Yaari?

Who would have fed the poor if not for Operation Hunger and Ikamva Labantu, Afrika Tikkun, The Angel Network, and the Kirsh family?

Where would South Africa be without the music of Johnny Clegg – "Le Zoulu Blanc", the hysterical biting drag of Pieter-Dirk Uys, the drawings of William Kentridge, the cartoons of Dov Fedler, the writings of Nadine Gordimer, and the photography of David Goldblatt?

We are the intel inside, the trailblazers, the visionaries, the engine behind this nation.

Our lists are long, and your time is short, so forgive me for not listing the thousands – no tens of thousands – of Jews who have made this nation greater than its potential.

We celebrate and recognise the building of this nation together with our partners. We do this each year together with our title sponsor, Absa, which is deeply committed to telling the inspiring stories of our nation. It banks our nation so that we can sleep at night; it funds our businesses so we can employ people and feed families; it is the epitome of a bank that builds a nation. Absa has been our partner in this holy mission for the past 23 years, finding the extraordinary and unique, and celebrating all that can be achieved in South Africa.

I, too, wish to thank our other sponsors who are so deeply committed to the development of South Africa: the Kirsh family; the Ellerine family; the Lubner family; the Ichikowitz family; the Mann Made family; and Europcar, which is so determined to recognise women leaders and create role models for all of South Africa.

Our teams of organisers: Dina Diamond, Jodi Kramer, Dori Weil, Britt Landsman, Peta Krost, Sandy Furman, Dylan Berger, Nkateko Mkasi, Makgale Mohuba, and Felicity Kantor complete a world beating team. Our five panels of judges, 35 in total, vet all contestants, and subject all winners to due-diligence. This contribution to the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards is immeasurable. A total of 825 people were nominated, and we have 11 winners.

Over the past 13 months, we have witnessed the rise of bigoted Jew hatred in this country. Yet we are resilient, we will not slumber nor sleep, we are the moral conscience of our nation. It is us who built this country, and it is us that will continue to employ our nation and educate our youth.

We are the ripples of hope in a river of debris. Our job is to turn those ripples into a tsunami of love.

**Howard Sackstein**  
Chairperson, SA Jewish Report and Absa Jewish Achiever Awards



# TITLE SPONSOR'S MESSAGE



## The power of collaboration

It's difficult to believe that we're entering the last stretch of 2024. As we reflect on the past few months, we're encouraged by the green shoots visible in our economy and business environment, and the positive sentiment that has emerged in the wake of the national elections.

While there remains a lot of work ahead, the long-term impact of continuous gradual and collaborative progress should not be underestimated. Behind every success story, there are often insightful anecdotes, highlighting that success is rarely a linear achievement. This is also the case for the nominees of the 25th Absa Jewish Achiever Awards. Woven through each of these stories is a golden thread – one of dedication, ingenuity, and perseverance, and an ability to rise above new challenges.

As we celebrate the nominees' achievements and recognise the contributions they've made across the arts, business, humanities, and community landscape, we're reminded of the power of collaboration, inclusivity, and commitment to lasting impact.

To all the nominees, we congratulate you and celebrate your success!

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Managing Executive: Private Banking  
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## Honouring women who lead with heart and purpose



**F**or more than 10 years, Europcar has proudly sponsored the Europcar Women in Leadership Award. We are continually inspired by the stories of extraordinary women touching lives and igniting positive change in their businesses, organisations, and communities. Each year, we're honoured to engage with Jewish women who aren't just breaking barriers but redefining what it means to lead with passion, purpose, and unwavering integrity.

True leadership extends beyond personal success. This award celebrates women who aren't just successful innovators, business people, role models, academics, professionals, artists, and changemakers, but who at the same time foster ethical and inclusive practices, drive sustainable change, and create a future where everyone thrives.

As with every year, this year's nominees have impressed the judging panel with remarkable achievements in their respective fields. Their talent, resilience, vision, tenacity, humility, and dedication inspire us, and we're sure their achievements will inspire others, particularly women. We're proud that Europcar helps to provide a platform to share the achievements of the nominees.

We sincerely thank the nominees for so openly sharing their inspirational stories with us, and warmly congratulate them on their nominations. Our heartfelt thanks also go to the *SA Jewish Report* for enabling our participation in these prestigious awards.

**Martin Lydall**  
**Chief Executive Officer Europcar**  
**South Africa (Motus Car Rental)**



## Inspiring stories that build communities



**M**ann Made is once again honoured to sponsor the Community Service Award at this year's Absa Jewish Achiever Awards.

This prestigious recognition celebrates an individual or organisation within the Jewish community whose commitment to service extends beyond the expected, uplifting and supporting the broader community with dedication and compassion. These nominees embody values that inspire positive change and serve as a guiding light for future generations.

At Mann Made, our mission is to create events and stories that amplify human connection and ignite human potential.

Through creative storytelling and cutting-edge technology, we bring ideas to life in ways that spark impact and leave lasting impressions. Our recent successes, such as the SingularityU South Africa Summit returning in person this October, reflect our commitment to crafting transformative experiences that unite people and open new horizons of possibility.

Our passion for community empowerment is also evident in our longstanding partnership with the Maharishi Institute. By sponsoring the education of deserving students each year, we're helping to build South Africa's next generation of leaders. Our projects, including Africarare, South Africa's first



metaverse, demonstrate our dedication to advancing technology and creating opportunities that inspire and uplift.

As we celebrate the achievements of the 2024 Community Service Award winner and all the nominees, we are reminded of the incredible potential within our communities. On behalf of everyone at Mann Made, we extend our deepest gratitude to these community champions whose selflessness and impact shine a light for us all. Thank you for your invaluable contributions and may your stories continue to inspire a brighter future.

**Shayne, Mic, and Kevin Mann**  
**Mann Made**



## Jewish youth – key to community and country



**O**ur family and family foundation have strong South African roots, and we're committed to investing time, energy, and resources in the future of our nation and community.

For us, this isn't just a gesture, it's a real responsibility that we hold close to our hearts. We're passionate about the incredible potential of African youth, recognising it as the heartbeat of our country and the African continent. As Africa evolves, its young people, growing in number and spirit, stand ready to shape what's next. They aren't just the inheritors of tomorrow; they're the architects of a new future.

As a proud Jewish organisation, we feel a deep responsibility to support our South African Jewish community. I want to take a moment to recognise that I had the great privilege of being raised in a close-knit Jewish community in the small, rural town of Springs. My parents, Bernice and Louis, instilled in us a pride in our Jewish heritage, teaching us to draw strength from Jewish values. They inspired us to make a difference in our community, gave us the confidence to think creatively, and encouraged us to turn challenges into opportunities.

The mentorship I received from my parents and grandparents, and the understanding of how a strong Jewish value system builds confidence and resilience, has been a guiding force in my life. It's very much our desire, as a family, through awards like this, to encourage young Jewish South Africans to embrace their heritage, draw upon generations of experience in making meaningful contributions, and remember that we're not merely passing visitors in South Africa, we're woven into the fabric of this society and no-one can take away our rightful place here.

For young Jewish South Africans, it's also essential to see their Jewish identity as a strength, something to celebrate openly. It doesn't matter where you are in the world, you will always encounter detractors. Here in South Africa, we're fortunate that such voices are few, though often loud. It's the responsibility of our younger generation to be even louder, not in arrogance, but in pride and presence. We should be humble, yet never invisible.

That's why we're dedicated to supporting initiatives that celebrate the achievements of young Jewish South Africans who are shaping our community's future and leaving their mark on our nation. In this spirit, we're thrilled to sponsor the Ichikowitz Family Foundation Rising Star Award.

This award is special because it honours those not only succeeding in their careers, but also opening doors for future generations. These young achievers exemplify the energy, entrepreneurial spirit, and resilience of our youth.

At a time when South Africa faces challenges on many fronts, it's essential to invest in young people and celebrate their contributions. Initiatives like the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards shine a spotlight on the extraordinary efforts of young Jewish South Africans, inspiring others to believe in the possibilities within our country and encouraging them to pursue their dreams.

Through this sponsorship, we also want to honour the quiet heroes in our community whose commitment often goes unnoticed. We believe South Africa remains a land of opportunity, a place where young people can build fulfilling careers, contribute meaningfully to society, and shape the economy. We hope to encourage young people to take bold steps, start businesses, create jobs, and invest in our nation's growth and prosperity.

In the end, our involvement in this award goes beyond recognition, it's about envisioning a brighter future. It's about ensuring that South Africa remains a place of opportunity for young Jewish individuals and all young people. It's about building a community and a nation where young people can pursue their dreams, thrive, and create a legacy that lasts.

**Ivor Ichikowitz**  
**Chairperson of the Ichikowitz Family Foundation**





## Afrika Tikkun: 30 years of commitment to social change

As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards and the SA Jewish Report, I reflect with immense pride and gratitude on Afrika Tikkun's journey over the past 30 years. What began as a well-meaning charity serving merely 1 000 beneficiaries has evolved into a sustainable social-impact organisation that continues to transform the lives and communities of more than 30 000 beneficiaries annually.

Afrika Tikkun's story is one of dedication, resilience, and unwavering commitment to social justice. Our late founders Bertie Lubner, Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris, Herby Rosenberg, and Arnold Forman, who serves on the board of directors, were driven by the value of *tzedakah* and a profound sense of responsibility. This was the foundation that laid the groundwork for an organisation that initially provided relief to townships and addressed critical issues such as food security, housing, and early childhood development.

Today, we stand as a testament to their collective vision, having grown into a multifaceted organisation that addresses the national imperative of youth unemployment through education, skills development, and holistic support.

Under Marc Lubner's leadership, the organisation has grown from a charity to a sustainable social-impact organisation that went from raising about R20 million per annum to today generating a total revenue exceeding R500 million. In the past 30 years, through its award-winning Cradle-to-Career 360° model, Afrika Tikkun has changed the lives of more than 32 000 children, close to 80 000 young people, and with more than 30 000 job-seeking youth trained and placed. In addition, the organisation has distributed more than 25 million meals to beneficiaries and their families, ensuring their well-being and sustenance, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Afrika Tikkun has expanded its reach from serving children and young people in two provinces to all nine provinces, working with more than 1 000 complementary partners, including government,



**Marc Lubner**  
Chairperson of the Lubner Family Foundation

non-governmental organisations, community based organisations, and small, medium and micro-enterprises.



Notably, one of the most remarkable aspects of Afrika Tikkun is our diverse and inclusive community. While we are proud of our Jewish roots and the values that have shaped our mission, we are equally proud to be a multi-faith, mixed group of individuals from all races and backgrounds. Our unity in diversity is a powerful testament to what can be achieved when people come together with a common purpose: to serve others and build a better future for all. Our 2023 matric pass rate of 94%, surpassing the national average by 11%, and a commendable 60% Bachelor's admissions rate, are evidence of the power of collaborative effort and our young people's grit and determination.

The Jewish community's contribution to township communities through Afrika Tikkun is a shining example of how we can address pressing social issues while fostering understanding and co-operation among different groups. By working together, we have made a significant impact on the lives of countless young people, providing them with the tools and opportunities they need to succeed.

As we jointly celebrate this milestone alongside 25 years of the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards and the SA Jewish Report as well as 30 years of democracy, we also look to the future with hope and fortitude. The challenges we face are great, but so is our resolve. We remain committed to our mission of empowering young people and building resilient communities.

Together, we will continue to make a difference, guided by Talmudic and everyday values that have brought us this far and inspired by the possibilities that lie ahead.

Thank you for joining us on this journey and for your continued support. Here's to many more years of making a positive impact and creating a brighter future for all.

## Celebrating those who dare to dream big

It's with great pride that the Eric Ellering Trust sponsors the Entrepreneur Award at the Absa



Jewish Achiever Awards. This award is a tribute to the enduring legacy of Eric Ellering, a pioneering entrepreneur who dedicated his life to building not only a successful business but empowering others to do the same.

Eric's journey began as a young, ambitious 16-year-old, using his Barmitzvah money to open a single store. From those humble beginnings, Eric and his brother grew Ellering Holdings into one of South Africa's most successful retail enterprises, eventually listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. Eric's achievements weren't simply testament to his entrepreneurial spirit, but his unwavering belief in South Africa's potential. He devoted himself to creating jobs, investing in people, and supporting other budding entrepreneurs, a commitment that continued even after his tenure at Ellering Holdings with the establishment of Eric Ellering Trust Proprietary Limited, an investment holding company through which Eric, and then his family, continue to back entrepreneurs.

Through this award, we honour the essence of what Eric stood for: resilience; integrity; and an unshakeable commitment to excellence. We hope that it serves to inspire others to pursue their dreams with the same tenacity and vision that he embodied. Eric believed in building something greater than oneself, and it's our privilege to encourage and recognise those who follow a similar path.

We hope this award will inspire generations of entrepreneurs who, like Eric, dare to start small, dream big, and invest in the future with courage and compassion. Thank you to the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards for this platform to celebrate and perpetuate the spirit of entrepreneurship.



**Dionne Hirschowitz**  
Chief Executive of Eric Ellering Trust

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Greg Solomon is chief executive of McDonald's South Africa, as well as a mentor and strategist

Nomsa Moeketsi is Regional Segment Head Wealth, at Absa

Sharon Wapnick is senior partner of TWB and Partners

Geoff Rothschild, judging panel chair, was formerly chairperson of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange

Garron Chaitowitz is director and audit partner of BDO



## ABSA JUDGES

ONLINE JUDGE

Dionne Hirschowitz is chief executive of Eric Ellerrine Trust, a diversified investment holding company

Excel Academy founder Dan Stillerman has helped tens of thousands work smarter through Excel

Justin Blend is a director of Africrest Properties, which owns apartments and resort-style estates

Jade Kirkel transformed Sorbet into a household name, and is co-founder of sneaker business JoyJoy

Grant Friedman is partner at Africrest Properties, which owns apartments and resort-style estates

Jonti Brozin is founder of Forever Young Capital, focused on delivering social and finance returns



## ICHIKOWITZ FAMILY FOUNDATION RISING STAR JUDGES



**Barry Swartzberg** is a co-founder and executive director of Discovery

**Romeo Kumalo** is chief executive of LLH Capital and chairperson of Kalon Venture Partners

Consulting Brand Mama **Heidi Brauer** was chief marketing officer at Hollard, kulula.com, and SLOW

**Avi Mishan** is managing director and co-founder of brand originator and developer SMD Technologies



# THE ERIC ELLERINE ENTREPRENEUR JUDGES

## ONLINE JUDGE

**Suzanne Ackerman** is non-executive director of Pick n Pay, and chair of PnP/Boxer and Feed the Nation



**Dawn Nathan-Jones** is a seasoned executive with a 35-year track record in transport and tourism

**Dorianne Weil**, "Dr D", is a clinical psychologist, and is influential in business and government sectors

**Johanna Makgalemele** is group chief executive and co-founder of corporate agency Travel with Flair

**Taryn Marcus** is a business-savvy human resources expert, and the co-founder of Reinvent CoLab



# EUROPCAR WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP JUDGES



## in honour of Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris



# Sivan Yaari

## Giving water to Africa, one village at a time

**W**hen Sivan Yaari was unable to help a starving Ugandan woman keep her baby alive, she knew she had to do whatever she could to make running water available across Africa. She's on her way to making this a reality.

Yaari, this year's Bertie Lubner Humanitarian Award winner (in honour of Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris) at the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards, clearly remembers the woman holding her baby and begging for help back in 2017. But by the time she had returned to help her, the baby had died. "I felt so helpless, but it was the moment I realised just how important it was for me to do this work as fast as possible," she says.

To date, Yaari and her company, Innovation: Africa, have brought power and running water to five million people in 1 200 villages across Africa. In South Africa alone, in just six years, she has given more than 700 000 people access to clean water in 184 villages. And by the end of this year, she will have helped more than one million South Africans. "There are still 400 million people in Africa who need clean water, and it is my mission to get that to them," Yaari says.

Yaari spent her early childhood in Rishon LeZion in Israel, but she's proud of the fact that she has African heritage, with her father from Algeria and her mother from Tunisia. Her father lost his job and couldn't find alternative work so her mother was the sole breadwinner, selling chocolates. "When I was almost at Batmitzvah age, my family moved to Nice in France to live with my aunt in the hope they would find work there. They were uneducated, they hadn't even gone to high school."

In Nice, they survived by making and selling pizzas in a market, with Yaari doing her bit to help. "We were considered poor, but I now understand what poor is. I had shoes, running water, and electricity, and I never went hungry. What I have seen in Africa is so humbling," she says.

At 18, she returned to Israel to do her national service, and worked on a kibbutz. At 20, she interviewed for a job with United States (US) clothing company Jordache. "I almost didn't get the job because my English wasn't good enough. As I was leaving the interview, I said, 'But I speak French', and that led to me being sent to its factory in Madagascar," Yaari says. "It's all about luck."

It was in various villages across Africa that she saw how desperate people were for clean water and energy. Yaari felt the need to do something about it, and Jordache sponsored her to do a scholarship at Columbia University in the US to study energy. Seeing that Israel uses solar power, she believed she could use that technology on her African quest.

"I first took two solar panels to a medical centre in Tanzania, and they were enough to supply energy to power 12 lightbulbs and a refrigerator for vaccines. That was how I started in 2008," she says. "I have gone from one village to the next, learning more about what's needed all the time.

"I've learnt the real meaning of poverty. No water means no food.

It also means being sick because of using dirty water. And it means no education because you spend all day walking to find water."

She also realised that she didn't have to invent anything because the sun provides energy in Africa and there's water underground. "We simply need to drill down 100m to 200m, and 98% of the time, we find clean water. Then, all you need to pump the water to taps is energy, which can be supplied by solar panels. It doesn't even cost that much," Yaari says. In most African villages, it costs an average of R1 million to create a sustainable and 24-hour monitored water system, she says. With much bigger villages, like many in South Africa, it costs about R1.5 million because they need more taps and pipes.

"This includes the remote monitoring system from Israel, and training and employing 10 people in the village to ensure the upkeep of the system. They work with the contractor for four months and learn everything to do with the solar water pumping system. So when we leave, if they need to change a tap or stem a leak, they can fix it, making every system we've installed 100% sustainable."

Yaari didn't believe she was needed in South Africa. However, on her first visit here in 2018 – to a group of women at King David school – she got a call on her way to the airport out of the country from Stephen Koseff, then chief executive of Investec Bank.

He told her that his wife, Sheryl, had heard her speak, and pleaded with her not to leave South Africa immediately, but to meet him. "I didn't see the point, but I agreed. I thought if there was electricity, there was no reason not to have water. But when I went to Bushbuckridge and Vembe, I saw the grid was there, but women walked kilometres to get water and often they could find only dirty water," she says. "I was shocked at hearing the horror stories of what happens to some women on their way. I knew I had to help. Investec offered to give us money for the first 10 villages.

"We use Israeli technology and work with local communities and contractors," she says. All the South African sponsors are from Jewish-led organisations.

"The South African Jewish community has such a big heart. It really cares for its members, the country, and its people. I couldn't do what I have done here without its help," she said. "I come to South Africa two or three times a year and see how the community

really cares and wants to create change. I feel like I'm helping it to do the good it wants to do. It's heartwarming."

Yaari says she has no doubt that though there are still four million people in South Africa who don't have access to clean water, it's feasible that with the help of the Jewish community, this won't be the case in a few years' time.

"It's my vision to ensure that the whole of Africa has access to clean water, and we're working on it one village at a time. Because of the simplicity of the technology and how efficient we're becoming, we have the best engineers in the world, the best team, and we make water systems to last."

Yaari speaks of the joy she feels whenever people first open a tap in a village. "You see the faces of the women, and you can see they recognise they no longer need to be fearful and that their lives will be forever changed by this moment.

"What I love most about what we do is the fact that the impact is immediate, from not ever having running water to never again having to be without it. From drinking contaminated water to suddenly breaking the cycle of poverty. It's a historical moment.

From then on, their lives can only get better."

Yaari says they can install this technology in between 30 to 35 villages a year. "What amazes me in South Africa is that when I go back to those villages six months later, I see the businesses that have been set up by the women there, who are now free to be a part of the economy. They make bricks, open shops, make and sell food, create vegetable gardens, and become financially independent. It's so inspiring!"

Yaari says she was inspired by Golda Meir, who helped found the state of Israel and served as its fourth prime minister. "Israel was just nine years old when Golda went to Ghana's Independence Day and saw the poverty there and decided to send Israeli experts to share their expertise and help them and other African nations," says Yaari. "This is what Israel is about – helping others and sharing what we know. I feel we're continuing Golda's legacy and doing what we as Israelis are supposed to do. This is how we fulfil our destiny."

However, she emphasises the urgency of her work, and says she wants to work faster. She goes back to the moment she met that one woman in Karamoja in Uganda. "I remember arriving there at this place that the homeless Jews of Europe were offered, and was shocked. People were dying of thirst," she says. Yaari spent three months there after the woman's baby died.

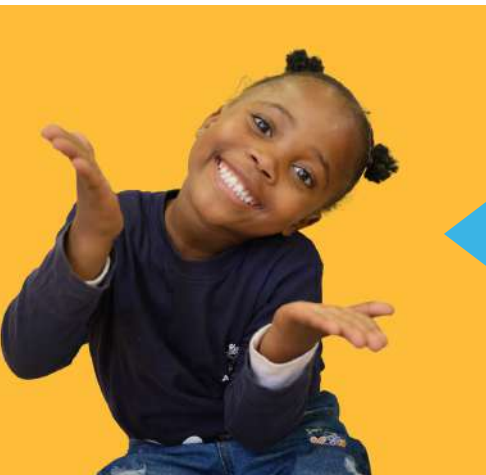
"At the time, my three babies were at home, but I couldn't leave because those villages had no water anywhere nearby, and they were literally dying. Even today, there are people dying from drought just because they have no energy to pump water. So, we need to do it for them."



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## JNF 'catapulted into action' after 7 October

On 8 October 2023, as the true depravity of the day before in southern Israel became apparent – 1 200 killed, kibbutzim destroyed, and 250 taken captive by Hamas into Gaza – the Jewish National Fund South Africa (JNF SA) decided to do whatever it took to help Israel and the Jewish world through this horrific time.

"We were catapulted into action," said JNF SA Chairperson Michael Kransdorff. "We asked ourselves how, with limited resources and so far away, we could help people overcome the disconnection and helplessness caused by these brutal acts of terror."

"Post 7 October, for the first time in generations, Jews around the world face an unprecedented threat," Kransdorff said. "The ancient evil of antisemitism, which we believed had been vanquished, has risen once more. Despite our differences, we knew we must come together in support of Israel and stand united in the fight for the return of our hostages. We are one people with one heart, and we all have a stake in Israel's future."

Within days, JNF SA decided to focus on directly assisting Israeli children in the south hardest hit by the war. It raised funds to temporarily relocate more than 300 children to safety at its campsite in the South African Memorial Forest in the north, where they received respite and therapy. Initially expected to last a week, this arrangement extended to eight weeks – a "Chanukah miracle", said Kransdorff – until the government provided alternative accommodation.

"Heartbroken like so many of us by the plight of the hostages, JNF SA was determined to take up their cause in South Africa." Following a trend in other cities, JNF SA set up a large Shabbat table for hostages outside KosherWorld in Glenhazel. "Then, in conjunction with The Base Community, we launched a campaign to tie yellow ribbons around trees until the hostages are freed. We produced yellow ribbon lapel pins and yellow Shabbat candles for distribution. On Pesach and Rosh Hashanah, community members were encouraged to lay a place for a hostage."

JNF SA, together with Rabbi Aharon Zulberg of The Base Community, the Jassinowskys, and Ronit Beleli, has also arranged for released hostages and hostage families to enjoy healing and advocacy trips in South Africa, giving them respite from the ongoing conflict. While some have opted to share their experiences publicly, others chose to keep them private.

Kransdorff said that when ex-hostage Sapir Cohen came to Johannesburg, she was nervous to be in a country seemingly at the epicentre of Israel hatred. When she saw the hundreds of yellow ribbons adorning trees on her drive from the airport, she sobbed at the realisation that so many people cared.

"This collaboration with The Base is significant given that many

We asked ourselves how, with limited resources and so far away, we could help people overcome the disconnection and helplessness caused by these brutal acts of terror.

secular Israelis from kibbutzim in the south are often hesitant to engage with religious communities," Kransdorff said. "It demonstrates that different Jews can respect and collaborate with one another for the betterment of Am Yisrael." These trips have also served to resurrect the negative image of South Africa in Israel. More such visits are planned.

Together with other Zionist organisations, JNF SA organised several solidarity visits to Israel after 7 October. It partnered on three successful fundraising webinars with the SA Jewish Report.

"The JNF is probably the first crowdsourcing project in history," Kransdorff said. "It turned fundraising on its head. Rather than relying on huge bequests by wealthy families, it got millions of small donors to contribute and feel invested in Israel."

Historically, from the mid-1990s, JNF SA pivoted from an organisation mainly supporting the development of Israel to one deeply rooted in South Africa. "We saw the opportunity to share Israeli technology in areas like agriculture and water. It took some convincing of the JNF in Israel, Keren Kayemet LeYisrael [KKL], which has historically been internally focused," Kransdorff said.

The result was the Walter Sisulu Environmental Centre in Mamelodi in 2004. Today, it hosts 12 000 pupils annually who learn about biodiversity, alternative energy, water conservation, and recycling. "It's still going strong 20 years later," Kransdorff said. The Mamelodi Centre was recently accredited as the only science centre in a South African township. A similar, smaller centre exists in KwaZulu-Natal.

The South African Memorial Forest in northern Israel was the brainchild of JNF SA's irreplaceable Isla Feldman. Apart from its formidable environmental impact, there's a beautiful monument of a stone cut in two. There are now 94 fallen South African soldiers and 15 victims of terror commemorated there.

Sadly, since 7 October, 10 new names have been added and two memorial services held.

One of the JNF SA's newest projects in Israel is "Gan Siyabonga", or the "We Thank You Garden", a memorial park in Tel Mond near Ra'anana with the South African Zionist Federation that honours South African Jews who fought against apartheid and supported Israel.

The KKL is also regrowing Be'eri Forest that was destroyed at the Nova festival. JNF SA has a grove, and it will plant 1 200 trees, one for each person killed on 7 October.

Per capita, through JNF SA, Jewish South Africans over the past 120 years have contributed the greatest amount of money to Israel despite a weakening currency. The community supported draining the swamps in the Hula Valley to open up the Galilee for settlement, and Israel's second biggest reservoir for wastewater treatment, located in the Negev desert.

The aftermath of 7 October aptly demonstrates that JNF SA is about more than blue-and-white money boxes and buying trees, although 240 million trees have been planted in Israel since its founding in 1903.

Said Kransdorff, "We've worked hard to regenerate the organisation over the past few years. It's great to see this acknowledged. We are one of those Jewish communal legacy organisations that have been able to reinvent ourselves and thrive. My hope is that JNF SA will continue to reinvent itself and remain for the next 120 years the vehicle through which South African Jews remain deeply rooted to our ancient homeland."

JNF SA is a worthy winner of this year's Mann Made Community Service Award at the 2024 Absa Jewish Achiever Awards.



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# Michael Lewis

## Retail icon creates a legacy

**R**enowned international businessman and chairperson of The Foschini Group, Michael Lewis, was born into a multigenerational business legacy. He was named for his grandfather, Meyer Lewis, who died two years before he was born. Lewis's father, Stanley, told him Meyer's story. "It started in the traditional way that so many Jewish family stories in South Africa do – with my grandfather's escape from Latvia," Lewis says. Smuggled through Europe into England, he eventually sailed south and settled in Cape Town.

Meyer, who was around 16 at the time, began working as a hawker, selling small supplies to make a living.

He eventually found customers in rural areas, and when some couldn't afford to pay him, they traded lamps, tables, and other items, which was how he learned about furniture. He later purchased a business called Woodstock Auction Mart, which he eventually turned into a furniture shop called M Lewis and Company. "From there, he developed the business, and it became Lewis Stores."

Lewis's uncles, and later his father, worked in the business. "Lewis Stores offered credit, and my father went with my grandfather to collect the money," Lewis says. "Here, he learned a lot about reading people, how to judge personalities, and about human compassion. That informed a huge part of his character. I remember hearing those stories. Growing up in a household where the idea of success went hand in hand with compassion had a big influence on me."



grow up around because there was so much to him."

Yet, while he believes it was a great privilege to growing up in a family business, Lewis says it made his path less straightforward. "In a family business, the colleagues who you eventually interact with see you as the boss's son, and it's difficult to break that perception. It's a process that happens only over time as you demonstrate who you are. Also, though doors are opened for you, you've still got to walk through them.

In so doing, you have to find a way of existing outside of the framework of your sponsor, who in this case was my dad."

That's why, after joining the navy for two years and then studying economics and politics at the University of Cape Town, Lewis grabbed an opportunity to work for an Edinburgh-based investment company. He later moved with the company to London. "While I stayed close to my dad and was very conscious of what he was doing, I was able to function outside of the family network and be my own person," he says.

"I enjoyed that independence, and the work enabled me to develop a set of financial analysis and investment skills that I still use today. It prepared me for the challenge that eventually came in 1987, namely how to continue to build and

People won't remember what you do with your life from a business achievement or material perspective, they will remember what it was like to encounter you.

than both of them. It's a story that ultimately benefits society through the people the family's businesses employ. Though Lewis says he feels a family obligation to keep writing this story, he also enjoys what he does immensely.

"It's managing the people, the strategy, and the financing, the challenge that comes with trying to develop something that will endure. I also strongly relate to consumer-facing businesses, creating or developing brands and trying to segment customers, while also stepping up to the ongoing digital challenge."

Like his father before him, Lewis knows the value of those with whom he works. "What distinguishes successful businesses from unsuccessful ones is generally people," he says. It's how people manage and develop the assets of a business that counts, he says, as well as the relationships they form.

Lewis says prioritising people is equally important in one's personal life. "You need to be part of something bigger than yourself, whether it be community, shul, business, philanthropy, or small acts of kindness. This makes you more than you otherwise would be, and gives you a level of fulfilment that's otherwise hard to achieve.

"People won't remember what you do with your life from a business achievement or material perspective, they will remember what it was like to encounter you," he says. "Encountering someone is a bigger concept than just meeting them." It's about the impact they make on you. "In the end, if someone asks what it was like to encounter you and it's positively answered, you've lived your life well." Lewis hopes to leave such a legacy.

Stanley tragically lost both his brothers in 1950 within six weeks of one another. By this time, a large British retail business had taken a strategic interest in Lewis Stores, and it later took control of the company. Stanley felt the business had lost its "people culture", and decided to leave and establish something of his own. In 1957, he identified an opportunity in Foschini, then a small public company, and slowly gained control of what ultimately became known as The Foschini Group.

Lewis was born in 1959, and says he had his first business conversation with his father at the age of six. From then on, they would visit stores together. "As I grew older, I would watch him talk to managers and customers, looking at what he tried to impart. From 12 years old, I sat in meetings with him."

When the time came to forge his own path, Lewis felt a tremendous pull to his father and to what he was trying to achieve. "I was very taken with him as an individual, as a Jew, from a Zionist point of view. He was a wonderful person to

oversee this big business in South Africa while ensuring that we expanded it domestically and internationally."

When a now experienced Lewis joined his father to accomplish these goals, he brought a new level of self-confidence. "My dad turned 65, and decided to spend more time in England, and he set up an investment office. I watched how he was continuing to chair and control the business in South Africa, while simultaneously expanding internationally, which to this day, is something I'm still engaged in."

In addition to chairing The Foschini Group, Lewis also chairs his Australian luggage, fashion, and accessory retail business, Strand, now operating beyond Australia. "It's 100% owned by the family, and I've been intimately involved in its development and internationalisation," he says. He also looks after his family's investments.

Lewis says his enduring drive comes from the knowledge that his father "entrusted and trusted" him to build a story larger



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# Colin Nathan

## Living the dream and changing lives through boxing

**C**olin Nathan, the winner of the Arts, Sport, Science, and Culture Award, has turned unknown fighters, including ones from disadvantaged backgrounds, into boxing champions and international stars. This lifelong boxing fanatic says his involvement in the sport, as a boxing trainer, manager, promoter, and commentator, is “genuinely to change lives”.

For Nathan, his task as a coach is about more than producing world championships for South African boxing, a feat he has accomplished five times in the past five years. “It’s about really changing the trajectory of someone’s life. Some fighters could have landed up in jail for crime but got into boxing and now are champions and role models for other people. This is what I live for.”

Nathan, a multiple Boxing South Africa Trainer of the Year, helped transform his signature fighter, Hekkie Budler, from an amateur boxing teenager into a professional boxer and multiple world champion.

Nathan had seen a young Budler at an amateur event in 2006. “It was like love at first fight. I saw a kid who had a lot of heart and a real desire to win. He was the youngest fighter in South African boxing history ever to win a senior title at the age of 17. I went up to him and introduced myself.”

The Johannesburg-born Budler soon came under Nathan’s tutelage. “My boxing knowledge was exceptionally vast at the time, but my coaching ability and my track record were largely unproven,” Nathan recalls.

One of Nathan’s mottos is that success is built on relationships. “I grew with Hekkie. He mentored me, and I mentored him. When he had his first loss, I realised that maybe it’s not him, maybe it’s me, so I went to learn from the esteemed Freddie Roach, one of the greatest trainers in boxing history.”

Nathan has been described in the media as being on the same level as Roach, and as the go-to man in South African boxing. He puts this down to his evolution to being more than just a coach. “I’m promoting, managing fights, working with broadcasters, putting fights together internationally, getting the best possible deal for my athletes, and so on. Besides forming successful relationships in boxing, my passion and the fact that I’m a fan at heart are kind of where I get the edge from.”



**25**  
YEARS

When you spark emotion in someone or you get a physical mental shift and change from their actions, that’s the difference between winning and losing.

“I brought South Africa a legitimate world championship defence for the first time in several years when Sivenathi Nontshinga defended his championship last year,” says Nathan, who inspired Nontshinga to victory with his “nine-minutes-to-turn-your-life-around” speech, which gained acclaim across the boxing world.

“When you spark emotion in someone or you get a physical mental shift and change from their actions, that’s the difference between winning and losing,” Nathan says. “You think to yourself, ‘You dreamed of this when you were a kid.’” Nathan relishes coaching in a big fight in front of thousands

of spectators. “I love the feeling in your gut when you are in the dressing room and the floor manager opens the door and says, ‘Five minutes [until the fight].’”

Nathan struggled to deal with his pre-fight nerves back in the day, but now loves going into “hostile territory where you’re not supposed to win. The biggest thing for me, since I was a kid, and it still drives me today, is don’t tell me I can’t do something when I know I can because I’m going to prove you wrong,” says the man nicknamed “Nomakanjani” (No matter what). “Boxing will teach you about life more than life will teach you about life.”

Away from boxing, “I enjoy staying home with my kids, Jamie, Kyla, and Daniel, and watching sport, particularly boxing. I’m fascinated by boxing to this day.

“I’m absolutely living my dream. I got my first pair of gloves at the age of two. I started being fascinated then. I used to watch great corner men like Teddy Atlas, Emanuel Steward, and Angelo Dundee, and I thought that maybe one day that could be me.”

“My late grandfather, Clarence Nathan, was involved in a public gym with a boxing ring, where my late dad boxed.”

Nathan’s mother became the first white woman professional boxing judge in South African boxing history in 1993.

Nathan himself became the youngest licensed corner man in South African boxing history at the age of 12, a record that will never be broken due to a subsequent 18-year-old age requirement.

“I got taken to boxing because I nagged my late father,” he reminisces. Nathan was a judoka for about 10 years. “I was

doing really well, and won the nationals.”

However, his main love was boxing, and although he never boxed competitively, he sees this as a blessing in disguise “because a lot of trainers who were fighters coached the fighters the way they used to fight. I’m going to work with what you give me.”

Reflecting on the Boxing South Africa challenges last year, Nathan says, “People were getting suspended. It was such an injustice. I went on national broadcaster and radio interviews and let rip on what was going on inside of South African boxing. I’m proud of being one of the activists. Fights were being cancelled, and I just couldn’t deal with it. I’m glad that I used my voice to fight for a serious cause.”

Nathan believes his boxing company, No Doubt Management, is probably the most diverse boxing company in South Africa. His Hot Box Gym in Johannesburg “is probably also the most diverse boxing gym in South Africa. I love the unity among the fighters,” he says.

Judaism intertwines with Nathan’s career. “I always cover my head in the dressing room and say the Shema, asking Hashem to protect my fighters and the opponent. My tefillin bag is probably one of the most travelled in the country.”

Nathan, whose career has taken him to 30 countries, was moved by his nomination for the Absa Jewish Achiever Award. “The biggest thing was my community recognising my work in the realm of sport, and the lives I’ve changed. If you ask me what I do for a living, the answer is, I make dreams come true.”



# JOHNNIE WALKER

LET THE  
STEPS  
YOU'VE



TAKEN  
DO THE  
WALKING

**KEEP WALKING**



Photo: Screenshot



# Trevor Rabin

## From Rabbitt to rocking the world

**T**revor Rabin, the only South African to be inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, accepted the Absa Jewish Achiever Special and Extraordinary Award this year because he felt it was the right way to stand up against injustice in the world today.

"It feels like now is the time to accept this as we watch antisemitism rear its ugly head," he says. "I agreed to accept this award on the day that six Israeli hostages in Gaza were brutally assassinated after almost a year of surviving in the tunnels. I was so revolted and angry," says Rabin. "I wanted to stand up against this in some way, and this seemed like the right way."

"When the 7 October massacre took place, it had an impact on the whole world. And antisemitism, which is often hidden, was then given an excuse to be exposed."

Rabin, who now lives in Los Angeles in the United States, is best known in South Africa as the lead guitarist and singer of what was a world-class rock band that ruled the local music scene in the 1970s. The band was known for its thousands of adoring teenybopper fans.

Today, though, Rabin composes soundtracks for mega-budget movies and television shows. To date, he has composed at least 50 movie soundtracks and music for 50 television shows. He is also in the process of composing a symphony and does digital artwork for fun.

His musical career started when he and two friends, Neil Cloud and Ronnie Friedman – alias Robot, started making music together in their early teens. "I met Neil because his older sister was going out with my brother, Derek, and Ronnie lived two houses up from him in Houghton. We became friends." After jamming together, these young teens took to playing at Barmitzvahs, weddings, and parties in and around Johannesburg. They became a band, called Conglomeration, which Rabin said, "is a horrible name".

"At one Barmitzvah, we earned the princely sum of R10, which was great because I really needed to get a microphone to improve our vocal sound. It would cost a bit more than that," he recalled. "We learnt *Hava Nagila* and several other songs popular at Jewish events, and our popularity grew from there. Soon we were headlining at pop festivals".

The three of them, still best friends today, performed with Julian Laxton and other top musicians at the time, but hadn't recorded anything as a group. They then got their conscription papers, and spent their time in the army travelling around performing for troops.

"My captain who was behind this,

called us the Rabinites, also a bad name that I had no chance of changing at the time," said Rabin, with a wry chuckle. "We played loads of music, from Led Zeppelin to the Beatles." While still in the army, they were approached by acclaimed music producer Patric van Blerk, who had them "AWOL-ing" (sneaking out) to play in dodgy clubs.

Rabin cannot remember how they got to be called Rabbitt, but it stuck, and Van Blerk brought in a young musician from Pretoria, called Duncan Faure, to join them. Once their army service was done, their group solidified as Rabbitt once they recorded *Boys Will Be Boys*.

They finished recording the album in seven or eight days, and then realised that they hadn't included Faure, so they gave him a song to add. Rabbitt then became a household name, particularly among girls and young women. They were regularly featured on the early television pop music show *Pop Shop*.

"I wrote the song Charlie, which was a chart topper, with Patric. It was about his husband, which wasn't so acceptable in those days. So, when newspapers asked me who the song was about, I thought it best to tell them it was about my dog," Rabin says.

Rabbitt became the equivalent in South Africa to the Beatles in the United Kingdom, and to date, there has never been a band quite as popular in this country that caused such a stir.

"The crazy thing is it was our life, so it didn't feel bizarre to live like that, not being able to go anywhere without being recognised," he said. He recalled having teenage girls hanging outside the home he lived in with his parents, just waiting to see him. Comparatively, among rock bands, Rabbitt was fairly clean cut. "We were quite responsible, but still had lots of fun," Rabin says.

"I was exhausted at the time as I

did session music all day, and then played six or seven sets of music every night except Monday and Sunday."

Rabin grew up surrounded by a clear understanding about how unpleasant apartheid was. "My father was a sought-after attorney, and my uncle was Sydney Kentridge, Nelson Mandela's lawyer and one of the world's finest barristers." But music was a central theme in the Rabin household, with his father playing violin in the Johannesburg Symphony Orchestra, his mother being a "great pianist", and her mother a well-known piano teacher. His brother was also an award-winning violinist, and his sister an acclaimed dancer. "I virtually grew up reading music before I could read words and singing before I could talk," he says.

Rabin went solo in 1977, which led to the group's demise soon afterwards. "The record company we were working with was in trouble and on the verge of closing down," he says. "We were working on signing with another label, but the businesspeople concerned with us worried that they would be written out of the deal, which caused them to react badly. I got angry and left."

Rabin soon got over his anger, but by then, he had already moved on to starting a record label in England and doing solo albums.

"Truth was, as Rabbitt, we had overachieved in the territory we were in and needed to expand or we wouldn't have survived anyway," he says.

Rabin ultimately moved to Los Angeles with his wife, Shelley, and joined the rock band, Yes, with whom he stayed for 15 years. Soon after he joined, his song *Owner of a Lonely Heart* went to number one in almost every country.

Rabin produced the band's last album, *Talk*, which he says he is proud of because "it was the first album we recorded digitally", and he was getting more and more comfortable with digital music. After they toured Japan, Rabin decided he wanted to do something different and left Yes.

It wasn't easy to get his foot in the door of producing music for film, being told by many he would face a brick wall because they saw him as a rock star not a composer. He eventually used a connection with Steven Seagal to help him get his first opportunity, and the rest is history. To date, among the film scores he has composed, are: *The Glimmer Man*; *Enemy of the State*; *Gone in 60 Seconds*; *The Misfits*; *Jack Frost*; *Armageddon*; and *American Outlaws*.

In 2017, with the fellow members of Yes, Rabin was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame when the remaining musicians performed together again. It was shortly before then that the Yes drummer died, and the band's remaining musicians, Jon Anderson, Rick Wakeman, and Rabin toured, doing 200 concerts together. "That was the last time I performed," Rabin said.

His ties to South Africa remain, with his brother living here and both his wife, Shelley, and his son, Ryan, also a musician, feeling very connected. "My son got married at Londolozi Game Reserve not long ago, and Shelley often talks about us retiring back there," he said. But, he says, who knows what the future brings?



# JOHNNIE WALKER

**IT TAKES  
YEARS TO  
BECOME**



**AN  
OVERNIGHT  
SUCCESS**

**KEEP WALKING**

## Alan Browde

Alan Browde's company, SA Harvest, is on a mission to end the injustice of hunger in South Africa and in just 58 months, has delivered more than 70 million nutritious meals to the hungry. According to Browde, this makes the company one of the top two food-rescue companies in South Africa.

"Being able to improve the lives of our more unfortunate brothers and sisters, especially children, has been a life-changing privilege for me," he said.

SA Harvest has also rescued 17.5 million kilograms of edible food during this time that would have otherwise gone to landfill. The company sources it from farmers, manufacturers, and retailers, and delivers it free and in bulk to community-based organisations to disseminate. It has also prevented 1.5 million kilograms of methane emissions, and helps lessen the 10 million tons of food that goes to waste every year.

SA Harvest aims to eradicate hunger in South Africa by integrating charity with systemic solutions which focus on employment, skills training, and community upliftment.

The company has also developed bespoke technology which tracks and traces every morsel of food, registers expiry

collection, and delivery dates, and measures the average nutritional values delivered to all its beneficiaries, according to Browde.

Browde, a former Habonim Dror camp organiser and an ex-dairy farmer on Kibbutz Nir Eliyahu, says, "SA Harvest has enabled me to give back to the people of this country. Helping to improve lives has been a life-changing privilege for me."

He says the most challenging experience of his career was moving from a kibbutz into the very formal business environment of Stellenbosch Farmers Wineries without any appropriate training or experience. "I had to handle a huge budget as the brand manager of Mainstay. I managed the storm by not being afraid of making mistakes and with the support of my special boss," he said.

SA Harvest began operations in October 2019, just before the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. "It was ironically a boon for us," he said. "Everyone suddenly woke up to the catastrophe of hunger and malnutrition in the country, and we managed to raise a lot of money at that time. We delivered, safely, millions of meals during lockdown.

"I was determined not to be concerned with issues –

loadshedding, corruption etc – that we couldn't control. We pushed on, and delivered, proving that we are more than the challenges thrown at us."

Browde believes the most important task of a leader is to keep his team connected to its purpose. "Goals in themselves aren't motivational unless the 'why' is deeply meaningful. Our feeding every day of thousands of hungry people and our work in helping to uplift severely disadvantaged communities are powerful emotive reasons."

Browde's love of learning has helped SA Harvest become one of the thought leaders in issues affecting the rescue and delivery of free food.

"I'm fortunate to have had great teachers in my parents – Selma and Jules Browde – who taught me an ethical way of life and the importance of courageous action," says Browde, who was King David Linksfield head prefect in 1968.



## Norman Kretzmer and Raphael Segal

Norman Kretzmer built up Avantedge Group, which offers innovative software solutions across various industries including legal, financial, and medical; and Raphael Segal did the same with the group's software solution, Legal Interact.

Kretzmer, the chief executive of Avantedge, is most proud of building this diversified business conglomerate from the ground up and positioning it as a leader in innovation across multiple sectors. The Johannesburg-based business employs more than 100 people, and its services and products extend internationally.

external challenges, both from a technological perspective and the evolving landscape of South Africa over the past 40 years.

"We have embraced adaptability as a core value, continuously evolving our strategies and operations to navigate external disruptions," Segal says. "Through continuous learning and professional growth opportunities, we have empowered our employees to thrive."

One of the most challenging periods of Kretzmer's career was managing Avantedge during the COVID-19

pandemic. "The sudden shift to a remote workforce was a significant disruption, particularly as we had to maintain productivity, communication, and morale," he says. "Ensuring that our teams remained connected and engaged despite the physical distance was crucial. By staying focused, supporting our

teams, and continuing to innovate, we not only weathered the storm, but emerged stronger."

Both Legal Interact and Avantedge contribute to skills development. The former upsills individuals from diverse backgrounds, equipping them to thrive in an AI-driven future. As for Avantedge, "When we train users of our products, we ensure they acquire not only the necessary skills to operate the software, but a comprehensive understanding of the associated processes," Kretzmer says. "This holistic approach enhances their overall expertise."

Kretzmer's leadership traits include a positive mindset and commitment to continuous learning. One of his greatest achievements was leading the expansion of the Builders Warehouse division of Massmart, resulting in its recognition as a leader in South African home improvement retailing.

One of Segal's greatest achievements was founding eBAM Systems in 2001, and successfully selling its solution to prestigious clients such as BMW South Africa and other regions. His leadership strategy includes building shared purpose, dedication, and continuous growth.

Kretzmer and Segal both enjoy spending time with family, while the latter is also passionate about sport and came second in a Maccabi bodybuilding competition in 1991.



"Avantedge stands out because of its innovative use of technology, particularly in the legal and healthcare sectors," says Kretzmer.

Segal, who describes Kretzmer as a source of support and collaboration, transformed Legal Interact from a law firm-facing business to an enterprise-facing business. "It required maintaining the operational efficiency of our existing team while simultaneously building a new team. It involved extensive hard work, continuous repositioning of people, and adapting to evolving requirements," says Segal, describing the challenges.

Legal Interact, which employs 70 people and operates throughout sub-Saharan Africa, is unique as it began with the development of "practice management and accounting solutions for law firms, which provided us with expertise in the legal industry," says Segal. "Leveraging this experience, we transitioned to focus on comprehensive contract life-cycle management."

A pioneering legal technology company dedicated to transforming legal and contract management, Legal Interact's standout innovation is its My AI Lawyer platform, which combines a digital lawyer with human legal expertise.

Named Microsoft's Global Partner of the Year for 2024, Legal Interact champions access to justice and artificial intelligence for good. It has faced numerous

## Nadav Ossendryver

Nadav Ossendryver's wildlife media company, Latest Sightings, has more than 17 million followers and brings the wonders of nature to people globally through real-time, crowd-sourced wildlife sightings.

"Visitors to game reserves share live updates of sightings with photos, which are broadcast across platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and our app," says Ossendryver, a 28-year-old alumnus of King David Linksfield and the University of the Witwatersrand.

Ossendryver started Latest Sightings when he was a 15-year-old Grade 9 student, and he was still in high school when his business's impact resulted in him winning the Jewish Achiever Creative Counsel Young Jewish Entrepreneurs Award.

"It was a proud moment that marked the beginning of a journey that has since grown beyond what I could have imagined back then. From a school project to a globally recognised platform, Latest Sightings has come a long way."

Ossendryver says his app is unique as he has built a team driven by passion for wildlife. "This isn't just a job for us, it's us working with what we love," he says. "There's also no other app that provides real-time sighting services for people on safari. Latest Sightings' unique selling point is that we generate the content. The app allows people to send us their sightings, so we get the

great photos or videos first before anyone else. We're able to generate hundreds of sightings every day."

Ossendryver says his success is largely driven by his obsessive personality and fast-mover mentality. "When I see an opportunity or have an idea, I don't spend too much time overthinking. I dive in, and take action, which allows me to capitalise on opportunities quickly."

He is most proud of turning his passion for wildlife into a business. "In 2023 alone, we received more than five billion views online. That was more than National Geographic online."

His greatest business achievements include building a global community with more than 17 million followers, continuing to generate billions of views every year, and Latest Sightings' conservation impact. "We provide critical data to researchers via the sightings that we receive. This directly saves the lives of multiple species in the parks."

Latest Sightings is also committed to helping the wildlife community and its business partners to develop valuable skills. "We focus on improving their online social media presence and videography skills," Ossendryver says.

He believes leadership is about creating a culture of transparency, trust, and positivity. This past year, he has focused on giving his team the freedom to make decisions and empowering them to take ownership of their work. "This approach fosters a sense of accountability, and encourages creative problem-solving," he says.

"I also believe in celebrating small wins, whether it's reaching a million views in 24 hours or making another sale. By celebrating these victories, we create a continuous atmosphere of positivity. This way, even when we encounter setbacks, the team's morale stays high."





## Seymour Talpert

**S**eymour Talpert is the founder of Barbeque Rib Manufacturers (BRM), a family business that produces meat and poultry products for the food and retail supermarket trade. "All our recipes and sauces are made and developed on site by our dedicated product development team," he says.

Founded in 1985, BRM started from small beginnings in a restaurant in Milpark, Johannesburg, and grew into a world-class cooking and processing facility producing top-quality, safe, and convenient products. "We supply customers nationally and in limited African, Indian Ocean, Middle Eastern, and Asian markets," Talpert says.

Talpert is most proud of leading a special team of professional management and staff.

He believes his greatest business achievements have been to introduce great products and inspire and mentor staff members. "Training and mentoring are the only way to create a great working environment and ultimately a great company and team," Talpert says.

After matriculating in 1972 and serving in the army, Talpert managed various hotels as well as Mike's Kitchen in Greenside, Johannesburg, before owning the Gallery Grill in Milpark from 1978 to 1988.

"Since childhood, I wanted to cook and feed people great food, and fortunately, I've been blessed to be able to pursue my dream," he says, "from being a chef in the army to training in hotels, running restaurants, finally owning my own restaurant, and now being involved in a great company, BRM, with a special team and family." He says he has been "blessed with two great families who have managed to help me live my food and culinary passion for feeding the nation".

Talpert believes the first lesson of leading a team is not to have an ego, and to learn to talk as "we" instead of "I". "Have an open-door policy, where any staff member can talk to you. Have an open mind to listen to people. Try not being a dictator," he says.

His best business character traits are "endeavouring not to be a total control freak and, as I get older and hopefully wiser, letting go and delegating".

The COVID-19 pandemic was the most challenging event of Talpert's catering and culinary career. "Once again, because of family and team members, we managed to weather all and survive," he says. He has weathered external storms such as loadshedding by having "a fantastic, energetic family and fellow directors and management who infuse energy and a positive attitude towards challenges."



A road runner for the past 40 years, Talpert believes in working and playing hard, and living his life to the full."

## Ely Aluf

**E**ly Aluf, the chief executive of Privé Financial Services, is an innovative force in the insurance and business community, introducing creative solutions to age-old problems. "My approach not only helps companies increase their efficiency and profitability, it has inspired others to think outside the box," he says.

Privé Financial Services, established in 1990 as a medium-sized brokerage, has expanded to include all of South Africa and Mozambique. Aluf has managed to grow the company's brokerage in extremely challenging economic times.

In the past few years, he has inspired others, he says, through his "commitment to persevere, no matter the challenges, by instilling confidence and positivity to soldier on. Putting others before myself has inspired family, friends, and colleagues to push their own boundaries by being constantly motivated to pursue their goals."

Aluf believes his greatest achievements are the numerous accolades and insurance broker awards he has received in the short-term, life, and medical aid arenas. However, his greatest joy is in "giving charity to our community-based organisations", says this 55-year-old Norkem Park High alumnus.

His greatest challenge is the constant worry he has for his son, Gil, who developed life-altering disabilities at the age of six when he fell off a jungle gym at nursery school. "The constant worry and uncertainty about our son's future weighs heavily on our minds and hearts," he says. "Yet we persevere, driven by our love and commitment to our son, demonstrating an unwavering devotion that truly embodies the essence of parenthood."

Aluf's mom was five months pregnant with him when his father was tragically killed while serving in the Israel

Defense Forces. "My mom remarried, and my journey to Africa began, arriving in Kenya in 1979, whereafter we moved to South Africa in 1981, residing in Kempton Park."

Aluf, a gym and scuba diving enthusiast, experienced a life-changing moment when he was involved in a serious motorcycle accident on 11 September 2020. "I spent time in intensive care and nine months recovering from debilitating injuries. Thank G-d, I have recovered, albeit with screws and plates. I realise how precious life is, and have made a conscious decision to live my life to the fullest."

He goes beyond the challenges he and the country face by remaining focused on his business ideology and beliefs while blocking out negative noise.

"I have made a profound impact on my peers and others with my empathy, leadership, and sincerity by creating a safe and inclusive space where my clients, colleagues, and partners feel heard, valued, and empowered to grow," he says. "In our profession, we empower people to have a better financial understanding, thereby helping people to grow wealth."



• Ely Aluf is also nominated in the Absa Professional Excellence category



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# Alan Fainman

## Tough but fair, Fainman empowers teams

**A**bsa Business Leadership Award winner Alan Fainman has been with Bidvest for 28 years and is now divisional chief executive of Bidvest Services International, the largest profit contributor out of six divisions in the group. His division manages all the company's hygiene and facilities management services, and employs 74 000 of 130 000 people in the group.

Fainman, a 61-year-old King David Linksfield and University of the Witwatersrand alumnus, says Bidvest Services International supports companies through innovative outsourced services such as integrated facilities management, technical maintenance, hygiene services, and cleaning.

His division operates in South Africa, Namibia, Mauritius, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Spain, Australia, Singapore, and Eswatini. He describes it as unique "simply because of our people".

"We're as good as our people because we're in the world of service. As a decentralised group, our management teams are fully empowered to run their businesses. We have no handbooks of 'do's and don'ts', and all resources are in the businesses. We have no centralised or standardised human resources systems or the like. This is the unique aspect of how we operate. We guide, mentor, support, and grow our businesses while empowering entrepreneurs."



Do your best and leave the rest to G-d.

Fainman believes his humility makes him unique. "I also don't hold grudges and don't believe in 'faribels'," he says. "From a corporate perspective, I'm totally apolitical. I've learnt a lot from a number of people who are at every level in our businesses. I have a strong work ethic and always work six days a week. I also do a lot of self-reflection, especially when things have gone wrong or there are disagreements within a business. I also don't take myself too seriously."

Fainman says his greatest business achievement includes starting the Bidvest Laundry Group, which ran at a loss when he joined the group and is now making a great profit. "We grew the staff complement from 900 to more than 3 000," he says. He also grew Bidvest Steiner substantially between 2009 and 2015, created thousands of jobs, and gave numerous young people their first start.

Two events rank as the most challenging moments of his career. The first was "a devastating fire in 2001 that destroyed our largest laundry where I was based", and the second was the COVID-19 pandemic. "At that stage, I had 100 000 people in my division. I learnt the lesson of dealing with COVID-19 from the fire. First, protect your people, which we did in both events. We paid everyone. I developed a policy to deal with the death of more than 120 people. We also worked out how to retain

thousands of clients without going bankrupt.

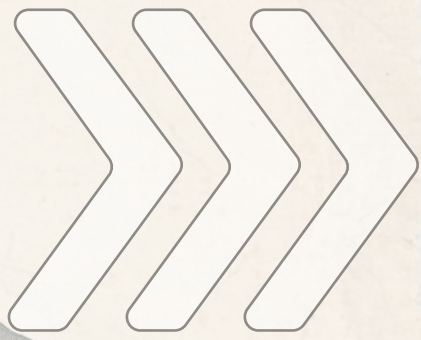
"My approach to external storms has always been to find a solution. The changing face of South Africa since democracy has had its challenges.

We have black economic empowerment scorecards and key performance indicators for all types of things, but transformation must come from your head and heart. You must want to do it for the right reasons, not just because it has an impact on your remuneration.

"I have had challenges in numerous businesses but the most significant was a large business with a shocking culture and an undertone of racism and misogyny. After attempting numerous cultural interventions including sessions for senior management at Liliesleaf, many successes were achieved but the undertone remained. I eventually used an Israeli artificial intelligence tool that checked people's social media for certain words which resulted in a number of major dismissals. This created a better culture, and it ultimately became our most transformed business, with more than 80% black top and senior management. The key is to bring in talented people regardless of colour and have gender equality at all levels, and the business will flourish."

His division spends whatever it needs to on skills development. "We've moved away from training employees only in bursary courses from adult-based education to management skills and everything in between. One success is the journey a cleaner undertook to get a human resources degree and today, that employee is our divisional transformation manager."

Fainman, the recipient of awards such



as the 2022 Primestars Trailblazer Award, started his own business, First Shoe Repairs, in 1982. He went on to be an executive director of First Garment before joining BidServ Laundry Group in 1996 and working his way up from there.

Being meticulous, punctual, driven, passionate, and having an eye for detail are the character traits that make Fainman the best business person he can be. "I read everything, and always prepare," he says.

He believes in leading from the front. "To work with a team in good times is easy. The tough times I always feel have brought out the best in me. I'm supportive but firm when a decision needs to be made. There's a time when one cannot debate any longer, and firm guidance is needed. I try to make sure people are treated equally and fairly, and I don't work with prima donnas. They aren't good for teams. I try my best to recognise people individually."

In the past year, Fainman and his senior team renegotiated one of their largest South African contracts that had been through tough times. He worked with the team every step of the way, he says, and has secured the future of that contract and business. "Most negotiations were on weekends and at night. We made tough calls together, which I took responsibility for as no-one could quantify the impact of the changes to any great degree of accuracy."

Despite all his business achievements, Fainman says he's most proud of "playing an active role in raising my children to be mensches, and being a proud South African even during the 1980s".

He says he leans on Pam, his wife of 34 years, as well as Bidvest's former and current chief executives, and his children.

He played first-team soccer at school, and represented Maccabi Southern Transvaal in the sport.



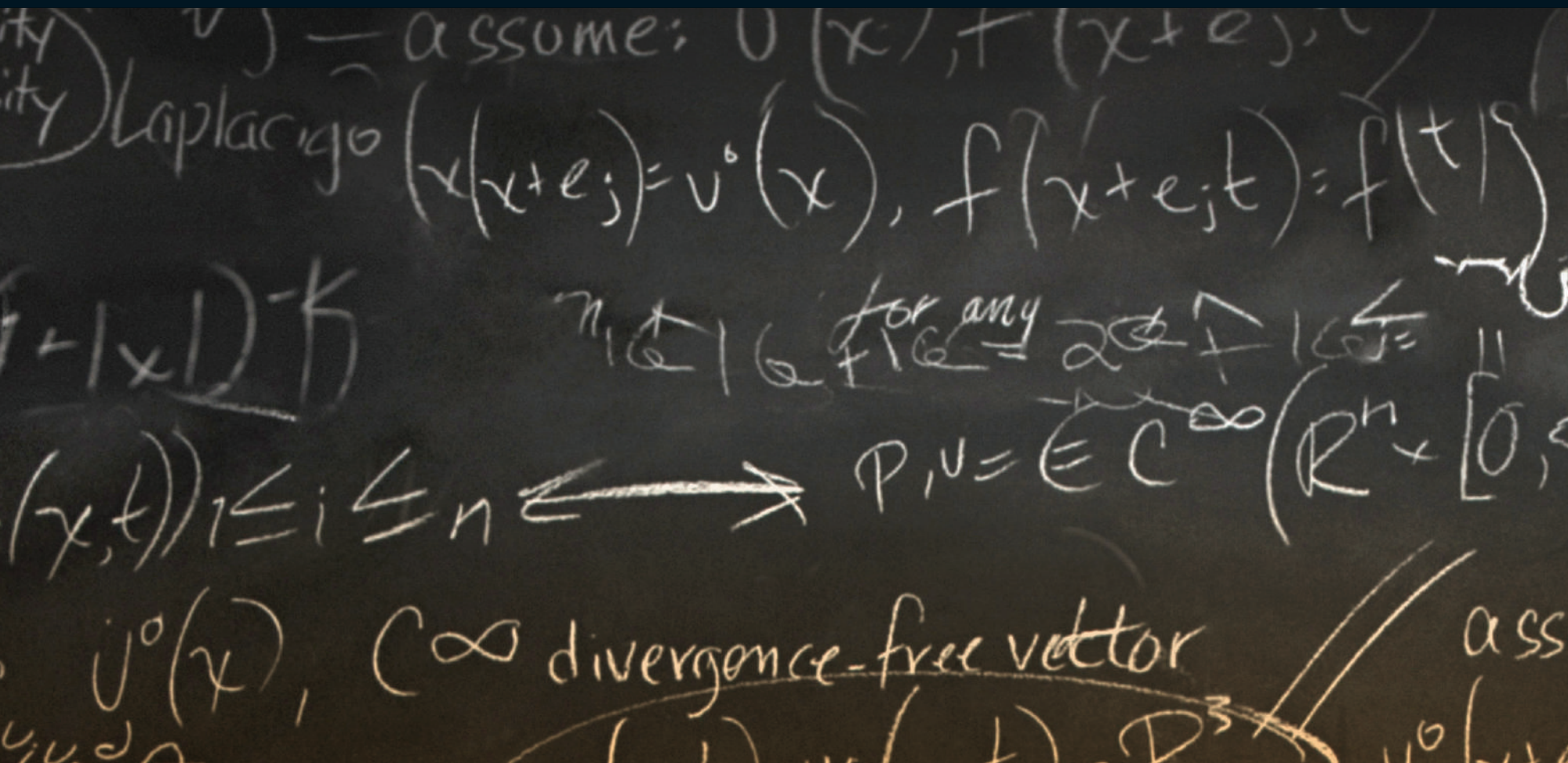
# ATTITUDE OR APTITUDE

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## Michael Bagraim

**M**ichael Bagraim, a Member of Parliament (MP) in South Africa for 11 years, has committed his professional and parliamentary life to improve job creation in South Africa.

Over the past few years, this practising attorney and Democratic Alliance (DA) member has enhanced numerous pieces of labour legislation to influence job creation, something that has inspired others.

"I've been involved in numerous groundbreaking labour legislation cases causing amendments to the Labour Relations Amendment Act," said Bagraim, who has served as DA labour spokesperson for the past 10 years.

In the past year, he is most proud of fostering and guiding legislation regarding strike rules and ballots before strikes.

His biggest challenge has been "trying to educate MPs within the ANC [African National Congress] as to why social engineering and Black Economic Empowerment has destroyed jobs in South Africa. I hold a monthly tutorial with members of the portfolio committee of employment and labour to train them with regard to job creation."

The founder of Bagraims Attorneys, Bagraim has been involved with numerous civic organisations. He has served in positions such as the president of the Association for the Physically Disabled, and as national president of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies.

He was named the Law Society's Human Rights Attorney of the Year in 2015, and received the

South African Medical Association's "In the Spirit of Service to Medicine for Medicine" award in 2015.

Bagraim said representing independent trade unions over the past 35 years had made an enormous difference to peace in the workplace. "Over the past year, I was able to settle dozens of disputes which could have led to strikes, but resulted in peaceful solutions," he said.

He has helped South Africa create jobs and develop skills by liaising with the departments of employment and labour, basic education, and higher education respectively.

Bagraim made plans to leave South Africa when he matriculated from Cape Town High School.

However, that all changed when "my mother spoke to the Rebbe, who wrote back to say that I must stay and make my mark".

He graduated from Rhodes University, where he was a member of the student representative council and numerous other student organisations, with Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Laws degrees.

In 1979, Bagraim experienced a life-changing moment when he attended a two-day seminar with Professor Nic Wiehahn on the new Labour Relations Act.

"This seminar convinced me that this Act would be my future career," he said.

The past few years have taught Bagraim, elected to the National Assembly in 2014 and now part of the Government of National Unity, to tolerate opposing viewpoints and diverse ideology and to approach his own point of view with caution and greater temerity.

"Despite the completely broken government, I have steadfastly stood in the parliamentary gallery pushing for changes to job creation," said Bagraim, a keen mountain walker and motorbike enthusiast.



## Carin Berman

**C**linical social worker Carin Berman has dedicated more than 25 years to working with people experiencing the pain of grief, loss, and trauma.

"Having lost my father at the age of 11 in the Helderberg air disaster, I feel privileged to have been able to evolve from this tragedy and find immense meaning and purpose in the career that chose me," said this alumnus of King David Linksfield and the University of the Witwatersrand.

Whether helping people in her practice, addressing audiences in lecture rooms, or giving guidance in hospital corridors, Berman hopes that her work has given comfort to many others in dark times.

"Over the past few years, I have had the privilege of walking alongside people through their darkest times [by] holding a space of compassion, tenderness, permission, and healing," she said.

Berman feels immense gratitude for, as she puts it, being "invited into people's lives".

"The work of a therapist is the quiet sacred work that happens in safe places. Hence, it's such an honour to be nominated and recognised for my professional contribution.

"Grief, suffering, and trauma are shrouded in fear of our helpless vulnerability. My hope is to demystify and create words and courage where fear lurks so that we can provide a space to talk, share, and support ourselves and others."

Berman counts as her first achievement the development of children's board games – games for bereaved and HIV-affected children.

"Thereafter, my achievements have included

being widely recognised for my expertise in the field of grief and oncology; writing for publications; presenting at conferences; training the broader community; completing my logotherapy course; being elected to the board of the SABJE [South African Board of Jewish Education]; and

maintaining my humour and humanness despite the suffering and pain I bear witness to."

She is always learning, saying that each person she meets teaches her about life and human resilience.

"I had to go on the journey of my own grief before I could walk alongside others, and

I don't regard what I do as work but as a privilege. We never stop learning. There's no expert other than the person whose life we are entering."

Berman, who has made television appearances on SABC 3 and eTV to share her expertise, admits that the past few years have put her career in the spotlight. "From the COVID-19 pandemic to the situation in Israel, humanity is going through dark times. Death education was something people felt they needed only when bad things happened. However, I believe now, more than ever, it's a life skill!"

Enjoying family time, walking, and baking, Berman hopes to be a torch in dark times. "To bear witness to suffering is painful, and I value my support system that energises me in order to keep doing this work. My spirituality and religion also play a critical role in helping me to cope."



## Dr Steven Firer

**D**r Steven Firer's career has been defined by his resignation as head of finance at Gauteng Cricket, academic achievements, teaching successes, and massive contributions to the accounting profession.

"Each of these experiences shaped who I am today, and solidified my reputation as a leader and innovator in the field of finance and accounting," says the 66-year-old Firer, an auditor, accountant, and chief executive of FirerForensics.

Firer, who was dubbed, "Auditing's White Knight" in the media for upholding the highest standards in the auditing profession, has pioneered the development of a new type of forensic audit that integrates advanced analytical techniques with traditional auditing methods. "This innovative approach has enhanced the ability to detect and prevent financial fraud," he said.

He describes FirerForensics as "financial detectives, courtroom warriors, and compliance champions who bring clarity, justice, and integrity to the world of finance. Our journey may have started in the face of adversity, but it has transformed into a relentless pursuit of truth, ensuring that every case we handle is met with the highest level of expertise and commitment."

For Firer, one of the greatest days in his professional career was when he resigned from Gauteng Cricket. "This decision, deeply intertwined with the David Teeger matter [in which the young sportsman was dropped as team captain for his views on Israel], marked not only a pivotal moment in my career, but was also a testament to my unwavering commitment to ethical standards and integrity in the financial sector.

"The circumstances surrounding the Teeger matter left me with no alternative but to stand by my convictions. The decision was a culmination of years of dedication to transparency and accountability. It was a day when I affirmed that my values and ethical standards were non-negotiable.

"This period tested my relationships within various communities," he said. "The emotional weight was immense, and tears were shed as I grappled with the implications."

His love for Israel and faith in Hashem helped him get through it, and he has continued contributing to the accounting profession.

Firer has always stepped up to the challenge for good. In 2010, when a director of a company questioned his legal knowledge, he took on the challenge to get a law degree. He went on to attain a Master of Laws, one of his five degrees from various universities. He has also authored more than 40 articles in professional and academic journals.

"My research has had a profound impact globally, with my work being ranked as the third-most cited among accounting academics worldwide."

Firer has given more than 100 public lectures, which have further established him as a thought leader in the field, allowing him to influence the profession and educate the next generation of accountants. "I have never had a single student fail under my tutelage," he says.

He advises young professionals to prioritise continuous learning, maintain ethical integrity, seek and provide mentorship, gain practical experience, engage in networking, and contribute to the profession.

Firer, the proud father of four, was a Springbok soccer player, the winner of the 1979 South Africa Soccer Championships with South African Universities Soccer XI, and a Nuffield Week cricketer.

"Golf is another sport that has been a significant part of my life," he said. "At one point, I had a 4-handicap." He served as treasurer of Houghton Golf Club. "I combined my passion for golf with my professional expertise in finance, contributing to the club's financial health."







## Professor David Bilchitz

**W**hen David Bilchitz was appointed acting judge of the Constitutional Court of South Africa in February 2024, he hoped this would inspire other academics to work in the country's highest court.

This 49-year-old King David Linksfield alumnus was proud to become one of the first full-time academics to occupy such a position in the first court. It gave him a chance to make significant contributions to the development of the law in our country.

Bilchitz has a history of contributing to the advancement of constitutional law with a particular focus on fundamental rights. He says he has made a significant impact in fields such as socio-economic, business and human rights, the rights of non-human animals, and the understanding of proportionality.

"My work has been used by the Constitutional Court as well as foreign courts. I've also built and developed the South African Institute for Advanced Constitutional, Public, Human Rights and International Law," said Bilchitz, the director of the institute. In this capacity, he has mentored many young researchers. "I've also created many collaborations between academics in South Africa and other parts of the world," he said.

His academic work aside, he has been active in "changing certain features of our political community".

"I was key legal advisor to the LGBTQ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning] community during the

debates around same-sex marriage, and played a significant role in convincing our elected parliamentarians to move beyond a civil partnership model and make South Africa the fifth country in the world to recognise same-sex marriage," he said. "I've also played a role in ending the culling of elephants in South Africa, as well as contributing to a shift in environmental policy to take into account the well-being of individual animals."

One of his most ambitious projects was the organisation of the 2022 Johannesburg-based World Congress of Constitutional Law, the main event of the International Association of Constitutional Law that takes



place every four years.

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, major travel restrictions, and at the height of loadshedding, running the congress turned out to be his greatest challenge.

"We decided to persist with the event and continue to plan with all relevant protocols in place. In the end, 653 people registered for the event from 71 countries. Professionally, this involved managing a range of stakeholders as well as being prepared to take some risk. Personally, the uncertainty was difficult."

Bilchitz initiated the first blog on the African continent to engage every week with major issues of constitutional law and fundamental rights. "I regard the publication of my full-length book in 2022 on fundamental rights and the legal obligations of business as a significant contribution to the field," he said.

Community work has always been very important for this piano player. "I have been vice-chairperson of my synagogue, and was one of the founders of Limmud in South Africa."

## Dr Paul Davis

**D**r Paul Davis is so much more than a retired medical doctor with a passion for human rights and justice. Davis pioneered private medical rescue services in southern Africa by introducing a public-private partnership model. He also championed frontline paramedic response systems.

Two of what he considers his greatest achievements are directing a major initiative to research, diagnose, and treat tuberculosis and HIV in South Africa via the Aurum Institute, and developing strategies and programmes to try to prevent and treat torture in South Africa prior to 1994. He also contributed to specialist medical training in the private sector through his work with the Wits Donald Gordon Medical Centre, of which he is a board member.

In the past year, he has proposed two projects to the Government of National Unity that could lead to rapid improvement in healthcare delivery in South Africa.

"Human rights are at my core," said Davis, a Parktown Boys High School alumnus. "Apartheid, with its brutal cruelty, became my first target. I focused on fighting detention without trial and the systematic torture of people. As the old regime crumbled before 1994, I founded Medical Rescue



International, combining private-sector emergency medical service resources to support the failing public health system."

Medical Rescue International, founded in 1991, was Africa's first private emergency air and ground ambulance. It offered a national, regional, and international air ambulance service with supplementary ground emergency response vehicles and staff. This organisation pioneered the role of paramedics as frontline emergency providers. It also improved access for people in emergency situations to high levels of care in the country and the sub-Saharan region.

Among his numerous achievements over his 80 years was setting up the Aurum Institute, which as a policy-informing research institute advanced knowledge and the ability to help those with tuberculosis and HIV. As the organisation's chairperson, Davis is proud that the Aurum Institute recently

founded the Dr Paul Davis Academic Excellence Scholarships for a Master's and a Doctorate degree in his honour.

Holding a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery from the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and being involved with the Wits Donald Gordon Medical Centre for many years, one of Davis's biggest challenges was giving up his medical practice to concentrate on Medical Rescue International and then being threatened with incarceration for refusing to comply with an order to hand over some patient records.

Davis speaks of a life-changing moment that happened when he was a conscript in the South African Air Force. "I was ordered in an emergency drill to round up at gunpoint the kitchen staff who prepared and served our food to lie face down on a field, guns pointed at them. It marked me - and I suppose them - forever."

And like his clear ideas of right and wrong, he believes medicine chose him as much as he chose it.

"It gave me the privilege of understanding people in their most vulnerable moments. In hindsight, when you immerse yourself in the human condition, the cause, and your role in it will reveal themselves, just don't ignore it," said Davis, an outdoors, cycling, and photography enthusiast.

Having thrived in his career, his advice to any up-and-coming doctor is, "Medicine offers unlimited personal fulfilment. Put your heart and soul into it, and be assured that you will find yourself in it."

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## Ze-ev Krein

**C**olonel Ze-ev Krein works in life-or-death situations. A section commander of the South African Narcotics Enforcement Bureau at the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation (DPCI), known as the Hawks, Krein also spends his time "investigating criminals who have performed horrific actions and who seek to manipulate and lie in order to achieve their nefarious objectives. Nonetheless, I still seek to see the best in all people and remain empathetic."

Krein, a University of Cape Town class medallist with various degrees, has been responsible for the conviction of violent criminals, the combatting and dismantling of transnational serious organised crime, and the seizure of tons of harmful drugs such as cocaine.

This 44-year-old Herzlia alumnus has also acted to help remove South Africa from greylisting, designing a global drug strategy to reduce the demand and supply of illicit drugs, and implementing advanced technology to better combat crime and drug trafficking.

Krein believes he has inspired others in the past few years by, among other things, representing South Africa at structures such as the United Nations (UN) Office of Drugs and Crime, as well as seizing and forensically processing the largest methamphetamine clandestine laboratories in Africa's history.

One of his greatest achievements includes designing more than 20 novel compounds during his research to develop new drugs for HIV and malaria.

His biggest challenge has been corruption at various levels of state. "This is an ongoing process, but it requires building a network of individuals you can trust who are courageous enough to expose corrupt and dangerous individuals at all levels of government and state," he says.

This past year, Krein has taught topics such as open-source intelligence, cryptocurrency, and narcotics to local and foreign law enforcement. He also recently formed collaborations between various law enforcement agencies and global structures at the UN. "This has resulted in an unprecedented sharing of information, knowledge, and skills," he says.

A life-changing moment for Krein was "taking my position at the DPCI and truly feeling I was part of an organisation that could make a fundamentally positive impact on this country. I realised I was surrounded by people who were motivated to fix the ills of the country."

He would advise a young person in his profession not to be afraid to step up. "If you think you are the best person for the job, don't sit back quietly, show everyone your actions."

Krein, a keen stargazer who used to run a community open-mic event at Arts on Main in Maboneng, says that at a time when there are "very serious threats from community to global level" with rising antisemitism, "every person needs to step up and take accountability for the impact they make. I hope to leverage this recognition to inspire every one of us to take courageous steps to do whatever they are able to do to counter the hatred and division."



## Brett Morris

**B**rett Morris, the executive chairperson of the Nahana Group, the first majority black-owned global advertising agency network in the world, has been creating convincing stories since he was a little boy. This stood him in good stead for years as group chief executive of FCB Africa, now the Nahana Group.

It also worked well in allowing him to pursue his dream of making a feature film, *Just Now Jeffrey*, which he wrote, directed, and co-produced, and released this year. Telling a Jewish South African story, the film has already been nominated for the Beverley Hills and Toronto Jewish film festivals. It was also picked up by Amazon Prime Video in the United States and United Kingdom.

During his tenure as chief executive, FCB won more awards than ever before in its 95-year history, including Africa's first-ever Cannes Grand Prix; One Show Best of Show; and Best Foreign Film at ONE Screen.

Morris, an alumnus of King David Victory Park and the University of the Witwatersrand, stumbled into a career in advertising, which, he said, "exposed me to a whole other world of creativity and diversity that broadened and deepened my understanding of South Africa and its people".

Morris believes creativity has the power to change the world for good. "I've supported individuals and organisations who are making an impact by using creativity to help them achieve more than they thought possible. As the chief executive of a communications group, I established the Nahana Foundation to leverage the group's rich creative experience to maximise non-profit clients' marketing efforts to influence positive change in South Africa."



"Through our broad-based partner, the Maharishi Institute, we have to date funded more than 200 young black women with a full, four-year business degree through the dividends from their shareholding."

Morris's biggest career challenge was leading a diverse communication group of seven companies in three cities through the COVID-19 pandemic. "We focused on the mental well-being of our staff, protecting as many jobs as possible by reducing executive salaries for a period."

Morris's impact in his industry is clear. He has been voted the most admired business leader for five years in a row by his peers in the annual MarkLives poll. He was also ranked as one of the top five creative directors in South Africa by his peers.

And he was awarded a Financial Mail AdFocus Award for Industry Leader of the Year in 2016.

This movie enthusiast, one of only two King David Victory Park rugby players to make the second round of Craven Week school trials, balances his time by trying to "leave my work at the door. This allows me to create space for family, friends, and the community."

## Ilan Ossendryver

**P**hotojournalist Ilan Ossendryver uses his camera as a tool for social activism, helping to improve lives in communities such as Kliptown and Mountain View in Soweto.

He has helped to develop vegetable gardens to create a food source for various communities, and has assisted the Future Angels Day Care Centre in Kliptown to become an environment that helps children have a bright future.

"I helped upgrade teachers with a course on how to teach reading, built a kitchen, and constantly supply educational materials, all through guests I have taken there," Ossendryver said.

"During the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, with the help of the South African Jewish community, we provided about 175 000 meals to the community. Kliptown has been flooded several times since I began working there, and each time, I have facilitated aid and food. I have helped several families repair their homes. I have helped the elderly get to hospitals. I bring people to experience the drummers and guitarists of Kliptown, whom I fund and promote. We introduced an art project in which children in the community, who previously begged for money, are encouraged to draw and paint to sell their artwork. They have moved from begging to earning money through creativity," he said.

Ossendryver's actions have inspired others to do good. "A photographer from Washington, D.C. was so inspired, he built a kitchen for the Future Angels Day Care Centre."

Not only has Ossendryver's photojournalism helped him to uplift communities, it has also enabled him to "see everything in life".

"I had the privilege of photographing Nelson Mandela on his first few days of freedom. In more than 20 years of being a photojournalist in Israel, I have witnessed the country at her best and most devastated. I photographed the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan. I accompanied Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin when he met Hosni Mubarak and Yasser Arafat publicly for the first time at Mubarak's palace in Egypt."

Some life-changing events for Ossendryver were covering the assassination of Rabin, many suicide bombings, the Gulf War, and the Intifada. "But nothing prepared me for the brutality of 7 October. My images of post 7 October have affected me greatly, and I hope they will be used to make sure that it will never happen again."

"I'm also proud that I have promoted Israel among the people of Soweto. People there are continually telling me that they are praying for me and for Israel. Today, I'm considered one of the community, their *madala* [elder], which is such an honour."

He said that in the past few years, he had become "more passionate and more sensitive to the plight of people that our government has failed. I'm also proud of the good that the Jewish community does, and the impact that it has had on the lives of so many South Africans."





## Max Price

**M**ax Price says he believes he has made an impact by shaping debates as a thought leader, taking risks, and introducing changes.

According to this teacher, researcher, public health professional, and former vice-chancellor of the University of Cape Town (UCT), one example was introducing the idea of an Internal Reconciliation Commission following the national Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

"It invited past students and staff to make submissions to an independent tribunal about their apartheid-related experiences in the faculty," said Price, a dean of the faculty of health sciences at the University of the Witwatersrand at the time. "This became a public report which advanced reconciliation and transformation of the faculty and was emulated by several faculties elsewhere."

More examples of Price's impact include starting the first private academic hospital in South Africa, the Wits Donald Gordon Medical Centre, and the first substantial university research company, the Wits Health Consortium.

"At UCT, I advanced debates nationally on how institutions might think about honouring historical figures and how to deal with artworks that have colonial or oppressive connotations," said Price, a saxophone and running enthusiast. "I championed alternative student selection policies that addressed the concern with affirmative action based primarily on race rather than disadvantage. I would like to believe that these policies have helped my institutions and others to create more inclusive



environments.

"As dean at Wits, I'm proudest of the educational reforms I introduced such as the four-year graduate entry medical degree, the new Bachelor of Health Sciences degree, and the establishment of new academic departments."

Price, a 68-year-old King David Victory Park alumnus and presently a scholar in residence at the Atlantic Institute, Oxford, believes he has inspired others over the past few years by demonstrating resilience in the face of considerable challenges and demonstrating that a university in South Africa can succeed in the global landscape.

"UCT ranks in the top 1% of universities worldwide despite unlevel global playing fields and the most significant student unrest in our history."

Price's biggest challenge was having to deal with disruptive and sometimes violent student protests about nine years ago while he was vice-chancellor at UCT. "Many have commented to me that they don't know how I survived. I do think I was resilient, that I managed to maintain strong conviction, that I was on the right track and give direction to the university community, and that I brought the ship through the storm," said Price, whose book on that period, *Statues and Storms: Leading through Change*, has stimulated critical debate and made it on the *Sunday Times* 2024 non-fiction long list.

Price, appointed by Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma to the first ministerial committee on financing healthcare in 1994, was once detained in solitary confinement. "The camaraderie I found when the detainees would sing in our cells and then as a trusted anti-apartheid ally in various movements, created a sense of being part of the struggle, which motivated and sustained me for years," he said.

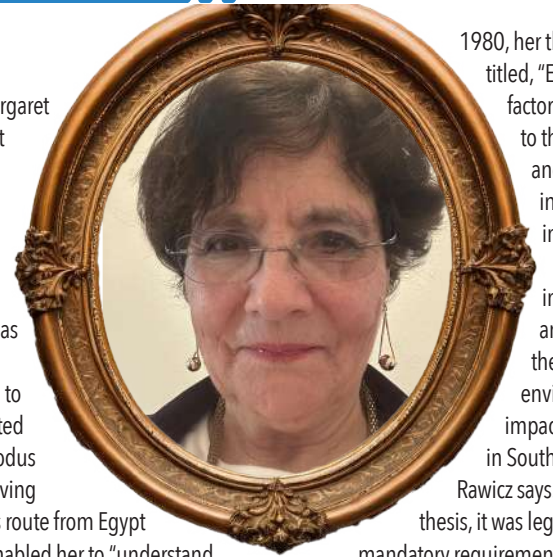
## Margaret Rawicz

**E**nvironmental management consultant Margaret Rawicz is proud that at the age of 73, many continue to ask her to give presentations and lectures on her career and how the environmental field has evolved.

Rawicz is also proud to have recently completed a Doctorate on the Exodus in Biblical Studies. Having journeyed the exodus route from Egypt herself, this degree enabled her to "understand whether what I had seen in my lone explorations of the route was the same as when the Israelites were there 3 500 years ago. This led me to do incredibly difficult research to determine what the climatic and ecological conditions were so long ago. I'm ready to publish findings for the benefit of the Jewish and other religious communities and secular biblical scholars."

This Hyde Park High alumnus, who has many qualifications, says, "I'm unique because I'm often on the cutting edge of a new way of thinking that opens up new ways of doing business, and I think about problem solving in disparate fields of interest, and integrate it with Torah thinking."

When she completed a Master's degree in landscape architecture at Pretoria University in



1980, her thesis was titled, "Environmental factors in relation to the location and planning of industrial areas in South Africa" "It resulted in new insights and introduced the need to do environmental impact studies in South Africa,"

Rawicz says. "After the thesis, it was legislated as a mandatory requirement for any form of development to submit an environmental impact study to the government before a project could be implemented."

Rawicz has presented publications at environmental conferences to educate business and the government to undertake investigations into environmental considerations as part of their planning.

It has influenced the South African government to pass laws to improve attitudes to social and environmental matters, and business and industry to take better social responsibility for the environmental impacts that pollution has on communities.

• Margaret Rawicz is also nominated in the Europcar Women in Leadership category



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# ABSA PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE AWARD NOMINEES

## Professor Benjamin Rosman

**B**enjamin Rosman, a professor in the School of Computer Science and Applied Mathematics at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), has a passion for creating spaces for others to excel.

This 38-year-old Crawford College alumnus has been working with robotics; autonomous intelligence and learning (RAIL); the Deep Learning Indaba; Lelapa; and the Wits Machine Intelligence and Neural Discovery (MIND) Institute.

"The fact that many of my colleagues are excelling in ways that people weren't before these spaces existed is evidence that I have made an impact on the computer science environment at Wits, and the AI (artificial intelligence) culture more broadly," Rosman said.

Through Lelapa, for instance, Rosman has helped to "make sure there are exciting tech positions in South Africa so that we don't lose all of our best graduates abroad".

Rosman's biggest challenge was having a stroke before he was born, which left him with cerebral palsy and partial paralysis on the right side of his body. "It has made many things difficult for me throughout my life, from sport at school, even to typing, but it has also taught me the value of playing to your strengths."

Rosman has a Master of Sciences (MSc) degree and a Doctor of Philosophy

(PhD) in AI and robotics from Edinburgh University. "I had to go abroad to do that. Since then, I vowed to do whatever I could to ensure that no-one would ever have to leave the country to acquire those skills again."

In 2014, he took on a visiting lecturership in the School of Computer Science and Applied Mathematics at Wits. "That slowly pivoted to become my focus, culminating in me being made full professor in 2022."

"My work at Wits has largely involved establishing and growing its RAIL laboratory. This is now the largest collection of AI researchers in Africa."

While working at Wits, Rosman has supervised 26 PhDs and 58 MSc students. "In addition to eight of my students having positions at Wits, others have gone on to hold positions at organisations such as IBM," he said.

He has also taught more than 300 students a year, including in specialist



topics at Masters level, which he introduced into the syllabus, and has worked with a senior team to establish MIND, "the only AI Institute in Africa to focus on fundamental rather than applied research", said Rosman, who was named a National Geographic Explorer in 2024 for a project on robots in the Sterkfontein Caves.

In 2017, he and seven colleagues founded a movement called the Deep Learning Indaba, the largest such summer school in the world. This was first held at Wits and went on to be held in other African countries.

Through the IndabaX programme, "we support locally run events in other countries. In 2024, we have run these technical machine learning events in 47 African countries. Our movement has inspired similar movements on other continents," said Rosman, who enjoys spending time with his wife, painting, and drawing.

## Daniel Schay

**C**ity of Johannesburg Ward Councillor Daniel Schay wakes up every morning knowing he has to confront a behemoth of a city struggling to deliver.

"It's a task I think most people would deem impossible," says this 36-year-old Democratic Alliance

I've developed new methodologies to hold government officials to account; and by standing up publicly as a Zionist Jew, I've given strength to our community to be proud of their beliefs and values."

Schay said his greatest achievement as a local councillor was his daily councillor message, which connects more than 4 500 people daily with what's happening in Johannesburg and the rest of the country. He describes this as "a massively successful innovation that has generated far greater political awareness within South Africa's Jewish community".

Schay, who has volunteered for organisations like the South African Union of Jewish Students and Bnei Akiva, experienced a life-changing moment while on tour to Poland in high school.

"I was standing in the gas chambers at Majdanek," he said. "I thought, 'According to all logical considerations, Jews shouldn't exist anymore, yet here we are after thousands of years of discrimination, of exile, of murder.' I concluded that being Jewish is more than a mere accident of birth. Being Jewish means you have been put on this earth by G-d to fulfil a mission, and that means embracing our beliefs and never being ashamed of them for an instant."

Schay, who has two engineering-related degrees from the University of South Africa, had 10 years of experience in the structural engineering field prior to becoming Ward 72 councillor. Over the past few years, he has shifted completely from engineering to politics.

"While I still view my role as a problem solver, the problems are different and a whole lot bigger. It has forced me to consult far more than I ever did previously, to be open to criticism, and course correction, and to embrace the power of our community. I used to work from 08:00 to 17:00. Now I work from 07:00 to 22:00 and even longer. Frankly, I've never been happier."

He enjoys hiking and reading, but says his key to maintaining balance is Shabbat and the time it gives him to switch off and be with family.



(DA) member and King David Linksfield alumnus, "but I know that with determination and the power of our community, we can deliver change."

Schay, who previously volunteered for the DA in positions including deputy chairperson of the party's Youth Johannesburg, pushes every day for more accountability and action among the city's officials as he knows jobs will be created and educational opportunities will blossom if the city moves in the right direction.

He believes he has made an impact by introducing a new level of transparency and accountability between the community of Ward 72 and its local government councillor.

In the past few years, "I have stood resolutely and publicly against ineffective governance in Johannesburg;

## Steve Sherman

**S**teve Sherman, the chief imagination officer of Living Maths, has dedicated his career to instilling young students with a love for STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and maths) subjects. He believes this will inspire more graduates to pursue careers in fields such as engineering and programming.

Sherman teaches thousands of students weekly around the world, including at the Museum of Mathematics in New York, looks for new ways to open schools and students to opportunities that would normally be financially out of their reach, and has 1 200 educators on the Facebook group he created for educators to share resources and ideas.

"As a Microsoft Innovative Educator Expert, Kahoot Ambassador, Wakelet Ambassador, among many other EdTech roles, I have run many global collaboration events online to bring educators together," says the 52-year-old Sherman, the 2020 recipient of the Global Teacher Award.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented Sherman, a Herzlia and University of Cape Town alumnus, with his biggest challenge. "When the lockdown took place, I was instantly 'unemployed'. I couldn't go into classrooms, run workshops, travel, or be around people. Fortunately, problem-solving is what I do for a living, and technology is one of my strong points."

He turned everything online, and reached

3 000 students worldwide.

"Despite the realisation that financially, COVID-19 could have devastated me, I focused on what I could control and made sure to master it."

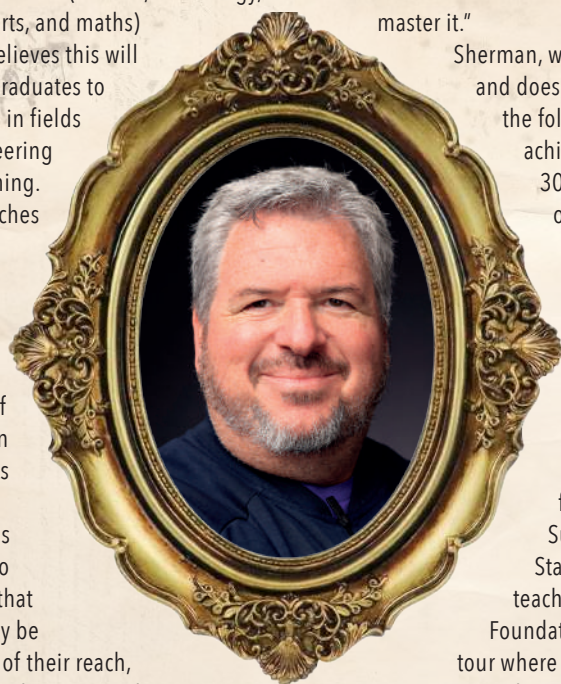
Sherman, who loves what he does and does what he loves, counts the following among his achievements over the past 30 years: pupils from his outreach project making the Western Cape's top-50 list for maths; and his hosting of an astronaut in South Africa in front of 10 000 people and more than 40 million people digitally.

"An outreach officer for the Humans to Mars Summit in the United States and an international teacher liaison with the Space Foundation, I run an annual space tour where I bring astronauts and experts in the space industry to South Africa, and we visit schools and offer public talks so that young people can get access to these incredible role models."

Sherman says he experiences life-changing moments every day, whether it's doing volunteer work for Reach for a Dream and realising the fragility and brevity of life, or watching a student who was written off by their teachers and family achieve above and beyond what was expected because they felt I believed in them."

Sherman's family are his "why". "It's about being a positive role model for my daughters," says this photography enthusiast. "I want my children to be inspired to help others."

He advises young STEAM professionals to "get busy doing what makes you happy. Don't be afraid to take on challenges. Climb out of your comfort zone, and say yes more often."



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# Tony Leon

## 'GNU' times for political prize fighter and democrat

**T**ony Leon, who has been a household name in politics for many decades, this year made a remarkable return to the frontline of South African politics. He is the Absa Professional Excellence Award winner for 2024.

Leon, who grew up in Durban in a secular but liberal Jewish household, was a key negotiator for the current Government of National Unity (GNU). He was asked by the leader of the Democratic Alliance (DA) to be one of the party's six negotiators to ensure that the DA was part of the final GNU.

"I wasn't looking for a role, but I was asked to perform it," Leon recalls. "I just felt this was too important in terms of the national future to sit up and say, 'Well, I don't want to go back into politics'."

This award-winning author, acclaimed speaker, consultant, and columnist, who has had two highly successful careers in frontline South African politics and as an international diplomat, spent about six weeks this year immersed in what he said was the frontline of the often "hairy" GNU negotiations with the African National Congress (ANC), and he found it very interesting.



Some think, some do, some both, too few.

"It was difficult because you've got two opposing forces from across 30 years of division, strong dislike in some cases, and they're having to come together not because they wanted to, but because the country's election results demanded it, and particularly because the alternative just outside the door – and still there incidentally – was the mass populist, divisive EFF [Economic Freedom Fighters] and MK [uMkhonto we Sizwe]."

His GNU negotiating work aside, Leon says he has also made a unique impact on South Africa by helping to negotiate the South African Constitution, serving as the South African ambassador to Argentina from 2009 to 2012, and founding the DA. He has since started a specialist public relations and public affairs agency, Resolve Communications, that has successfully tackled a range of challenging assignments for global firms, Johannesburg Stock Exchange-listed and private companies, and various industry associations.

A member of Parliament for nearly 20 years, Leon remains the longest serving leader of the opposition in Parliament since the advent of democracy in 1994.

Lauded by Nelson Mandela for his "enormous contribution to democracy", Leon says he has inspired others in the past few years through his passion for community, writing of five books on contemporary issues, and offering via lectures and articles a principled and pragmatic approach to national and international issues.

His greatest achievements, he says, were forming a strong liberal opposition party in South Africa, establishing a market for South African ports in South America, and offering principled thought leadership unencumbered by political fashion.

His father was a lawyer and judge, and his mother was active in politics through civil society movements. Growing up, Leon's interests included politics and debating. "I didn't just want to be a politician, I wanted to be in politics to bring about certain results," says this Kearsney College alumnus. "I had a clear value system which came from a combination of circumstances – my background, my parents, my community, but also my beliefs."

Leon, a trained lawyer, faced his biggest challenge in overcoming hostility to minority racial and religious membership in a quest to build a non-racial and inclusive country.

If he had to do one thing again, "It would be to speak and stand fast for opinions and values despite pressure to conform or keep silent. Taking up unpopular causes as well."

Leon, who has spoken at institutions such as the European Parliament in Brussels, says he has helped contribute to job creation, skills development, and education by authoring policies and practices advancing economic opportunism and job creation. "I have done significant pro bono work to promote a culture of reading and appreciation of literature. I have mentored countless young professionals in a host of careers and with opportunities for self-improvement. I have also guided companions in navigating complex terrains."

Leon's advice to a young person would be, "Read, read, read on a host of topics and not just in a narrow professional niche. Be open to outside counsel, and never be afraid to both ask questions and listen with your ears, not your mouth."

Leon had a life-changing moment when President Mandela offered him a seat in his Cabinet in January 1997. "Mandela invited me to an early morning breakfast at his home, very early, six o'clock. He liked to get up early," Leon reminisces. "He offered me a seat in his Cabinet". Leon considered it a generous and tempting offer, "but I realised it would prevent the establishment of a viable opposition, so I declined it" with thanks and appreciation.

The DA was a seven-seat party at the time. "I realised that if I had gone to the government in 1997 rather than long after I retired from the DA, there wouldn't have been the possibility of building a democratic opposition in this country."

Nevertheless, Leon believes that it's important for non-ANC faces to represent the country and the world. "I was the most identifiable non-ANC face in the country at that time outside of politics, and the government offered me an ambassadorship. I chose to go to three countries in South America because I thought I could do interesting things there, important to trade. I was centred as ambassador to Argentina and surrounding countries. It was very absorbing."

The past few years have had an impact on this dog-lover's thinking. "I think more carefully about decisions now and less impetuously than before.

I resist the temptation to accept offers simply for the sake of prestige."

Leon, a proud grandfather and golf fan, believes in standing by his convictions. "There are two types of politicians, a weather-based one who turns around and fluctuates with every gust" or "the signpost that knows where it's going, and sticks to that direction".



# Dion Friedland

## “Do it now; do it the best” – the man who built Dion

**B**usiness stalwart and award-winning bodybuilder, Dion Friedland, 81, best known for starting the iconic and successful retailer Dion Stores, credits his parents for giving him the drive to succeed. “They were great parents, but they didn’t spoil me. I had to fight to get what I wanted. I think those are the kind of kids who succeed,” he says.

From the age of 10, Friedland had an entrepreneurial spirit, digging up charms and selling them to a friend, and later sewing ties and selling them to his classmates. On his 15th birthday, he started a job at OK Bazaars, the biggest retailer in South Africa at the time, and his retail journey began.

Matriculating at 16 because he’d been rapidly promoted at school, Friedland studied at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and worked at a discount clothing store owned by his friend’s father. He later asked his boss for an extra discount on shirts, began selling them to his Wits classmates, and soon recruited multiple fellow students to sell for him too. “A guy who lived in my building worked for an electrical wholesaler and told the owner about me. He asked to meet me, and gave me a job as a rep for the company,” Friedland says.

He managed to save R1 000, and used it to rent half the premises of a bicycle store in Braamfontein run by one of his customers. He called his half of the store Factory Price Distributors. With a partner, he subsequently opened a second store, and named it Rave Discount Stores, a name he soon gave to his initial shop as well. As Rave Stores grew, prominent businessman Natie Kirsh, Friedland’s cousin, bought a share in the business.

“Six years later, I told him that we needed to get a big shop downtown,” Friedland says. He identified Ansteys, a department store in financial trouble as a potential opportunity. Friedland and Kirsh ultimately negotiated an amazing merger deal, putting Rave Stores into Ansteys and taking 80.5% of the shares of the public company. After making significant changes to Ansteys, Friedland sold it to Greatermans, then the second largest retail chain in South Africa, for a significant sum. “Effectively, I was retired at about 26 years old,” he says.

Friedland was hounded by people seeking to do deals with him, but ultimately decided to buy a small building on Louis Botha Avenue. He concluded an R80 000 purchase deal over the phone, and called the shop Dion Stores.

Here, he ruthlessly cut prices and sales soared. The industry-mandated retail price maintenance, which meant they had to sell goods at the same price, Friedland says. “I said, ‘The hell with that, I’m going to cut prices.’” His electrical wholesale background meant he could buy goods on wholesale and at a discount, making this possible. He also made cash deals to maintain his low-cost offering.

“We became a sensation. People would drive a hundred miles to buy a washing machine or a refrigerator from us,” he says. “Whatever prices Rave Stores – which now belonged to Greatermans – came out with, we undercut.” Greatermans therefore started a price war, which was publicised in the *Sunday Times* newspaper, providing great publicity for Dion Stores.

Under Greatermans, Rave Stores ultimately suffered a R7 million tax loss and eventually, Friedland was asked to buy the stores back. He did so for almost nothing, wrote off the tax loss within a year, and landed up with 12 big Dion Stores. “Those 12 stores did about 20% of all large appliance and television business in the whole country,” Friedland says. “We dominated the industry, and I became a huge advertiser across different media. I was the first to use coloured advertising supplements in the *Sunday Times*.” He also pioneered longer shopping hours, inspired by trends he had witnessed in the United States (US) and simply paid the fines that came with being open after industry-mandated hours.

“I expect perfection, which I think is another thing that made me successful,” he says. “We just had a higher standard than other people.” Friedland is also particularly proud that a number of his employees went on to become entrepreneurs

Photo: Kestias Piktinas



themselves. “We trained people very well so they could go and start their own businesses,” he says.

Yet, when the rand collapsed in 1985, Friedland sold his entire company to Kirsh, who sold to Rusfurn. Makro ultimately took over, and converted the remaining Dion Stores into Game. Friedland went on to invest his money in hedge funds. He started Magnum Funds and formed the Hedge Fund Association that today spans many countries.



If you want to do something, do it now, do it to be the best, and put your heart into it.

Friedland also has various business interests around the world. He heads up a green technology company in South Africa called Radical Waters, and has achieved success in the hotel business. A highlight in that industry was developing and selling Cap Juluca, which attracted celebrity visitors and became the top-rated hotel in the Caribbean.

Also highly driven in areas beyond business, Friedland was an avid tennis player for many years. Yet after a hip

replacement, he focused on bodybuilding. “It’s kept me healthy,” he says. From Mr Europe to Mr Universe, he holds more than 50 international titles in his age group. “At the end of September this year, I won two more world bodybuilding titles,” he says. Together with bodybuilding and stock market investing, travelling around the world occupies much of Friedland’s time. He and his wife divide each year between the US, South Africa, and Italy.

You’ve got to be prepared to work hard, he says, when asked for advice for aspiring business owners. “Up to the age of 60, I averaged about four hours sleep during the week. If you want to succeed in business, you need to be relentless, determined, and work to overcome adversity because not everything goes right. You’ve got to be a fighter.

“You’ve got to mix with people you can learn from, keep reading, and just keep growing your knowledge. You also need to teach, because if you’re going to succeed, you’ve got to teach your people how to do well. That’s one of my strengths, I can teach and motivate people to become successful.”

In training his Dion Stores management team, Friedland put plastic plaques on their desks with the words: “Do it now.”

“That’s my philosophy,” he says. “If you want to do something, do it now, do it to be the best, and put your heart into it.”

- Dion Friedland is also nominated in the Absa Business Leadership and Eric Ellerine Entrepreneur categories



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**Susan Abro**

"Growing up as a farmer's daughter, I was taught to respect my elders," says Susan Abro, a prominent Durban-based attorney specialising in family law. "My parents treated all staff equally, which instilled the values early on which still govern my life." Though she had an interest in pursuing multiple careers after school, none were as appropriate for women at the time as law. After qualifying, Abro was a partner in a large legal firm for the first five years of her career. "I soon realised that in order to follow my passion for advocating for gender equality, children's rights, and legal structures, I would need to go on my own." Having played a pivotal role in advancing family law in South Africa, Abro today has more than 34 years of legal expertise and is a leading authority in the field. She served as co-chairperson of the Law Society of South Africa (LSSA) in 2003 and 2004, and as chairperson of the LSSA Family Law Committee for 20 years. Further afield, she has been recognised for her expertise in international family law, including handling cases across various worldwide jurisdictions under The Hague Convention on the Abduction of Children. A no-nonsense person with a heart of gold, Abro has, through her practice, long been involved with the greater community in advocating for gender equality, children's rights, and an end to

domestic violence. She has also mentored women within and without her profession. "I have a comprehensive and holistic view of the legal landscape for family law, and have been involved in humanitarian work," she says. "It's through this lens that I have helped countless families and communities to live with dignity and justice. In my later years, I have managed to use my network and skills to influence others to do good." Now 60, Abro still runs her own practice and serves as president of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies KwaZulu-Natal Council. "I enjoy serving in the greater

community in this regard, so I wouldn't change a thing," she says. For Abro, a standout career moment was acting as judge at the Durban High Court in December 2005. Though she regrets not applying to become a judge, she says she's proud of the successful practice she's built. Abro's biggest challenge was being diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa in 2009, a group of genetic disorders that cause a slow loss of vision. "My brother, who resides in the United Kingdom, is totally blind and unemployable," she says. "This condition is progressive, and there's no available treatment. I'm grateful to have my own business and amazing employees and a strong tribe to assist me." Managing a small team, Abro says she and her three staff members are more like family. "I face many challenges losing my vision, but I have wonderful individuals who support me as well as amazing technology." She'd like to be remembered for making an impact as a gender activist, role model, and loyal friend.



**Viv Anstey**

As director of the Eliot Osrin Leadership Institute (EOLI) and the Midrasha Adult Education Institute, Viv Anstey has played a significant role in building the Jewish community. "I believe leadership is a practice rather than a position," she says. "Everyone leads in some way, and my role is to develop and empower people so that they become active citizens who step up." Having long been a community consultant, Anstey has worked in various leadership positions and established many organisations and teams to sustain them. "Eliot Osrin was a doyen and well-loved leader of Cape Town Jewry, a visionary and mentor to many, including myself," she says. "When he passed away, the family approached me to set up EOLI in his memory. His legacy has given me the platform to honour his leadership and express my own, thereby securing a strong, vibrant, and thriving Jewish community." EOLI aims to create a pipeline for leadership succession by upskilling, developing, and empowering current and emerging professional and lay (volunteer) leadership, she says. "The institute designs fully customised biannual, year-long leadership development programmes, workshops, and short courses for the Jewish community, incorporating local and global best practice and a world-class faculty." Long before establishing EOLI, Anstey started the Midrasha Adult Education Institute as an umbrella organisation in 2005. Midrasha incorporates the Florence Melton School of Adult Jewish Learning, a project of the Hebrew University, the first inclusive and comprehensive text-

based adult Jewish learning programme in South Africa. Throughout her professional career, Anstey has focused on developing and elevating others in the community as professionals and as volunteers. "I have supported people to show up as their best selves, mentored and coached them, and opened doors, carved career paths, and offered skills development," she says. Taking her skills outside of the Jewish community, Anstey has mentored many entrepreneurs in their fields. Reflecting on her achievements, Anstey considers herself to be blessed to celebrate many milestones in her professional and voluntary careers. "I'm grateful and proud of the organisations I've initiated and the rewards I reap in knowing I have had a hand in their birth. Being a mother to my two children has also been a huge blessing," she says. Like many in leadership roles, she continually seeks to create a better work-life balance. "My professional passion and purpose has provided immense satisfaction and meaning, but at the same time, has placed many demands on me," Anstey says. She's inspired by her late father, who was also a communal leader. "From him, I learnt that community is a commitment that enriches your life. He and I served on the South African Jewish Board of Deputies at the same time. He taught me to stand up for what's right, and champion moral and ethical voices. Ahead of his time, he used his professional skills for the benefit of the community. He welcomed the stranger, and hosted many international Jewish leaders." Anstey is proud to have emulated all of these qualities.



**Romy Becker**

Photographer Romy Becker believes that love of her work shines through in her imagery. She specialises in capturing the most personal moments of motherhood, family, and newborn documentary photography. "I'm invited into people's homes at a very intimate time of bonding with their families," she says, "private moments that clients trust me to capture in the most beautiful way. My work is unique as I get to expose rawness and empowerment in motherhood, which allows me to showcase what I do best." While she's now based in the United Kingdom (UK), Becker always books shoots when she visits South Africa. "I grew up in Johannesburg, where I loved going to the bush and taking photos with the camera my dad got me," she says, discussing her path to photography. "I always loved photography, and studied it in high school and after school through the Market Photo Workshop in Newtown." Yet it was only after having her daughter, Isabella, that Becker knew she wanted to pick up a camera again. "I now knew the direction in which I wanted to go – motherhood, family, and newborn photography was my passion. I started by reaching out to my antenatal groups, friends who had kids, and anyone really who wanted a family or newborn shoot." From starting out offering shoots for free to photographing celebrities including Carrie Johnson, the wife of former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Becker is proof of the power of self-belief. Off the back of the Johnson shoot, she has had her photographs published in the *Daily Mail* and has been interviewed by the *UK Jewish News*. "The motivation to succeed, the drive to get my passion off the ground from scratch and to find the

niche of my look and feel, could make me a leader in my field," she says. While Becker captures the essence of motherhood through her photos, she says the biggest challenge she faces is creating a balance between her work and being a mother herself. Having given birth in September, she now has three children under five who need her. "We live in the UK where help isn't always available and we have to manage as a family of five on our own, especially with my family being based in South Africa. I spend a lot of time with my clients on shoots, being away from my kids and husband for potentially four shoots a weekend." Yet, she is grateful to have her husband as a strong support system. Becker hopes to create a lasting legacy through her photos. "I'd like my work to be hung in galleries and people's homes and be seen as a wonderful reminder of a special time when their babies were young and things were different. This time doesn't last forever. I want my work to be seen and people to think, 'Ah, that's Romy Becker Photography.' I would like to be remembered as someone who you enjoyed having in your home to capture these memories, and who made you feel relaxed and at ease during these vulnerable moments." • Romy Becker is also nominated in the Eric Ellerine Entrepreneur category



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# EUROPCAR WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP AWARD NOMINEES



## Nicki Brivik

**A** former attorney, Nicki Brivik left her practice after more than 20 years to follow her passion and become a sex coach. Today, she's a qualified integral practitioner coach, and applies these life principles to sexual health through her brand, Ask Nicki.

Brivik empowers people to embrace their sexuality, communicate openly, and cultivate fulfilling relationships. "I'm shining a light on the often-ignored topic of sex, liberating the conversation around it, and debunking the myths that hinder our understanding of such an important aspect of our lives," she says.

Brivik takes a positive approach to sex by not focusing on problems, rather how to amplify pleasure and supercharge one's sex life. "Sex is one of the most positive and life affirming things we can do for ourselves and can enrich our lives enormously," she says. "It can add excitement, pleasure, adventure, and confidence into our lives and infuse these characteristics into everything we do. Yet there's a secrecy and dishonesty that shrouds sex, resulting in a lack of honest and open conversations and a perpetuation of false facts and ignorance."

The shame and inhibitions that are often associated with sex are learned behaviours that we pass on to our children, perpetuating a taboo on something beautiful and natural, Brivik says. "I realised the need for sex-positive environments where it's safe to have conversations and the sexual part of a person can speak freely. This knowledge coupled with my desire to help people made me become a sex coach."

Through her work, Brivik helps her clients overcome erotic barriers usually rooted in upbringing, providing insights into how to improve their sex lives and discover their sexual voice. She also provides tips to optimise sexual experience. "Pleasure is our birthright and what



makes us human, and I want to empower people to claim this right," she says.

Brivik believes her greatest achievement is to build a brand and a business from a topic that's widely misunderstood and rarely talked about or focused on. "I truly believe that sexual healing is a thing, and that if you can upgrade your sex life, you can upgrade your whole life," she says. "My energy and passion along with my distinctive style has helped to bring this topic to the forefront." Although she has no problem discussing sex, Brivik has had to hone her public speaking skills to spread this message.

"While I'm an extrovert, I've never been able to do public speaking as I always become overcome with emotion, no matter the topic," she says. "Accordingly, when I was first approached to give a talk, my first instinct was to decline. However, I knew that if I wanted to get my message out, I needed to embrace the fear. I still feel myself well up as I start a talk, but I manage to overcome it through sheer determination and passion for my topic. I also ensure that I'm extremely well prepared, even overprepared, so that I can impart my knowledge in an easily digestible way."

## Tracey Catania

**T**racey Catania, the project manager at ORT Jet, co-ordinates the key projects that drive the organisation's mission of supporting small and medium-sized enterprises. "Whether it's identifying the training needs of our members, sourcing knowledge, or co-ordinating impactful events, my work is driven by a deep belief in each individual's potential and the power of community," she says.

Catania's commitment to promoting growth and development on a professional, personal, and emotional level informs the way she manages ORT Jet's mentorship programme. "I create opportunities for meaningful connections that go beyond business, nurturing relationships that inspire, empower, and uplift," she says.

Her journey to ORT Jet began with her work as customer relations manager at Nando's between 1993 and 2014. "My passion for working with people fuelled my efforts to enhance customer engagement and satisfaction, designing mechanisms for feedback, and working closely with various departments," she says. "This experience of building relationships and ensuring high standards of service led me to ORT Jet, where I could continue to make a meaningful impact by supporting entrepreneurs and fostering business growth."

Catania empowers others through empathy, collaboration, and continuous growth. "I believe leadership isn't just about directing, but about inspiring and enabling individuals to reach their full

potential," she says. "By leading with empathy and understanding, I create a culture of trust and respect, which drives innovation and commitment."

She prioritises lifelong learning and development both for herself and team members, which helps them stay ahead of trends and respond to new opportunities. "Ultimately, my goal as a leader is to cultivate a positive, inclusive environment where everyone is motivated to contribute their best, and where collective success is celebrated," she says.

Catania is proud of her successful transformation and growth of ORT Jet's training and mentorship programmes, which support hundreds of businesses and entrepreneurs on their journey to success. "Seeing the tangible difference our efforts have made in the lives of entrepreneurs and knowing our work has contributed to the growth and resilience of small businesses is, undoubtedly, my greatest accomplishment," she says.

Catania says ORT South Africa Chief Executive Ariellah Rosenberg and ORT Jet Johannesburg Manager Helene Itzkin are two particularly important women in her life in terms of mentorship. "From Ariellah, I've learned the profound value of education and its impact on personal and professional development. Her



emphasis on continuous learning has reinforced my commitment to education as a cornerstone of growth," she says.

"From Helene, I've gained insights into being a strong and resilient woman, understanding the importance of perseverance and inner strength in overcoming challenges. Both of their influences have shaped my approach to leadership and personal growth, guiding me in fostering education and

resilience in my own life and work."

Catania says she would like to be remembered for her professionalism, kindness, and the meaningful impact she has made on the lives of her family, friends, and colleagues. "My aim is for others to see me as someone who navigated difficulties with grace and perseverance, turning obstacles into opportunities for growth, and inspiring those around me to do the same."

## Tanya Cohen

**A** qualified attorney, business leader Tanya Cohen addresses complex issues facing the country, from youth employment to sector masterplans to crisis management. "I work at the intersection between business and government, building trust through action," she says.

"I'm a trusted intermediary, bridging the divide between business leadership and government for developmental impact. During hard times, it's about coalescing around a common higher purpose and keeping people engaged in finding solutions rather than complaining."

Throughout her career, Cohen has filled key leadership roles including that of managing director of the Retail Association, and more recently chief executive of Business Unity South Africa (BUSA). At BUSA, Cohen was integral to forming social compacts including the national minimum wage and the Presidential Jobs Summit Framework Agreement. Along with leading BUSA, she counts these compacts among her greatest business achievements.

"Leaving BUSA in 2019 and not knowing what I was going to do next was a significant career challenge," she admits. "It was a process of self-discovery to find out what I wanted to do and how." Yet she found her purpose in her work as a public-private impact advisor and as an astute business leader. These are roles she now fills as director and founder of Cogent Advisory, and as senior advisor to the Public Private Growth Initiative (PPGI).

The PPGI is an initiative spearheaded by Roelf Meyer and the late Dr Johan van Zyl. "It aims to promote sector-based growth strategies and projects by unlocking constraints and opportunities for economic growth and investment together with government," Cohen says.

"I enable future-fit outcomes that stimulate economic growth, transformation, and employment," she says. "I work with multiple stakeholders across a variety of sectors to unblock complex national and international developmental challenges such as regulatory and administrative inhibitors for sectors to



grow." She also co-creates and delivers innovative and workable policy solutions.

One of her many projects at the PPGI has been to lead a steering committee to identify the training gap for nurses in South Africa. Though she's disappointed that she hasn't cracked this challenge yet, the journey is continuing.

Cohen remains driven by her commitment to the country's development, and is actively working with others to attain this goal. "Engaging with others at a human level, seeking to understand where they are coming from, and what our common interests are, is something I would do over and over again," she says.

In empowering future leaders, Cohen is on the board of Khula Education Trust, which provides quality education to underserved communities, and NextUp, which bridges the gap between high school, training, and employment. "I have a strong values orientation in relation to dignity, equality, and development, and a commitment to making a positive social impact on South Africa," she says.

In her downtime, Cohen enjoys long-distance running. Inspired by her late father, who completed 22 Comrades Marathons, she says she's most proud of completing the marathon herself. Cohen clearly has the resilience needed to navigate the most challenging of journeys in every aspect of her life.

• Tanya Cohen is also nominated in the Absa Business Leadership category





## Lesley Cowan

Lesley Cowan, a passionate squash player and coach, became involved in squash outreach programme Egoli Squash in 2011 when it expanded its offerings to train coaches. "Squash is more a way of life than just a sport," she says. As she found her niche in "coaching the coaches", Cowan saw that young females weren't getting the attention they deserved, and so became the girls' coach.

Cowan found herself sometimes training more than

management, I'm at grassroots level all the time. I'm a 'bottom up' not 'top down' kind of person. I elevate my young players from their everyday world into a sense of confidence, passion, and purpose. I'm able to channel my teenage self to be able to become 'one of the players'."

EYE evaluates its success by the number of players who get employment and bursaries through the programme. "Several of our graduates are now full-time squash coaches in different provinces," says Cowan. "Due to their squash skills, a number of our players have been awarded bursaries at universities and schools."

Cowan, who has also run a successful accounting practice for the past 30 years, is particularly proud of an Egoli player whom she brought into the business. "I took a chance on one of my players who did an accounting course after school," she says. "Khanyi is now my top employee, rising above and beyond every occasion, including beating me at squash. I'm training her to take over my business within five years, at which point I will have more time to dedicate to EYE."

Cowan has always been solutions-oriented, managing to find a way out of any challenge.

"I have been a stutterer since childhood, and have used this to my advantage," she says. "I have been fortunate to come from parents who gave me the confidence to challenge anything. People create problems and not solutions. I once said to one of my child's teachers, 'Everyone has problems; that's not the problem, it's how we manage the problem.' We became the best of friends."

Cowan believes commitment and consistency are vital to true leadership. "I'm not scared of hard work," she says. "In addition to being part of the whole organisation at every level, I enjoy relating to everyone, no matter who they are. I treat everyone the same, from the minister of sport to my players."



20 girls on one court, and so helped identify the need for a more holistic approach to uplifting youth. And so, in 2021, she helped launch a non-profit company called Egoli Youth Empowerment (EYE).

"EYE is a holistic development programme that focuses on empowering and enabling young people to contribute positively to the upliftment of their communities and society at large," Cowan says. Today, she serves as one of its two actively working directors, where she consistently fulfils her passion for empowering young South Africans.

"What you see is what you get," she says, reflecting on what makes her unique. "Even though I'm in

## Mandy Edison

Mandy Edison brings passion to her role as executive director of Astra Centre, a sheltered employment non-profit organisation in Gardens, Cape Town. Providing employment opportunities for Jewish adult men and women with intellectual and/or mental illness, Astra also has three group homes, a kosher coffee shop, and a gift shop. "By helping adults with disabilities to work, we give them a purpose to get up in the morning as well as social interaction and job satisfaction," she says.

Having started her career at Astra Centre in 2011 as a personal assistant and office manager, Edison was promoted to her current role in 2021 in recognition of her dedication to the organisation. Her non-judgemental nature and desire to treat everyone she meets in the same light regardless of their circumstances make her a natural fit for the position. She prioritises collaborating and connecting with those who surround her. "I have deep empathy for others, and will go to the end of the earth to support family, friends, and strangers with whom I cross paths," she says.

As a younger leader, Edison has initiated new ideas and is particularly proud of her perseverance in securing media coverage for Astra, which led to memorable career moments. "Being given the opportunity to be interviewed on three radio stations was a first for me, and I was thrilled and proud to speak about Astra Centre," she says.

"I have proven to the committee and staff that I'm

confident, driven, and determined to increase awareness of the centre. I have shown initiative in this cause, recognising that Astra is a sheltered employment centre with different entities, and understanding the importance of showcasing all the aspects to the Jewish and broader community."

Edison has an open-door policy for staff and beneficiaries, and believes in empowering her people to uplift themselves and succeed. "I have gradually introduced changes to the way things are done to allow staff to adapt to change as not everybody likes or accepts change," she says, discussing her leadership style.

"I do things in my own way. I strive to ensure that I devote time to everybody, listen, and don't react in a negative light during a conversation. I come up with new ideas and innovations, and focus hard to get them implemented for the benefit of all."

Continuous improvement is a priority for Edison, and she's proud to have received a certificate in the Eliot Osrin Leadership Institute 2021/2022 leadership programme. She's also recently started working with a coach. "She has supported me and shown me that I have the strength to go even further in my aspirations for Astra," she says.

Maintaining a work-life balance comes with challenges, Edison admits. Yet, over time she's developed strategies to manage it. "I don't have access to work emails on my personal phone. In the evenings, if I'm not attending after-work events, I devote time to my husband and children, switching the 'work off' button. Work will be there in the morning."



## Bendeta Gordon

A pioneer in franchise development, Bendeta Gordon believes that if you're a leader, you should empower people and serve others, while learning and growing as a person. "I aim to empower wherever I can - from the unregistered Zimbabwean builder without a mother or father, to the proven businessman who establishes an organisation to raise \$100 million [R1.77 billion] for philanthropic purposes."

It's this philosophy that has informed Gordon's multifaceted career and businesses, most notably Franchise Directions. The company is regarded as the leading franchise service provider in South Africa, and has dramatically aided job creation in South Africa. "Franchise Directions and the team helped grow the franchise sector, which comprises an estimated 700 franchised systems and 69 000 franchised business units," says Gordon. "These offer direct employment for more than 500 000 people and indirect employment for 1.5 million people."

Gordon says she works only on projects or businesses she believes in. "I take risks as an entrepreneur only when I'm passionate about the project or business. I'm not scared to try new ventures after doing the necessary research and analysis. Developing people to be the best they can be is my ultimate reward in any business or project I am involved in."

Gordon isn't just known for her contribution to franchising but is also actively involved in the property sector. She manages Bendet Shapiro Holdings, property investment partnership that she inherited from her family, runs a homeowner's association, and is a successful property developer.

Having recently sold a property she owned and developed into student accommodation in Mowbray, Cape Town, Gordon now plans to develop her next property in Israel. "I'm an ardent Zionist and believe that as Jews in the diaspora, we have a responsibility to help Israel," she says.

A qualified chartered accountant, Gordon says she has straddled multiple fields during her decades-long career, leveraging her specialisation to develop new skills. "My specialisation is that of a distribution development strategist, which has translated into me developing as a strategist, a management consultant, a researcher, a trainer, and an expert witness," she says.

Her path has also led her to the exciting world of developing the products and services the franchise sector needs. "The proof is the sustainable businesses I have helped develop with my clients," she says. "The core of my skill is the financial feasibility and management of every project I'm involved in."

Gordon has established herself as a formidable entrepreneur, while also being a wife, the mother of three sons, and an active member of the community. "I have a passion for giving back, and I teach at HA Jack with The Link," she says. "I also periodically do small projects to help a school for adult students in Sharpeville. It's a tough world and a scary place post 7 October. In my own small way, I do what I can to make the world a better place."



## Reeva Forman

Reeva Forman has an "overriding passion for helping people - especially the marginalised - realise the potential they have to overcome adversity, repair broken lives, relationships, and achieve their dreams," she says.

Forman has long made her mark on Jewish communal and religious organisations as well as on the wider South African population. Her multiple positions include honorary life fellow of the World Zionist Organisation; chairperson of Temple Israel; national executive committee member of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies; and much more.

Yet, it's in the story of establishing, losing, and reviving her business, REEVA Beauty & Health, that she feels she can best inspire others never to lose hope. In 1991, when Forman was "up there with the multi-millionaires", she took out a bond to build her Parktown offices and decided not to fix bond interest rates as financial gurus predicted a booming economy with rates decreasing to 8% or less. When rates, in fact, skyrocketed, the REEVA business was cash strapped.

"By 2004, the Reeva Forman Building was sold on auction," she says. "Our 3 000-strong salesforce had dwindled to less than 100. Turnover plunged. With the help of the Almighty, REEVA is still here. My story hopefully can be an example to the many that have lost loved ones or felt the pain of failure in their personal life or business not to give up. To retain faith and hope - *hatikvah* - in a better tomorrow."

Forman believes hope is essential to leadership. "Only this mindset or emotion determines the outcome," she says. "There's no great achievement without major setbacks. Hope and faith give one the

ability to face adversity and overcome obstacles." It's hope, she says, that enabled the Jewish nation to survive great tragedies and earn the title of "the eternal people".

REEVA Beauty & Health has evolved over the years. "We are, with partners, developing an online job creation and training portal for young, unemployed, digitally savvy people to start their own REEVA business," Forman says. "There are also exciting prospects ahead due to our being a direct marketing company with strong brand awareness. We're in an excellent position to take advantage of this 'new' digital 4IR [fourth industrial revolution] era, brought centre stage by the restrictive demands of a COVID-19 pandemic."

Despite the challenges South Africa has faced through government corruption and greed, Forman believes that the spirit of *ubuntu*, the concept of expressing collective responsibility for the other, is alive and well. To improve conditions locally and internationally, Forman says we must create awareness of what's positive in a situation rather than only reinforcing the bad.

"While still recognising the evil that exists, we must promote a glass half full as opposed to half-empty ethos. We must rethink government and big business economic policy to focus on expenditure, creating employment by fixing infrastructure, roads, and so on. We must stimulate job creation by supporting the small entrepreneur, be they local or immigrant."



# EUROPCAR WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP AWARD NOMINEES



## Hayley Gillman

After working in the corporate world for just more than five years, Hayley Gillman went on maternity leave and never returned. While raising the first two of her three sons, Gillman sought new challenges and began freelancing as a trainer/facilitator for an international company as well as for a local skills development provider. "It was then that I realised that I had the capacity, skills, and financial backing to start my own company doing skills development," she says.

Today, her company, the Business Optimization Training Institute (BOTI), has been around for more than 10 years and is an established skills development provider with a national footprint.

"My focus is on people – they are the engine of any company," says Gillman. "I ensure that the human aspect of managing a company isn't lost, and try to inspire and motivate staff with incentives, encouragement, and an open-door policy."

In the past year alone, BOTI has offered more than 400 soft-skills short courses; skills programmes; and 13 learnerships. "Our programmes have empowered local businesses to optimise their processes, reduce costs, and improve overall performance, contributing to the economic development and resilience of the South African business landscape," Gillman says.

Rather than offer once-off training, BOTI partners with clients to create mutually beneficial long-term relationships, she says. "We offer bespoke training courses that are customised to the client's focus areas and include client-specific examples and case studies." In most cases, delegates also have access to subject-related material for six months at no additional cost

as a value-added service.

Gillman is particularly proud of having sustained and grown her business for more than a decade. "We've weathered many storms, especially the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, and are now emerging from its financial impact," she says.

"My greatest disappointment was having to retrench staff during the pandemic – to have to let go of staff that showed loyalty and commitment. There was just no income at all for about four months. Yet, ultimately witnessing BOTI grow from just two staff members, including myself, to a team of nine, six of whom come from previously disadvantaged backgrounds, has been incredibly rewarding."

In future, Gillman would like to do less operational work and more peripheral management. "I hope that one day, we will have empowered the staff enough to run it by themselves with just a little guidance from us," she says. "That's when you know you have made a difference. This will leave me free to use BOTI profits for more philanthropic work."

If there was one thing she could do all over again, Gillman says it would be to allow her husband to be a part of the BOTI journey as a silent partner. "When launching the business, it wasn't uncommon for us to have long business conversations at night and on weekends, establishing all the various facets of a small business. Between us, we would address all areas that required attention. He has immense business experience and technical ability, and has been instrumental in my growth and that of the business."



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**Chantal Kur**

Chantal Kur found her calling as a mediator after witnessing the strenuous and litigious process of divorces while working in a law firm early in her career. "The costs, time periods involved, and emotional trauma to all parties, including the children, can really take its toll on all those involved," she says. "This compelled me to study advanced alternative dispute resolution, and to start The Mediation Clinic & Divorce Mediations in 2009."

Today, Kur provides a rare A to Z cost-effective service, which includes divorce mediation sessions; the drafting of settlement agreements; parenting plans; and post-divorce mediation. She takes a holistic approach to mediation, ensuring that if a couple isn't ready to proceed with a divorce, she offers them marital mediation or referrals to couples therapists.

"My commitment is to the well-being of the individuals and families involved rather than simply completing the process," she says. "This holistic, trauma-informed approach sets me apart and



ensures that my clients receive the support they need. My work isn't just about resolving disputes, it's about helping people find peace and healing, and this assists them to co-parent in the best interests of their children."

Kur's devotion to her work is clear in her path to establishing her business. "I'm self-made, having held various positions within a law firm for three decades while simultaneously studying, working, and building my practice," she says. "I funded both my studies and practice entirely on my own, without any external help. The growth of my practice is the result of immense time, effort, and sacrifice."

A particularly tumultuous period came when Kur lost her mother when the practice was just a year old. "Navigating the demands of running my practice while she was ill and after her passing was a significant challenge. Dealing with accomplishments and not being able to share them with her created a paradox of emotions - feeling elated at achievements, but also deeply saddened by her absence when she was the person I dialled first. She taught me the importance of having a strong value system, a solid work ethic, and an appreciation for hard work."

While it was challenging building her business from the ground up, Kur would do it all over again if given the chance. "If there's one correct decision I have made in this life, it was becoming a mediator," she says. "I have made a difference in numerous people's lives, and healing others happens to be balm for my own soul. Nothing is more satisfying than knowing that what I do matters and has long-term benefits."

Kur has chosen to be a sole proprietor so that she can provide personalised service to each couple that walks through her doors. "As a sole proprietor, there isn't much scope for me to build job creation in a larger context, but I believe I contribute by inspiring others to pursue similar paths," she says. "Many people have told me that watching me has inspired them to open their own practices."

**Yakima Dengler-Waner**

"I cannot tolerate or accept how as a universal society, we have come to normalise the concept that one life is more important than another," says Yakima Dengler-Waner. "Every single life matters as every single living being or creature was made by G-d." Armed with this belief, Dengler-Waner founded The Harvest Project in 2019, which she now chairs and serves as chief executive.

The Harvest Project is a non-profit organisation which enters risky environments where children face issues of racism, xenophobia, inequality, poverty, and negligence of health and education. Together with organisations and institutions in the area in which it operates, it aims to find solutions to the challenges the children face.

The organisation runs an early childhood development centre and primary school at its main base, The Harvest Centre. Situated on the grounds of the Brakpan Synagogue, The Harvest Centre also protects the synagogue as a museum, and maintains the Brakpan Jewish Cemetery.

"One of The Harvest Project's main objectives is to teach children how to harvest their own food and learn sustainable life skills so they can survive off the land in harmony and benefit from its therapeutic qualities," Dengler-Waner says. "This philosophy was adopted by the secret ghetto food gardens during the Holocaust, and survivors believed it helped the children see hope in darkness."

Dengler-Waner says what makes her unique is that she sees

endless potential and beauty in places where many only see the bad. "I've realised as a documentarian, activist, and a human being that the only way we can make a difference for nature, animals, and one another is by not looking the other way. Rather, we need to deal with the issues at hand and find ways to change them through the eyes of our children."

As such, she believes leaders are revealed as children. "Children have the potential to teach adults to be better leaders and better human beings," she says. "There are a few children in our centre who have changed me as a person and made me more understanding and accepting of others."



"For example, a young girl named Vimbai has been with us for many years." She singlehandedly gets her siblings to school each day, and helps her parents fill out documents that can benefit them as they can't read or write in English. "For me, this young lady is a true leader."

Dengler-Waner is involved in many different fields, and says she wouldn't have it any other way. "I come from a family that is dedicated to humanitarian efforts but is also business orientated and always a part of the community," she says. In emulating this example, in the coming years, she hopes to continue all her work but on a larger scale so that she can continue to help the team and children who rely on her. "If you make a difference in one life, there is a ripple effect which will change the lives of many," she says.

**Stephanie Weil**

"Miss South Africa has been an incredible passion and empowerment platform not only for me, but many young women in this country," says Stephanie Weil, the chief executive of the Miss South Africa organisation. "It inspires me daily to empower those around me, and that includes fighting for my beliefs and community."

Not only does Weil manage the Miss South Africa pageant, she has worked to make the pageantry space more relevant by creating a reality show called Crown Chasers. The show takes place in the lead-up to the final pageant, and aims to showcase the growth and development of the young women on the platform.

"In our second season on SABC 3 we had record numbers of viewers, making us the leading competition reality show on the channel," she says.

"We've also been nominated for a SAFTA [South Africa Film and Television Award] for work done in 2023."

A proud member of the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning) community, Weil is particularly proud of the show's impact in showcasing the diversity



of women in the country. "This year, we had mothers, divorcees, married women, and a woman with a cochlear implant on our finale stage and in the Crown Chasers programme."

"With Mia le Roux, our first deaf Miss South Africa, winning, we have seen the meaning of inclusion truly come to life. I hope to continue to ensure that young women across the country feel inspired, empowered, and that a platform like ours exists to ensure young women's voices can be heard."

Weil is the daughter of late renowned public relations guru Suzanne Weil. "She started working on the Miss South Africa pageant in 2013, and was instrumental in giving it a new look for the new millennium," she says. "Realising what an incredible platform this could be for the women of South

Africa, I made the decision to take over the pageant in 2019 at the age of 29 through my company, Weil Entertainment."

Weil has always had a clear vision of what pageantry needs to be, and aims to redefine the concept locally and internationally. "I managed to be at the helm and reshape the narrative of a beauty

platform into that of an empowerment platform, with the ideal of creating an army of strong female leaders," she says.

Employing eight people, Weil runs her business like a family. "The only way to succeed is to trust the people around me enough to let them do what they do best," she says, speaking of her leadership philosophy. "I take care of my employees from a holistic perspective, personally and professionally."

Ultimately, Weil aims to be a beacon of positive change for women. "I always dream too big and allow my courage of conviction to carry me through. I would love to be remembered as someone who changed the landscape for women in the beauty industry. More so, I'd like to be remembered as someone who lived for every moment, and succeeded in her constant drive for other young women."



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**Europcar**

# Glynnis Breytenbach

## A fearless fighter for justice

**F**ew are immune to Glynnis Breytenbach's piercing stare and undeniable tenacity. This year's Europcar Women in Leadership Award winner, Breytenbach was born and raised in Kimberley, and is today an advocate of the South Gauteng High Court. Armed with an unflinching belief in the rule of law, she has accomplished an enormous amount during her decades' long legal, and, more recently, political career. "I was a specialist commercial prosecutor for 26 years, with a reputation for being tough, stubborn, and scrupulously fair," she says.

Breytenbach is probably best known for taking on the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) after she was suspended from her position as a regional head of its Specialised Commercial Crime Unit. "When the NPA began to be hollowed out by the Zuma administration, I opposed the politically motivated withdrawal of the prosecution against Richard Mdluli, the former Head of South African Police Service Crime Intelligence," she says. "For my trouble, I was subjected to a disciplinary hearing and later prosecuted."

The incident and the upheaval that followed was the biggest challenge she has faced, she says. "When the then national director of public prosecutions instructed me to withdraw the prosecution against Mdluli, I had to make a choice," she says. "I had to choose between my own ethics, integrity, and the rule of law, and hanging on to my job, which I loved. I chose to take them on, lived through the life-changing consequences, and was vindicated. I won both cases, making the fight for the rule of law and the Constitution worth it. It demonstrated that it's always best to follow your own ethics and integrity regardless of the perceived costs."

After being cleared of any wrongdoing, Breytenbach resigned from the NPA and joined the Democratic Alliance (DA) as a member of Parliament in 2014. She has also been a member of the Judicial Service Commission since 2019, with her term recently extended for another five years under the new Government of National Unity.

In the past year, Breytenbach played an integral role in the DA's campaign to bring the African National Congress's support below 50% in the general election. "We succeeded spectacularly, with it achieving only 40%," she says. "This has changed, dramatically, the trajectory of South Africa for the better, and we're already seeing the benefits of a more ethically run coalition government."

She was also recently elected co-chairperson of Parliament's Constitutional Review Committee, which many believe is a step forward in ensuring fair, principled leadership on constitutional matters.

Breytenbach counts her work in both the legal and political arenas among her greatest achievements. In the domain of criminal law, she was a successful prosecutor who enjoyed the respect of her peers, both in the NPA and in private practice.

"As a politician, I have gained a reputation for being fearless, fighting for the rights of ordinary people and holding, particularly politicians, to account loudly and publicly," she says. "The removal of the previous public protector, Busisiwe Mkhwebane, was particularly satisfying, seeing as we alone had opposed her appointment from day one."

Breytenbach has also had much success in holding ministers and previous national directors of the NPA to account, eventually getting them removed from office. Both Nomgcobo Jiba and Shaun Abrahams were forced to vacate their NPA positions due to her efforts.

"After the Thabo Bester debacle [when Bester, a convicted rapist and murderer, escaped from prison after faking his death] none of the ministers involved were returned to their same portfolios," she says. "I played some part in Bheki Cele not returning to Parliament as police minister after his dismal performance in the Bester escape hearing. Then Justice Minister Ronald Lamola fared no better, and was forced to make a public apology for his abysmal performance."

In her role as a member of Parliament, Breytenbach works tirelessly to ensure the best interests of South Africa and South Africans. This includes taking all measures possible



to ensure economic stimulation of the economy to reduce unemployment, improve education, and access to skills development.

"My principal area of focus is to improve the justice system and crack down on corruption. To do this, I have drafted a Private

She herself has been deeply impacted by meeting billionaire businessman and philanthropist Natie Kirsh. "His approach to life is fantastic, generous, and essentially optimistic," she says. "I learned from him and his wife the joy of helping others, however modest the help is. I also learned to not fear making mistakes, but to recognise and correct them, and trust your instincts, but to carefully weigh risk and reward and never bet the farm. It changed my life exponentially."

Breytenbach says that over the past few years, although she hasn't changed the way she does things, "I've learned to do much, much more in less time, and to think strategically and with a long-term perspective." Yet she admits that finding a work-life balance is a challenge she's yet to overcome. She does, however, try to make time for golf, gym, and swimming.

If she had the chance to do one thing over again, Breytenbach says she'd do everything the same way. "I like to think that I've been part of the solution and not the problem," she says.

She advises someone entering her profession to "always work hard, always do the right thing, always listen to your conscience, and only do sunshine deals. Never do anything that you could be ashamed of." Breytenbach's career is a testament to the value of this philosophy.

• Glynnis Breytenbach is also nominated in the Absa Professional Excellence category

As a politician, I have gained a reputation for being fearless, fighting for the rights of ordinary people and holding, particularly politicians, to account loudly and publicly.

Members Bill to set up a Chapter 9 institution styled as the Anti-Corruption Commission. This is a truly independent, well-resourced anti-corruption body that will go a long way to getting a handle on the rampant corruption in this country." The Bill will be introduced in Parliament shortly.

Throughout her noteworthy career, Breytenbach says she would like to think that she's served as a strong role model for her peers. "I hope that I've inspired people to be tough and often abrasive, to work hard but always to be honest and fair," she says. "Never do anything that cannot stand up to scrutiny."

**25 YEARS**



## Clyde Ackerman and Rael Lasarow

Clyde Ackerman and Rael Lasarow are behind Thirst, a specialised, full-service bar company with several complementary divisions that enhance its core offerings.

Their expertise extends beyond just mobile bar services for small private gatherings or large-scale corporate events. They also provide mobile coffee bars, operate a renowned bartender training academy, and manage brand activations for leading liquor companies.

Thirst has branched out internationally, and co-founders and directors Ackerman and Lasarow say that among their most remarkable recent achievements was their involvement in this year's Ambani pre-wedding and wedding events in India.

"We were entrusted with managing bar services for 56 bartenders in March and July 2024. This prestigious opportunity highlighted our ability to operate on an international scale, delivering excellence at one of the world's most high-profile events."

Closer to home, the company is deeply invested in the future of South Africa. "With the rapid growth in the number of hotels, restaurants, and bars, there's an enormous demand for skilled service staff in the hospitality industry," say the business partners. "Recognising this need, we have partnered with the accredited culture, arts, tourism, hospitality, and sport sector education and training authority (CATHSSETA) programmes and leading alcohol brand sponsors to offer comprehensive training and upskilling opportunities for unemployed youth.

"Upon successful completion of the training, we assist graduates to find employment, either within our company, or with key industry stakeholders with whom we have established strong relationships. Through our efforts, we are contributing to the growth of the hospitality sector while making a positive impact on the lives of the youth in our community."

Ackerman and Lasarow say they've learned to focus their

offerings over the past decade. "When we first started, we tried to be everything to everyone, providing a wide range of services that didn't really complement our core offering, namely bar services. In 2015, we held a strategy session with a professional who guided us to cut out the extras and focus on the low-hanging fruit, all centred on the liquor space. By concentrating on what we do best, we've experienced exponential business growth and new service offerings and divisions have emerged."

They have benefitted from exposure to fellow entrepreneurs, particularly Anthony Stein, whose business mentorship, they say, has been the cornerstone of their success. Lasarow is also part of a business network called Civitas, which gives daily support, while Ackerman is grounded through his Entrepreneurs' Organisation (EO) membership. "EO has given me access to some of the brightest minds in South Africa," he says, "offering invaluable perspectives



and experience sharing."

Thirst's founders themselves offer a fair dose of inspiration to aspiring entrepreneurs who may face hurdles. While Lasarow has a reading disability, and listens to audiobooks to learn and grow, Ackerman suffers from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. "People always doubted me, and I have proved all my doubters wrong," he says.

While attending to key clients and larger events personally in order to ensure

consistency and maintain strong relationships, "I also carve out some time for myself each day, doing things such as going to the gym to stay balanced and energised," says Ackerman.

He's still learning what true balance means, he says, but uses breathwork to help centre himself each day. "I don't have an off button," he admits. "I'm deeply committed to my work, but I also make time for exercise and other hobbies that keep me grounded, and I prioritise weekends as a time to unwind with my wife." Having a strong team of department heads who manage most of Thirst's operations also allows him to focus on making strategic decisions.

## Ryan Chaitowitz

A born entrepreneur, Ryan Chaitowitz, the chief executive and founder of eyewear wholesale distribution business Eye-In Eyewear, grabbed the opportunity to establish his own business in 2022. It followed a successful career in real estate, during which he received the prestigious South African Property Professional of the Year Award.

"My greatest challenge was making a career change after 21 consecutive years into an entirely different industry," he said. "I used the skills set I had developed over the years. My resilience and never-give-up attitude is what got me through the tough real estate markets, and the change to the eyewear industry."

Eye-In Eyewear began with the successful acquisition of the exclusive distribution rights for Carolina Lemke, a proudly Israeli and Jewish brand. "Up until two years ago, Carolina Lemke was purely a stand-alone mono-brand retail concept in Israel," says Chaitowitz. "We pioneered its wholesale distribution channel, and were the first territory to do so in the world."

The brand is now being distributed through wholesale channels in more than 20 countries. This includes multiple African countries and more recently Australia and New Zealand, where Eye-In Eyewear has recently started an international division.

The company has also secured exclusive distribution rights to some of the world's biggest brand names against tough competition from established distributors. Brands distributed include Roberto Cavalli, Lamborghini, Yohji Yamamoto, and many more. Closer to home, Eye-In Eyewear has collaborated on an eyewear range with well-known South African fashion designer, Gert-Johan Coetzee, and is poised to introduce its own original

brand to the market.

"We have also formed business relationships with local black South African eyewear designers to help them with brand design, strategy, and distribution," Chaitowitz said. "We're passionate about our country, and we believe in its potential."

For Chaitowitz, giving back to the Jewish and broader South African community is a priority, something he plans to do through one of his proudest endeavours – The Chesed Project. "We're partnering with optometrists to provide glasses to those who aren't able to afford prescription spectacles," he said. "This initiative will be conducted with Jewish charity organisations and certain charities that assist underprivileged South Africans."

Chaitowitz believes overcoming challenges and change is about creating the right company culture that consistently defines the business. "We also ensure that our service and the customer experience exceeds expectations. We have different areas of revenue generation. We keep our overheads as low as possible, and most importantly, we have the ability to adapt quickly to change where necessary."

Chaitowitz works consistently to become the best version of himself. "My humble background and upbringing have shaped me into the highly motivated, and driven individual that I am today, and have instilled in me an attitude of gratitude as well as a growth mindset."



## Charles Freedman

Charles Freedman has carved an unusual path to business success in South Africa. Leaving a good corporate job in 2009 with Barclays in London where he was born and grew up, he moved to Malawi and later to South Africa.

"My aim was to accelerate my learning, make an impact, and build a life," he says. "I arrived with no permit, no job, and no network. Since then, I've worked across the rest of Africa, including a year in Nigeria, across management consulting, financial services, and venture capital. I thrive on doing hard things in hard places through people."

After many years in Africa sharing his management consulting expertise, empowering start-ups in a sustainable way, and doing pioneering work for financial institutions, Freedman joined ServCraft in 2021 as its chief executive. For the first time in his career, he was running a business. Upon identifying ServCraft's challenges, he worked to overcome them and stimulate growth. "I led an intervention from shareholders as part of an effort to right-size the business and redeploy capital in pursuit of our shared objectives to grow it," he says.

Today ServCraft offers South Africa's leading job-management software, supporting trade business owners including those in the installation, repair, and maintenance fields, through the power of technology. "Through our web and mobile app, we digitise their operations from the moment their customers reach out to the moment they pay," says Freedman. "By putting them in control and powering productivity, we help small and medium enterprise business owners to win more work, get paid faster, and have happier customers."

"I've got the most joy from seeing how ServCraft doesn't just transform businesses, it transforms lives and livelihoods," he says. Freedman's proudest accomplishment in this role is to build the business from 100 to 600 customers over the past three years. These customers power 4 000

teams across multiple industries. "I'm excited about redefining and uplifting the industries we serve," he says.

The business is expanding its offering through its recently launched, industry-first ServCraft Mastery. This educational platform allows trade business owners to engage with content, curriculum, and coaching to grow their businesses. "Our vision is to extend the value ServCraft creates by expanding our offerings across software as a service, e-commerce, and



financial service in South Africa and beyond," says Freedman.

Among the many elements that define his business philosophy, Freedman says he's dedicated to maximising his team's potential. "Stretch – don't snap," he says. "People can do more than they think they can with the right support, tools, and environment. Unlocking that can be transformative for them and your business."

On a lighter note, Freedman admits that Captain Jean-Luc Picard from *Star Trek* was one of the biggest influences in his life because of his strong values and principles. As a result, he even secured a scholarship to become an officer in the British Army. "I ultimately chose not to join the army, but never stopped wanting to be like Picard," he says.



## Nicholas Ingel

Nicholas Ingel hasn't had it easy, having been a child-abuse survivor and alcoholic. Now sober for 15 years, he's dedicated to maximising the good in everything he does.

"In recovery, I've chosen to build my life on service and share the hard lessons I've learned in working to build a life of value," he says.

In building his company, Emet Gyms, and its multiple subsidiaries, Ingel has taken a holistic approach to wellness and creating social impact. "Our greatest business achievement is our ongoing evolution from a single gym to a comprehensive wellness and media enterprise that continues to create meaningful change," he says. "We measure our success not just by financial returns, but by the number of lives we affect positively."

Emet Gyms has a mission to transform lives by fostering physical and mental well-being. "We believe mental health is the cornerstone of overall well-being, and we use physical training as a powerful tool to enhance self-belief, mental resilience, and quality of life for our clients," Ingel says.

This work is aligned to the Emet Academy, which furthers the business's aim of maximising the good in everything it does. "The Academy focuses on empowering individuals from challenging backgrounds, offering them the opportunity to grow and succeed as trainers, coaches, and media professionals," Ingel says.

Also operating under the Emet umbrella is Emet Media, which

leverages the business's expertise and extensive network within the wellness community. Offerings include podcasts and live streaming of national and international powerlifting events. This allows the business to showcase emerging talent, including young athletes and coaches, as well as international champions.

Finally, in-house record label, Emet Beats, produces the music used in its livestreams and competitions, and is also available for public use without any copyright concerns. "Our music comes from a blend of international producers and local artists, particularly youth from challenging backgrounds in South Africa," says Ingel, "giving them with a platform to showcase



their talent on an international stage."

Ingel's approach to building a strong management team, something he prioritises, is rooted in open and honest communication. "I believe transparency is key to developing a management team that's not only effective in its role, but also deeply invested in the success of the business," he says. "By sharing everything the business is going through, I ensure that each member of the team has a full understanding of where we're headed and the challenges we may face."

Ingel's professional and personal worlds constantly intersect. "Maintaining balance in my life has always been an ongoing journey, particularly because, as an alcoholic, I find that unoccupied time can be quite uncomfortable for me," he says. "What's become clear to me over the past year is the deep connection between my work and my personal life. I'm incredibly blessed to love what I do, and there's no distinct separation between work, family, and community. In many ways, working is spending time with family."

## David Jacobson

SYNAQ, established in 2004, is a leading cloud-based email security provider serving more than 5 000 businesses in South Africa including some of the country's leading brands. After the company was acquired by Dimension Data and NTT in 2011, its co-founder and chief executive, David Jacobson, repurchased it in 2023 at a sixth of the price he sold it for. He considers this to be his greatest business achievement.

"Our company culture is dynamic and innovative, with a strong focus on email security in a niche market," Jacobson says. "As an entrepreneur-owned corporation, we adhere to global standards while maintaining local flair. We've developed cutting-edge security technology, featuring agile, customisable solutions and a world-class development team."

Jacobson says his perspective on business has evolved over the past 20 years.

"In the early days, I viewed business primarily as a means of generating profit. However, as the years have passed, I've come to see my business as much more than that. It has become a spiritual entity, a living organism that not only supports my personal growth but also nurtures the growth of everyone connected to it - employees, clients, shareholders, and the community at large. I now approach business decisions with a more holistic mindset, considering the impact it will have on the broader ecosystem in which we operate."

Jacobson says though many may see his lack of direct involvement in his business as crazy, it not

only gives his team freedom to grow as individuals, it allows him to maximise his time. "I seldom tell my team what to do or how to solve problems," he

says, explaining his philosophy. "I ask them a lot of questions, which empowers them to own the solution and run with it themselves. This has served me time and time again."

That's why, for Jacobson, when it comes to fool-proofing his business, hiring the right people is crucial. "We have implemented a thorough and meticulous interview process to ensure that we bring on board the best talent," he says.

"This makes the world of difference. I look good despite my shortcomings because of my exceptional team."

He's most inspired by Linux Torvalds, the creator of the Linux Operating System.

"Linux is an open-source operating system built by thousands of developers worldwide, many of whom volunteer their time and skills for free," he says. "What makes Linux so impressive is how it brings together people from all walks of life, across different cultures, to create something that has become the backbone of modern technology, from servers to smartphones. It's all about collaboration, passion, and the belief in creating a free, accessible, and powerful tool that anyone can use and improve."

Jacobson has long been technology-obsessed. Speaking of what he thinks people would be surprised to know about him, he admits that he hacked into the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the Pentagon when he was just 15. Clearly, he's in the right profession, with few better placed to ensure online security than those who know how to get around it.



## Justin Kramer

Justin Kramer is a passionate entrepreneur, being chief executive and owner of a Popular Bunch and managing director of TendersHQ.

A Popular Bunch is an experiential agency offering immersive and bespoke marketing experiences, which offers a comprehensive through-the-line brand activation and special-event solutions across multiple categories and clients.

"Key to our success is our keen eye for custom solutions, combined with a constant drive for innovation and forward-thinking designs tailored to our clients' specific requirements," Kramer says.

TendersHQ simplifies the tender process, offering entrepreneurs the opportunity to receive relevant tenders in real time for a monthly subscription. Providing a comprehensive offering in South Africa, the company has begun crossing borders to provide its services to entrepreneurs across Africa.

Kramer is inspired by his father - his mentor and role model - in running his businesses. "He started as a chartered accountant, but transitioned into entrepreneurship, where he opened, rescued, and sold multiple businesses," he says.

"What makes him unique is his ability to navigate the technical and strategic sides of business with remarkable wisdom. His integrity, combined with his entrepreneurial experience, has taught me valuable lessons about leadership, adaptability, and long-term vision. He hasn't just been successful, he has done so while maintaining his values and supporting those around him."

Through the highs and lows of entrepreneurship, Kramer has learned the power of resilience. "Losing my former business partner as he resigned and moved overseas on short notice was my biggest business challenge," he says. "I landed up flipping this around and turning it into a

positive. It forced me to create more structure in order to survive and in turn, take on more work." In the process, he grew each division and business, almost doubling revenue and his client base in a year.

Kramer believes in the power of education to create a better future for South Africa. "Although I'm the sole owner of the business, we have successfully achieved a black economic empowerment level 1 status due to our strong commitment to education," he says. "We have established a trust dedicated to supporting black female education in South Africa, and we consistently have at least two staff members pursuing courses relevant to their roles at any given time. Additionally, we provide ongoing financial support for the education of the children of our long-standing staff."

Strengthening the management structure and providing growth opportunities for everyone at a Popular Bunch is a priority, Kramer says. "Initially, I brought in a seasoned general manager to guide the process, but

I quickly realised that building our management team from within

would lay a much stronger foundation for the

future." The company

has therefore

taken significant

steps to invest

in its people

through

initiatives

including

training

courses and

an overall focus

on growth.

"By nurturing

the talent we

already have, we're

not just building

individual careers but



creating a more cohesive and

resilient company," says Kramer. "As we

continue to grow, I'm confident that this strategy will help us achieve even greater things."



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## Josh Lasker

**A**t about the age of 16, Josh Lasker, now a successful entrepreneur, left high school for a short period. "I really didn't like school – the class and schedule aspects of it," he says. "I left with the intention of dropping out and starting a business. I imported leather bracelets from China, and sold them at markets and to friends and family. I was, however, nudged by family and friends to go back to school after a few months and I'm thankful I did."

Now 31 and armed with a Bachelor of Commerce degree in strategic management, Lasker is a "healthtech" innovator and a co-founder of Abby Health. Transforming health monitoring and leading the way to universally accessible healthcare, Abby Health provides self-service health stations designed to increase employee engagement in wellness programmes.

"These health stations perform quick, comprehensive health checks, offering personalised health data and insights to users and organisations," Lasker says. "We've made health screenings free, fast, accessible,

and engaging to hundreds of thousands of people where they would usually need to pay more than R600 for a similar health screening elsewhere."

Having co-founded Abby Health with his father and mentor, Dave, Lasker says the company leverages their complementary strengths. Drawing on his father's medical equipment expertise, Lasker's technology and marketing know-how propels the company's innovation.

"My earliest mentor was my dad, who had his own entrepreneurial journey long before we started working together on Abby Health," says Lasker. "I learned many core business lessons throughout my childhood and teenage years, and I'm still learning from him now." Today, Lasker's extended network of mentors includes authors and successful figures in the business world as well as business leaders in the local Jewish community.

Lasker has a long-term view of having a work-life balance. "I look at balance over a period of months or years rather than a short-term day-to-day period. It's impossible to build

something great if you try and optimise your day-to-day life for balance. There are periods where I'm working on something non-stop, day and night, with little time for anything else. Then there are periods where I spend a lot of time with a focus on family, friends, events, when there are less intense work demands."

There has been a key shift in Lasker's view of business over the years. "My idea about business, particularly entrepreneurship, used to be a 'build it and they'll come' approach. As long as the idea was great, I thought that's all that was needed. Now, I see execution as 99% of the work, and the new ideas as 1%."

Abby Health contributes to national development by creating jobs, upskilling workers in technology and healthcare, and improving health literacy through educational partnerships.

"By providing accessible health screenings, it enhances public health and eases the burden on the national healthcare system," says Lasker. "Abby Health's commitment to innovation and ethical growth supports a more prosperous and resilient society."

## Shevi Lurie

**S**hevi Lurie began introducing her second child to solids in 2018, and found the process overwhelming. In the absence of kosher, freshly made, preservative free, healthy baby foods on the market, she began to make her own, a time-consuming and expensive process.

Realising that many kosher mothers felt the same way, she identified a gap in the market and began to do research into starting children on solids. As a result, she developed a "six-week starting solids programme", and began producing her own kosher, healthy, fresh baby food which became known as Little Pudding. From humble beginnings in Lurie's own kitchen with pots, pans, and a blender, Little Pudding products are today made in a factory-style kitchen with industrial blenders, catering to thousands of customers.

Lurie derives great satisfaction in knowing that she's helping parents to guide their children on their journey to eating solids. "Being a mother myself, I've gained a deep passion for helping little ones have a positive experience with their introduction to food, which will hopefully carry them through to adulthood," she says.



"Little Pudding provides developing digestive systems with the highest quality baby food," she says. "Our offerings cover most different food groups and allergens to ensure a wide range of exposure in an exciting and colourful way." The fresh ingredients they use incorporate multiple textures and flavours that would otherwise not be introduced, lowering the risk of babies growing up to become fussy eaters.

The fact that Little Pudding offers more than just baby food sets it apart. "We have created a space where we have a great professional yet personal relationship with each of our parents as we help them navigate the daunting milestone of introducing solids," says Lurie.

Having managed her company alone since its inception, Lurie is seeking resources to

accommodate a growth spurt and hire a management team. Through this future growth, she plans to empower women. "We aim to continue to hire women and mothers and give them the opportunity and safe space to support themselves and their families. Upon hiring our employees, we would like to educate them on raising healthy families through nutritious food."

While Lurie considers herself fortunate to have a few mentors, her primary role model is her husband, Doron Lurie. Though he grew up feeling that he wouldn't amount to anything due to his learning difficulties, he never accepted defeat, she says. "He took matters in his own hands, and has since created a strong personal and professional name for himself. His determination and grit have led him to become one of the most esteemed tailors in Johannesburg. He inspires me every day, and has taught me all I know so far."

Always learning, Lurie believes in continuous growth and in staying humble. "I don't believe there are any guarantees to fool-proof a company against changes or challenges as there's always room for improvement," she says. "Challenges are healthy for any growing company or person as they strengthen character and enable success."

## Racheli Marks

**R**acheli Marks, 23, is doing her bit to make people feel beautiful from the inside out with her hair salon, Tangled The Hair Salon, and her mental health activism podcast, Together We Connect, which she co-hosts with Tova Tocker.

Marks believes women's hair can make them feel beautiful. "I used to watch Disney movies, and was fascinated with the elegant hairstyles all the princesses had," she said. "I started recreating them with my friends."

Marks works predominantly with sheitels, making each client's vision come alive in less than 24 hours.

She said she will never forget selling her first wig, giving her the confidence that she could make women feel more beautiful.

She created an online hairstyling course which she hopes will enable people to learn the basics of hairstyling. She hopes those who complete the course will be able to start their own hair styling businesses to improve their life and that of their potential clients.

Alongside working to make people feel better about themselves on the outside, Marks advocates for mental health as she believes looking good on the outside isn't enough. Her belief in the need to end the stigma around mental health led her to launch the podcast Together We Connect with her co-host in July 2023.

Marks's advocacy comes from her personal struggle with clinical depression. "Living with mental illness has made me increasingly aware of how big this struggle is worldwide," she said. "Although we're on our paths and journeys, talking and learning can be liberating and helpful for those feeling alone."

She recognises that this is only one step to acknowledging this massive problem, but she wants to be a part of helping young people connect to improve their lives.

"Bringing awareness and joy to others is no small feat, and it can create a new generation of well-thinking minds, and strong, independent leaders that can change the world together. That's the essence of Together We Connect," she said.

In each podcast, Marks and her co-host look for individuals who will share their stories about how they overcame difficulties in their lives. The podcast covers topics like sheer will, body image, loss, resilience, marriage, surrogacy, being diagnosed with an illness, and everything in between.

Marks is also involved in helping others through involvement in the ZAKA Fire Containment Unit, ZAKA Logistics, and CSO (Community Security Organisation) Johannesburg.

- Racheli Marks is also nominated in the Europcar Women in Leadership and Ichikowitz Family Foundation Rising Star categories





## Terri Maselle

**T**erri Maselle says she empowers individuals to become the best versions of themselves through her executive search and consulting company, The Good Human. She guides people to “dream wide awake” and embrace their true potential.

“We’re forging meaningful connections and redefining the future of recruitment in the digital, hospitality, property management and development, gaming, and fast moving consumer goods sector, one partnership at a time,” Maselle says.

Maselle, a seasoned talent acquisition specialist and sourcer with an established database of contacts, delivers strategic and innovative projects across the human capital-solutions spectrum. She believes she’s found her true purpose in The Good Human and in realising her vision to help others to achieve by helping them to “get unstuck”.

Yet, she has faced challenges to getting where she is today. “Losing my first business in 2009 was the hardest thing I have ever experienced as I had 10 members of staff and had to find a way to pay them before I closed down,” she says. “I picked myself up and started over, redefining my brand. Keeping calm and never giving up nor losing sight of my childhood vision, which I believe is a Hashem-given gift, got me through.”

Maselle fool-proofs her business by being a “good human”.

“Put money away, work towards building annuity revenue, be responsible, give much more than you get, and never lose sight of the vision,” she says.

Through The Good Human, Maselle is actively working to empower those working in hospitality and to elevate the industry as a whole through developing The Good Human Onboarding Program. “We’re in the research and development phase, and our initial research indicates a widespread need for service improvement across South Africa,” she says. “We believe that addressing this gap is crucial for the industry’s success.”

Maselle is developing this groundbreaking citizenship initiative through collaboration with key brands to create impactful solutions. It’s aimed at South African youth who have completed their secondary education in hospitality and are ready to enter the workforce. Accredited by the Tourism, Hospitality, and Sport Education and Training Authority, the programme offers more than just an entryway into the hospitality industry, it’s a journey of self-discovery, empowerment, and transformation.

It equips participants to excel in their professional roles and make meaningful contributions to society, Maselle says.

“Graduates aren’t just better hospitality professionals, but also compassionate, aware, and engaged citizens of the world, ready to make a lasting impact.”

Revealing how she’s evolved on her business journey, Maselle says she worked on herself during the COVID-19 pandemic. “I did seven different 12-step programmes on my addiction to approval, changed my thinking, and started loving and trusting what Hashem



has given me since childhood,” she says.

“I learned to trust the process to always work out in my favour in Hashem’s time. My hashtag, which I learned during the pandemic, is #faithistheneweconomy. I started becoming my authentic self, and stopped caring about anything other than the childhood vision I had and reimagining what I call ‘humagination’.”

## Dr Jedd Myers

**J**edd Myers is a qualified medical doctor, entrepreneur, executive, investor, and advisor.

After graduating from medical school at the University of the Witwatersrand, Myers made the move into the commercial world of healthcare and subsequently attained a Master of Business Administration degree. Over the years, he’s been involved in multiple businesses rooted in his passion to build and deliver large-scale healthcare initiatives that have an impact on hundreds of thousands of lives.

“My initial vision was to have a positive impact on thousands to millions of lives simultaneously by owning and influencing a larger part of the healthcare value chain,” he says. “This as opposed to treating patients one on one, although there’s nothing at all wrong with that. Having followed this calling, I remain true to it today.”

“Each of my business interests has the intention of activating commercially a health service at scale that has a positive impact on the health and lives of everyone who experiences it,” says Myers. HealthImpact creates integrated and holistic health

and wellness solutions for corporate clients, recognising the interconnectedness of physical and mental health for the full spectrum of employee well-being.

Through its caring team of carers, nurses, and doctors, Care@Home provides world-class clinical and supportive care at home for individuals who require medical support. HealthMatrix Natural Supplementation and goBu – the world’s first wearable humidifier – are both product-based business offerings. Outside the medical realm, Myers is also a partner in Platinum Services, a family-run corporate travel agency servicing the travel needs of companies and their executives.

“Having started out driving nurses in my car from client to client, and then leveraging this grit and passion to build these businesses, gives me a unique perspective and a certain credibility when motivating



and inspiring teams,” says Myers.

Ultimately, however, the impact he makes through his businesses comes down to ensuring the health of the people he serves. “True validation lies in the lives that we have an impact on, the lives of the executives that we have saved and affected,” says Myers.

“There are more than 10 children in this world today who are HIV negative because of how effectively we managed their mothers’ HIV status before, during, and post pregnancy. I’m proud of all these stories.”

Over the years, Myers says he’s matured as a leader and business owner. “Becoming a husband and father has also changed my perspective on many things,” he says. “This self-awareness has been key to my management and leadership style. I have always been a people-centric and results orientated leader and the more I understand this, the greater respect I have for the people that work with me. Being empathetic is an extremely valuable character trait as a leader.”

Myers is dedicated to uplifting South Africans through his businesses. “Having worked internationally in multiple jurisdictions, I remain bullish on the South African story and its future,” he says. “I believe that if we’re true to our vision as a business and work back from having a positive impact on the lives of the employees we treat, we’ll continue to grow and have a positive impact on our society and country.”

• Dr Jedd Myers is also nominated in the Absa Business Leadership category

## Trent Saldsman

“I’ve learned that if one wants true success, true achievement, and the ability to better others’ lives, one must be an entrepreneur and make one’s own stamp on this world,” says founder and managing director of The Gold Avenue, Trent Saldsman. “Instead of contributing to other people’s dreams, chase your own.”

Offering a premier service for the exchange of luxury goods, The Gold Avenue buys and sells luxury watches, Krugerrands, gold coins, and gold and diamond jewellery.

“Offering a contemporary, upmarket, and secure environment distinct from traditional pawn shops, where individuals are safe to sell their hard-earned items for fair and honest pricing, makes us unique,” Saldsman says. “We educate our clientele rather than manipulating them to sell. Long-term relationships, referrals, and peace of mind is key to our success, rather than a quick once-off payout.”

In continuing to chart his entrepreneurial path, Saldsman is motivated by his future and his past. “My father abandoned my family, leaving us without any money or assets when I was 16

years old,” he recalls. “I’m therefore driven by relentless ambition to achieve, succeed and ensure that my future children don’t ever have to face the financial challenges I did.”

Over the years, Saldsman’s perceptions of success have changed dramatically. “I was the first one in my family to



graduate from university. I always believed that getting a degree and doing so in a stand-out manner through graduating cum laude would essentially guarantee a high-paying job with career succession.” Yet he soon realised that entrepreneurship offered even greater potential than climbing the corporate ladder in an established company.

However, branching out on one’s own inevitably comes with risks. One of Saldsman’s stand-out business achievements was elevating himself from working as an industrial building caretaker in the Johannesburg CBD to becoming a director and shareholder of a large and successful property company. Yet, deciding to leave said company to start his own business in a completely different sector and making it profitable within 18 months is something he’s equally proud of.

Speaking of what inspires him, Saldsman recalls something his mother once told him. “After my

father left us, my mother shared a quote that has inspired me throughout: ‘Don’t ever become your circumstances’ victim, but rather a victor. Don’t give anyone that power.’ I decided then and there to never follow my father’s path or use this as an excuse not to succeed because that would be the easy way out.”

Aside from living by that philosophy, Saldsman also gained important life lessons from enlisting in the Community Security Organisation (CSO) at the age of 18. “I was troubled and hanging out with the wrong crowd,” he says. “Joining the CSO was a life-changing event. I was interacting with older men, selfless leaders, and contributors to the community. I became relentless in my passion to lead and inspire others in that organisation and in life in general. This not only helped me to remain on the right path, it helped me create my own trail.”

Absa Jewish Achiever Awards





## Ross Silbert

Ross Silbert, 23, has created a games company focused on building educational simulations, empowering users to learn by doing. The simulations enhance the users' understanding and retention of key concepts and skills.

"Our simulations aren't about spoon-feeding information to students, but designed to immerse them in real-world scenarios from the beginning," says Silbert, chief executive of Literally3D.

Growing up, Silbert realised that he wasn't retaining the work he studied regardless of whether he used mind maps, flash cards, or other methods. "It wasn't until many years later that I discovered the real method to learning: by doing," he says. So he applied this realisation to his business.

"At Literally3D, we create interactive experiences where students actively participate and make decisions. What sets our offering apart is that when you put the simulation down, you'll have acquired the skills to perform them in real life."

For the young entrepreneur, the desire to go it alone was fuelled by some hard lessons. "Since I was a kid, I've wanted to be a game developer," he says. Yet Silbert was influenced by his friends, rarely trusting his gut, therefore giving up on several early projects and living with a sense of being incompetent.

That was until he immersed himself in studying games, series,

movies, and more and got a job. He says his Absa Jewish Achiever Award nomination is an acknowledgement of the power of developing self-confidence. "I now know that after spending much of my life failing because I've taken the orders of others, my success is because of the belief and trust I've had in myself.

"In the company I previously worked for, I was hired as a developer but ended up developing, designing, and conceiving everything myself, which took a heavy mental and physical toll on me," he says. "The week I started, my mother took me to a general practitioner who told me, 'If you keep up with this, you're going to die.'"

Yet he didn't take the doctor's advice, and his health deteriorated rapidly, with bouts of insomnia and a diagnosis of clinical



depression. "I felt like a spider trapped in a glass, unable to escape," Silbert says. "The moment I hit my lowest point, I decided that I needed to move out and start over. So, after six months, I eventually decided to quit."

"Using the knowledge and experience that I had acquired, both good and bad, I decided to develop my own company, believing with every fibre that I could do it and that mediocrity wasn't an option. I know my worth, and I refuse to be exploited again."

Running a one-man show, Silbert has an interesting approach to fool-proofing his business. "In Judaism, there's a concept of a 'shmita year', where you work for six, do nothing on the seventh, and profit on the eighth," he says. "I believe in this and I've taken an all-or-nothing approach, using the capital I've acquired to build a strong foundational structure that allows my business to flourish in the next year."

## Ilan Wiesenbacher

Born in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, Ilan Wiesenbacher has built a dynamic career that reflects his entrepreneurial spirit, love of his birthplace, and passion for the hospitality and retail industries. From managing nightclubs in Cape Town to becoming a prominent entrepreneur in Zimbabwe's food and beverage industry, Wiesenbacher has overseen multiple business interests throughout his career. His portfolio today includes distinctive food brands, liquor retail stores and distribution centres, as well as a theatre production company. He employs more than 600 dedicated employees across his Zimbabwe-based businesses.

Ultimately, what sets all his business interests apart, he says, is a focus on customer satisfaction. "Whether it's through our large portions or comfortable chairs – a non-negotiable in all the sit-down restaurants – it's always about customer first. I always say that I run my businesses from front to back. I can sleep at night if the customer is happy, but the administration is in a mess. Not the other way round."

Wiesenbacher says working in Zimbabwe has taught him and his team to be resilient in the face of challenges. "It's all about learning from experiences. I honestly don't get disappointed. I just see it as a lesson learnt. Even money that people owe me, if you hold on to it, it just wears you down. I see it as a donation. That person needed the money for their family. Our lack of law and order in Zimbabwe has also forced us to think that way."

Building a strong management team has been pivotal to Wiesenbacher's business success. "It's about identifying the diamonds, looking after them, and not letting them out of your sight," he says. "They are out there, and when you find them, you do everything it takes to look after them. If management is strong, business is strong."

To create jobs and develop skills, Wiesenbacher and his team are working on creating a restaurant school in Victoria Falls.

"This will help our business in the long term, but of course – and more importantly – be a big benefit to the community," he says.

Wiesenbacher splits his time between Johannesburg and multiple locations in Zimbabwe. "Although I'm away from my family a lot due to frequent travel, when I'm home, I try to give them as much of my time as possible. Family comes first. I always aim to be home on the weekends, which is family time. I have had to sacrifice a lot of my passions, mainly fishing, for time with family, but it's certainly no hardship."



Among his many successful brands are The Three Monkeys Restaurant in Victoria Falls and Harare, The Smokehouse in Bulawayo, Star Liquors, and the Victoria Falls Theatre Company. The Three Monkeys restaurant in Victoria Falls, established in 2016, changed the way others in the industry operated, says Wiesenbacher.

"Before we started, the restaurants in Victoria Falls were tourist traps. We came in and changed the landscape and culture. It's all about giving value. We also turned a dilapidated train carriage on a deserted piece of land into something truly unique."

## Yanky Woolf

Those who frequent hospitality guru Yanky Woolf's restaurants know him best for his unique personality. "There are so many successful restaurants in Joburg, but they lack the personal touch that ours are known for," he says. "I know most of my customers by name. I'm active and involved. My staff are brilliant people who can think for themselves and who are constantly learning the psychology of customer service."

Running The Wild Side and The Frog, both Joburg restaurants with a twist, Woolf and his partners pride themselves on providing beautiful spaces for people to feel at home, build relationships, make memories, and connect. Both restaurants are ultimately about creating experiences.

"The Wild Side is a beautiful outdoor venue that's safe but not in a shopping centre or near a parking lot," says Woolf. "We offer an easy transition from a meal to a party, without guests having to leave. I opened The Wild Side during the COVID-19 pandemic, and everyone said there was no way it would survive. Yet it thrived, and we managed to quadruple turnover. However, we still close at midnight because my Jewish mother has always said nothing good happens after midnight."

In opening The Frog, a "boot bar" in Illovo this year, Woolf and his business partners used a retail model that combines two different revenue streams within one cost centre. Waiters serve food and drinks and are also trained to sell boots from Jim Green Footwear, a successful Pietermaritzburg-based, family-owned boot-making business. "We aim to open seven more branches over the next two years," says Woolf. "We're turning the retail shoe industry on its ... foot."

In terms of buffering his businesses to withstand challenges, Woolf says he doesn't believe fool-proofing a business is possible. "We simply have to be brave enough to roll with the punches and do the best we can with the resources we have at the time. One golden rule, though, is having a team that's been trained and empowered to think for



itself. I'm also not scared to incentivise people to bring the best versions of themselves to work every day."

Having written a training manual in 1998 called *Knives, Forks & Maniacs*, he's ideally placed to upskill people in the industry. "The book teaches waiters how to make more tips using the psychology of customer service," says Woolf. "Twenty-six years later, I still use that philosophy to train my managers."

In opening more restaurants over the coming years, Woolf will be able to extend employment opportunities and empower new managers. "The hospitality industry is critical to our country's economy because it teaches people to deal with people – it goes way beyond serving food and carrying trays."

Woolf, whose real name is Yaakov Aaron Woolf, says that though most people don't even know he's Jewish, he was in fact born in Mea She'arim in Jerusalem. "We left Israel in 1979. My mom kidnapped my sister and me from my father, who was mentally unstable and who lives in Selwyn Segal to this day, and fled back to South Africa."





## Joshua Kadish, Marom Mishan and Jordan Hertz

### The fine art of assisting small business

**T**his year's winners of the Eric Ellerine Entrepreneur Award are Joshua Kadish, Jordan Hertz, and Marom Mishan. They're the team behind Sourcefin, a leading fintech company specialising in empowering South African small, medium, and micro enterprises (SMMEs) through streamlined purchase order (PO) funding and invoice discounting.

In only their fourth financial year of operation, this group of entrepreneurs has made Sourcefin the leader in the PO funding space, with a projected R1 billion to be deployed in the 2025 financial year. "We've been able to achieve a lifetime bad-debt rate of 1.8% in what's considered a very high-risk space, and a retention rate of 48%," they say.

As such, they've secured exclusive partnerships with public and private entities, including First National Bank (FNB), the City of Joburg, the Gauteng Department of Economic Development, Gauteng Enterprise Propeller, and the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. The newly signed FNB partnership is predicted to yield 75 leads per day, and will culminate in enabling Sourcefin to offer bespoke loans directly through the FNB banking app. Considering that they're all between the ages of 26 and 33, these accomplishments are that much more impressive.

Surprisingly none of these three businessmen have a financial background. Yet they've harnessed what some would call a weakness by using their diverse backgrounds to differentiate themselves from traditional financiers in three ways.

Unlike banks and other funders who apply retrospective affordability checks, they also judge deals on a forward-looking and order-backed basis. "We pride ourselves on the ability to use technology to fund SMMEs within 48 hours, with the vast majority of our clients being black economic empowerment level 1 and solely operating in the government space," they say.

Finally, Sourcefin stands out from its competitors by combining advanced automation with a human touch in its fintech solutions. "While our processes are streamlined and data-driven, ensuring quick and accurate vetting within minutes, we also incorporate personalised assessments to ensure a thorough understanding of each client's needs," they say. "This allows Sourcefin to offer tailored financing solutions with term sheets delivered within 48 hours."

Throughout their business journey, the team has harnessed the power of technology to enhance their offerings. "Over the years, we've shifted from traditional approaches to embracing artificial intelligence (AI) and advanced technology to meet the evolving needs of the economy," they say.

"Despite negative perceptions about South African governance, we saw an opportunity to support underserved SMMEs in this challenging environment. By developing products like PO funding and invoice discounting, we turned systemic obstacles into growth opportunities. Integrating AI has allowed us to assess risk better, personalise solutions, and scale effectively. This approach not only drives our growth, it empowers local businesses in an untapped market."

By combining data-driven insights with a human touch, Sourcefin is able to build products that are both commercially viable and socially impactful. "At Sourcefin, we focus on empowering black-owned businesses, youth, and women who often struggle to get support from traditional banks and funders," say Kadish, Hertz, and Mishan. "This is why our motto is, 'We enable the forgotten SMME.'"

Providing more than just financial assistance, Sourcefin helps with supply chain, procurement, and legal aspects of businesses and orders. "By forming partnerships with our clients, we drive growth and job creation in the SMME sector, which boosts the South African economy."

Reflecting on how they've built their management team, the three leaders say they've strategically hired young, driven professionals with a diverse blend of skills and backgrounds. "This mix of fresh perspectives and expertise allows us to adapt quickly in a constantly changing business environment. Beyond hiring, we invest heavily in mentorship and business coaching for our management team, ensuring its members continue to enhance their skills and grow as leaders."

The fact that this award is named for their own shared mentor, Eric Ellerine, makes it that much more meaningful.

While each partner has different role models who have shaped their personal and professional growth, they all look up to Ellerine.

"His entrepreneurial spirit, vision, and dedication to building the South African economy have deeply influenced us," they say. "As a founding investor, Eric provided invaluable hands-on mentorship, instilling in us a strong work ethic and a commitment to consistency. His guidance and insights have been crucial in shaping Sourcefin into the company it is today. He always taught us to start small and dream big."

For Kadish, Hertz, and Mishan, Judaism plays an integral role in allowing them to maintain some form of work-life balance. "Building a business is undoubtedly a full-time commitment, and even when we're away from work, our minds often remain engaged," they say. "That's why we're incredibly fortunate to have Shabbat in our lives, offering dedicated time to focus on family, friends, and community. The intentional rest that comes with Shabbat dinners is invaluable for maintaining quality time and bringing much-needed balance to our lives."

Their strong connection to their faith and community is also why just being nominated for this award is such an honour they say. "We've always seen ourselves as a Jewish organisation, with many of our employees, management, and directors being deeply rooted in the community. The Absa Jewish Achiever Awards holds special significance for us as it represents the pinnacle of hard work, success, and dedication. Seeing the impressive achievements of past winners of the Entrepreneur Award serves as an inspiration and a benchmark for us."

Before they were notified of their win, the Sourcefin team said that the award would have extra impetus in light of the recent challenges faced by the Jewish community. "It would stand as a testament to the resilience and success of a Jewish organisation making significant strides in the South African government space. This recognition wouldn't just validate our efforts, but highlight the positive impact and contributions we're making in a challenging environment."



Only dead fish go  
with the flow.

"First, we identified an opportunity in the market and solved it by using experience from the supply side as opposed to analysing deals from a credit background," they say. "We not only finance the projects, we offer a turnkey solution providing services that a SMME contractor would need to fulfil their projects."





# PRIVÉ

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### Jade Copans

When Jade Copans was in Grade 9 at King David Linksfield and responded to a peer's Instagram post calling for people to do community service that weekend, she didn't think she would be deeply involved in that work six years later. She's now assistant corporate social investment manager at the Nashua Children's Charity Foundation (NCCF), and doing it from university in Israel, where she is studying.

Not many who get involved in community service at school continue that commitment when they matriculate. "I'm one of very few who stayed passionate and committed to making a difference in the South African community," she said.

So committed is she to helping others, she wants to make a wish list in which every charity tells her the one thing they really need. "By the end of 2025, I want to have ticked every item off the list," she said.

Copans splits her time between her charity work and a Bachelor of Arts in psychology, where she is in her third year. She has committed to continue to put her all into her charity work because "I do what I do for the benefit of others. I like to believe that every act of kindness makes a difference."

Copans started off as a volunteer in 2018, and continued to volunteer until she was offered her current position in February 2024. The NCCF supports more than 150 children's organisations, including orphanages, early child development facilities, soup kitchens, special-needs facilities, squatter camps, and adoption centres.

"Most of the charities we assist are unheard of. They are in the heart of the township, some feeding and looking after 600 children. Without NCCF assistance, they wouldn't be sustainable," she said.

She loves working with the NCCF because she loves working with children. "I see so much potential in our beautiful country, and have so much hope for our future. The youth can change it, and if we give them hope and make them feel valued, they will work towards being successful individuals."

Copans' biggest achievement was to secure donations amounting to R228 000. These included clothes and toys, and expanded to larger donations such as printers, washing machines, jungle gyms, and a huge Mandela Day event at a corporate company. She arranged for a jungle gym to be donated to a charity that had never had one, and saw how one jungle gym could bring so much joy to so many children.

Earlier this year, Copans went to visit one of the organisations she helps, and was able to see the impact that she has made. "All the children wrote cards and drew pictures for me. Although I don't know all 15 000 children personally, they all feel the love I have for them in the way I assist them."



### Gina Dave

Gina Dave combines creativity, compassion, and community involvement to have a significant impact on the lives of vulnerable children, ultimately bringing about positive change.

When she started her community outreach journey five years ago, she was in Grade 8 at King David Linksfield. She realised she had found something she was passionate about, and wanted to do anything in her power to help the Jewish and wider South African community.

"I was determined to make a difference. I started to explore innovative ways of raising funds and resources and mobilising people to get involved in uplifting South African children at risk in order to have a positive impact on these children's lives," said Dave, now in matric.

She enrolled in the Duke of Edinburgh's President's Award, part of an international youth development programme that empowers youth between 14 and 24 to explore their potential. Their aim is to find their purpose and place in the world through physical recreation, a special skill, community service, and adventurous journey. Dave achieved the gold level of the President's Award in 2023.

She said her greatest achievement so far was being the only person from her school and one of 30 South African students to attend a reception at the British High Commission in Pretoria. This was in recognition of achieving gold. At the event, she met the Duke of Edinburgh, His Royal Highness Prince Edward.

"I felt proud to be the only person to achieve gold level in my year across King David schools and, of course, to be the only Jewish awardee to attend the reception and meet Prince Edward," she said.

Dave uses her creativity and entrepreneurial spirit to come up with innovative ideas that not only raise funds but urge everyone to get involved. One such project was her Forever Young socks to commemorate King David Linksfield's 75th birthday. For that, she designed, sourced, and manufactured the socks, raised sponsorship of R112 600, and then sold the socks. She gave the proceeds to outreach programmes. She also ran the Jibbit Croc shoe initiative, which raised R14 000 for Kids Haven and Yad Aharon & Michael food charity.

Dave works closely with Kid's Haven Children's Home, engaging the children, taking the time to bake birthday cakes and other treats for them, and collecting clothing, shoes, and stationery, which she hands over to the children herself.

Dave also won the world ORT Social Responsibility Award 2024 and the Kids Haven Ambassador Award in 2023.

Her biggest role model is her mother, Nicole Dave, whom she describes as "an Esther on steroids".

"She gave up her professional career as an attorney to do volunteer work and raise funds for needy causes. I've learned from her that helping others is the most beautiful thing we can do, and that Hashem uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things," Dave said.

"I've learned to dream big, be bold, and take action," she said. "I know where my strengths and passions lie, and have used them to bring about positive change."



### Erin Dodo

When Erin Dodo started studying at the University of Cape Town during the COVID-19 pandemic and saw that the South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS) had fallen off the map at the university, she knew that that she had to revive it to the thriving student organisation it is today.

She has since dedicated herself to give Jewish students a voice in the Western Cape and around the world. That, despite not having attended a Jewish school.

At only 22 years old, Dodo has held many leadership positions while pursuing a Bachelor of Social Science Double Major in political science and anthropology, which she completed in 2023. She's now pursuing a postgraduate honours degree in political science.

She was chairperson of the Western Cape chapter of SAUJS from 2021 to 2024; UCT student representative council deputy secretary general from 2022 to 2023; a Lauder Fellow for 2023 to 2024 at the World Jewish Congress; a member of the Jewish Diplomatic Academy at the World Jewish

Congress; member at large at the American Jewish Committee (AJC) Campus Global Board for 2023 to 2024; and chairperson of the International Committee of AJC Campus Global Board for 2024 and 2025.

Dodo believes she got to where she is today through her belief in taking every opportunity with both hands.

"Opportunities in politics haven't been handed to me easily. I've had to fight to be where I am, and I'll

continue to take up as much space as I can and keep Jewish voices heard," she said.

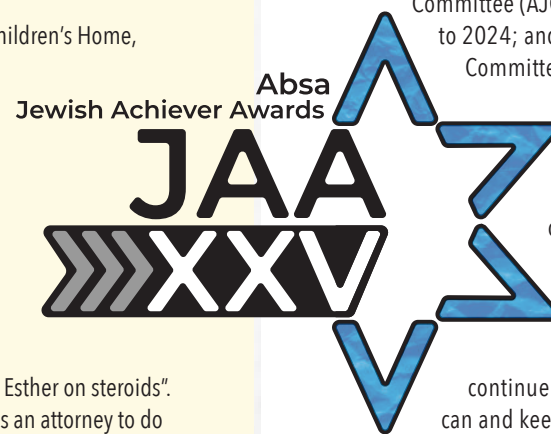
"Through empowering myself, I have empowered many others, and allowed more young Jewish leaders to grow and emerge."

While advocating for Jewish students on campus, Dodo said she encountered many hurdles, one of which was the unwillingness of the university to acknowledge the concerns and challenges of its Jewish students. She overcame these hurdles by understanding the inner workings of the university, not accepting its bureaucratic structures, and demanding that Jewish students got what they deserved.

A seminal moment for Dodo was when she spoke at the AJC's global forum on antisemitism on campuses. "It was incredible to be recognised on that level at such an esteemed and well attended conference. I also had the honour of working alongside Congressman Ted Deutch as his intern in New York that year."

For Dodo, it has been challenging to advocate for the Jewish students on campus while working hard academically, knowing that there are a lot of eyes on her. To meet the challenge, she said, "I remember why I'm doing it in the first place, and that the future I'm striving towards is bigger than their judgements."

Besides, she said, "I love what I do, and have so many friends involved, so whenever I go to meetings or community commitments, it hardly feels like work because of the joy it brings me. I also have supportive friends who understand my commitments and come to support me where they can."





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.....

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### Liat Feldman

**W**hen Liat Feldman started baking with her mother at the age of six, she knew she had discovered her passion. And as soon as she could read, it was recipe books she ploughed through to find new and interesting things to bake. This led to her starting Lilicious Bakery and then joining forces with her mother-in-law, Heidi Feldman, in The Family Bakehouse.

"We specialise in French and high-quality products, aiming to raise the bakery expectations of the average consumer. We take the normal and elevate it to something our customers love," she said.

Feldman deals with quality control and the development of new products. She is also the cake and sugar cookie decorator and staff manager.

Even as a child, Feldman would spend her time researching ingredients and recipes and would beg her parents to let her experiment so that she could share her treats with her friends and family every Shabbat and *yom tov*.

She decided to take her passion one step further when she finished school at Yeshiva College and started her first baking business while in her first year of university. Her business quickly

picked up so much, she decided to drop out of university and pursue baking full-time.

Feldman sets herself apart from the competition because she makes unique products. "We don't sell anything average. We aim for it always to be the best quality," she said.

Everything that The Family Bakehouse makes is made from scratch, and it takes ordinary baked goods and turns it up a notch. Feldman was able to turn her home-based business into a storefront visited by many throughout the community.

Her ambition to create the best treats she can keeps her going. She loves to see the satisfaction and joy her goods bring to customers.

"I've always followed where my heart takes me, even if it's hard," Feldman said.

She'll never forget getting her first large order from an



international company when she was 19 years old, and having to send samples of her sugar cookies to the company's headquarters overseas for approval. "The cookies took me forever to do," she said, "with a lot of help from family and friends. I'm now able to do the same quantity in a day."

With the expansion of her business, she has had to take up new responsibilities and hire more people to keep up with demand and to keep everything going while she's on maternity leave. This was difficult for her because, "I'm the quality control manager, and make sure I don't send out anything below par."

Feldman attributes the success of her businesses to the fact that, "I'm showing people what's possible in the baking and kosher industry, and I believe they can feel my passion towards baking and product development."

### Gilad Janet

**G**ilad Janet, 21, chose not to go to university after matric, but to follow his entrepreneurial spirit in founding the business Workflow Wiz. His company helps healthcare professionals by giving them tools and strategies to enhance their practice and streamline operations without sacrificing their well-being.

Janet relied on his intuition, knowing he had what it took to be able to build successful businesses at such a young age. "I trusted my drive to succeed and wrote my own script," he said.

allows me to have a significant impact without being tied to a specific location. It enables me to collaborate with a diverse range of clients and projects, adapting quickly to different environments and time zones. This global reach enhances the value I bring, and allows me to make a broader, more meaningful impact on the people I serve," he said.

When he started out, he said, "I struggled with the belief that no-one else could handle tasks as well as I could. This mindset was limiting my ability to scale beyond a certain point. Over time, I realised that to grow and manage a larger operation, delegation is essential. I began delegating with confidence."

Janet can vividly remember the feeling of signing on his first client. "That moment was incredibly significant as it proved that my vision wasn't just a dream, but a reality. It reinforced the belief that if I truly want something and am willing to work for it, I can achieve it."

Janet takes the role of a company founder extremely seriously. "I believe everything is my responsibility, and this perspective drives me to take full ownership of my actions, decisions, and outcomes," he said.

"By acknowledging that every success and failure is a direct result of my choices, I hold myself accountable for both progress and setbacks."

Janet believes his ability to be self-accountable is one of the main reasons



His company helps his clients achieve the impact, income, and freedom they have always aspired to without experiencing burnout, which is a problem in the healthcare profession, according to Janet.

He saw the need, launched the company, outsourced work to contractors, and managed operations, ensuring that the system runs like a well-oiled machine.

46 "What's unique about what I do is the flexibility to work from anywhere in the world at any time. This freedom

### Jay Kaplan

**J**ay Kaplan has his Masters in molecular engineering and is working on his Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in mathematics at the University of Chicago and the Courant Institute at New York University, but his biggest impact is his fight against antisemitism on United States (US) college campuses.

He was harassed, followed, videotaped, had his path blocked, and was threatened on campus by people who had been his peers and friends. He speaks of how he and other Jews were ostracised on campus by these "privileged, highly educated students at the most elite academic institutions in the world".

This former King David Linksfield Dux, who matriculated as one of the top 10 students in the country, is focusing on assisting the fight against Jew hatred and anti-Israel vitriol on campuses following the 7 October atrocities in Israel.

Kaplan is the only South African Jewish student leading the charge against antisemitism at the University of Chicago. He is part of a group of students who forced the university's union to exempt Jewish students from paying dues because the union funds campus Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions coalition activities. Kaplan and his group got the union to allow Jewish students to pay their dues instead to emergency service Magen David Adom.

He spearheaded an informal organisation to launch legal battles against Jew hatred on campus, and raised tens of thousands of dollars to display videos of the 7 October massacre in front of the pro-Hamas encampment on campus.

Though Kaplan was involved in Jewish advocacy throughout his university career, he took it to a whole new level after 7 October.

"I was shocked at their Jew hatred, and knew I would have to take a stand. This was confirmed over the past 11 months of horrific protests and people I once considered my peers and friends harassing me and adding me to the pro-Palestinian groups' campus Zionist shame list.

"Many people I know have been afraid to stand up," he said. "They are scared to post on their stories or openly show that they are Jewish. They don't want to make any noise and rather exist quietly, trying to ignore the raging Jew hatred around them."

Kaplan couldn't do that. He is fighting multiple legal battles against antisemitic unions, and is the only international student working with the US Senate HELP (health, education, labour and pensions) committee to investigate antisemitism in the workplace and on campuses.

The biggest challenge he has faced is the double standard the university administration shows to Jewish students.

He hopes to lobby congressional committees and administrations about stopping anti-Israel funding from antisemitic countries that are infecting US colleges with antisemitism.



"We took for granted people's common sense that terrorism and barbarity would be condemned. We were wrong," he said.

"Perhaps if we had started the fight sooner and struck pre-emptively, we wouldn't be in such a dire situation on college campuses and on the publicity and political fronts."

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### Aaron Levenberg

Aaron Levenberg has an entrepreneurial soul, which is why at 22, he launched an e-commerce furniture store with a family friend called Levitate Furniture Solutions (LVT8).

Levenberg noticed that the store had no online presence, and thought he could help. He offered to create an online store selling the products for a percentage of the profits.

He opted out of the traditional path of most youngsters, leaving university after his first year. "While many view formal education as the primary route to success, I discovered that hands-on experience and real-world problem solving were far more valuable for me," he said.

From university, Levenberg dived into the property business, working for Jawitz Properties and Merge Property Group in Cape Town. "This approach allowed me to learn through real-life challenges and adapt quickly, leading to success in the property sector and my furniture business," he said.

He kept up momentum in his career by always looking for the next best thing. So, when the family friend whom he had approached about the e-commerce store agreed to its launch, Levenberg jumped at the chance.

"Keeping this momentum required a commitment to continuous learning and adaptability, embracing new opportunities as they arose, and constantly refining my strategies based on practical experience rather than theoretical knowledge alone," he said.

Levenberg said he was drawn to LVT8 because

it offers high-quality, customisable furniture at affordable prices, combined with services like paintwork and fit-outs. The company quickly saw the success of the online store, and opened a showroom in the centre of Cape Town for customers to get a first-hand view of the furniture.

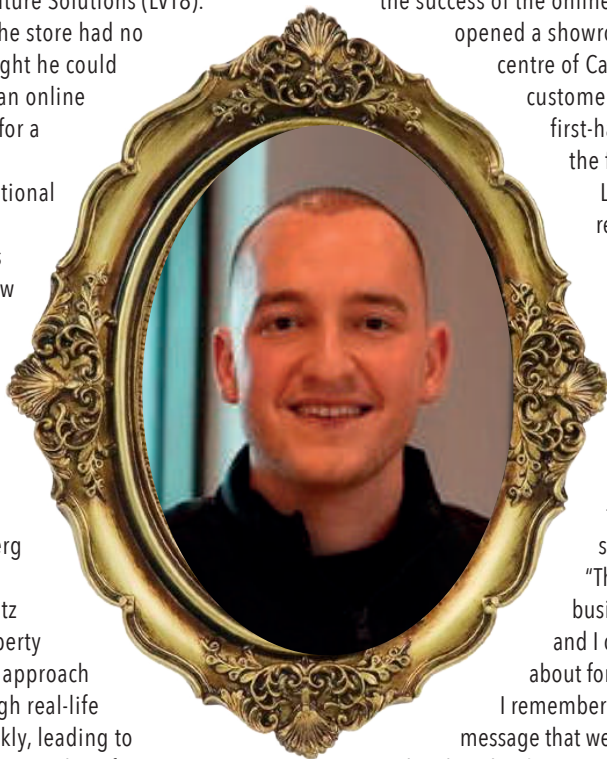
Levenberg remembers being on tenterhooks when he and his business partner were waiting to get confirmation for the showroom.

"This was all my business partner and I could think about for months, and I remember seeing the message that we had the go ahead, and waking up my girlfriend

to tell her," he said.

His biggest inspiration is his family and friends, he said. "I make sure to listen to advice and criticism as I believe they are constructive, whether I agree with them or not. One of the things that has stuck with me is something my dad always tells me, which is "as long as I have fun". This helps me to have an optimistic attitude towards everything I do, and my optimism radiates to my colleagues, my family and friends, and my clients and customers."

Levenberg hopes to take his business to new heights in the years to come.



### Tannah Levick

Tannah Levick was destined for the stage. As the granddaughter of South African music recording legend David Gresham, music was in her genes.

Levick grew up performing, but it wasn't until she performed in *Thoroughly Modern Millie* when she was in Grade 11 at King David Linksfield that she knew singing, dancing, and acting was what she wanted to do for the rest of her life.

Levick studied at the Luitingh Alexander Musical Theatre Academy (LAMTA) in Cape Town, where she honed her craft to become a true triple threat. Since graduating in 2021, Levick has performed in numerous musicals in South Africa and internationally.

She was in *Tales of a Big Bad Wolf* at the Kalk Bay Theatre in 2021, *Burn Baby Burn* at Gate 69 in 2022, and was an ensemble member and a cover for Scaramouche in the world tour of *We Will Rock You* in 2023. Levick was also in the critically acclaimed production of *Mamma Mia* in 2024, and is a part of *Disney's Magic Box Musical*.

"I'll never forget taking the final bow in *We Will Rock You* at the Tel Aviv Opera House," said Levick. This moment performing overseas was the signal that she was on the right track.

In addition to being a musical theatre performer, Levick also writes and performs music. Her first song, *Why Can't I Be Me*, released in October 2019 is the most meaningful for her. She wrote it in memory of her friend, Adam Seef, who tragically lost his life from suicide in 2019.

In the song, she sings, "Why can't I live my life the way it's meant to be? Why can't I just cry as a boy, be strong as a girl, why can't I find a way to set my spirit free?"



Using her creativity to share her emotions was a moment of release for her, but it isn't the only music she has released. Other songs include *Gaslighter*, *Okay*, and *Dancing Alone*.

Being in the theatre world has taught Levick the art of resilience. "I know that this is an incredibly tough industry. It's subjective, and it can hurt your self-image. So, I try not to view things as disappointments but rather as shields of protection. My granny always told me, 'Rejection is protection.'"

Levick has a unique skill that most performers don't have. "I am a straight, white Jewish performer who can speak not one word of Afrikaans but fully understands isiZulu within an industry filled with people who are the exact opposite," she said.

It's her mentor, her grandfather, David, who inspired her. "He always told me to keep my feet on the ground, and reach for the stars, which is my mantra to date," she said.

### Caleb and Judah Levitan

At 14 years old, twins Caleb and Judah Levitan straddle two worlds: being ordinary teenagers and international chess champions. To top it all, they have created a chess school for those in need.

"In one world, our peers are our high school friends, in the other, our peers are professional or semi-professional chess players," the boys say. "Because we are in both, we hope that we've inspired people in our school to pursue their dreams. It does take sacrifice and hard work to keep competing at the highest level of our sport and beyond that, we put in great effort for the benefit of those in need."

They live by the chess philosophy that "chess isn't always about winning. Sometimes, it's simply about learning. So is life."

Caleb and Judah started playing chess at six years old, and immediately noticed that they had a natural talent for the sport. At six, they both won tournaments that allowed them to represent South Africa from the age of seven. This also allowed them to get professional coaching for the sport.

They dedicated all their time to chess, so much so that the president of the Johannesburg Sports Confederation asked if the pair could coach a development team. It was then that they saw that chess was much larger than the two of them and they could make a difference through the sport that they loved. This led them to create the Levitan Chess School to bring the joy of chess to schools in need in Gauteng. This programme has provided equipment to 22 schools in Johannesburg, and the Levitan brothers hope to expand it to the rest of Gauteng.

The boys hope their programme will in turn expand to the rest of the country as "the Gauteng minister [of sports, arts, culture



and recreation] always reminds us that kids in sport are kids out of court. Well, chess will certainly keep kids busy for hours, but it's more than that, it helps with critical thinking, maths, focus, and so many skills that will help kids achieve in their school and life journey," they say.

Caleb and Judah are different to other top chess players in that they still attend school at King David Linksfield, and live ordinary lives. Said Caleb, "We're regular teenagers with an extraordinary life outside of school. This juggling act isn't easy, and we have met some other teenagers around the world who have been struggling to balance school and chess."

Caleb was the youngest player to represent South Africa in chess at the African Games, and the youngest to represent South Africa in the Olympiad at 14 years old. Judah's biggest achievement is representing South Africa in the Youth Olympiad (under 16) at 12 years old.

Caleb and Judah will always remember when they won the African Youth tournament together when they were eight years old in Kisumu, Kenya. Said Judah, "We were surrounded by different languages and cultures, given traditional Kenyan blankets to wear, and we got to celebrate together. We both beat all of our opponents and then drew to each other."

They are successful in all their endeavours, they say, because they have the support of their family, friends, school, and community, as well as work extremely hard on chess.

Both boys have had to deal with disappointment in their sport, but they have always been able to pick themselves up after a loss. Said Caleb, "In chess, there's a saying that it takes one bad move to nullify 40 good ones. We have, unfortunately, learned that lesson too often. We have lost out on titles, ratings, and podium finishes with a few bad moves, but try and come back stronger each time."

Said Judah, "We've learned not to chase competitions that sound like glory but aren't filled with highly rated players, and to focus on actual chess growth and constantly challenging ourselves."



### Elan Novick

**E**lan Novick, 22, developed South Africa's first Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven software for political campaigns. Initially, his goal was to increase voter registration in the country because he believed that a higher voter turnout could challenge the status quo and pave the way for the country's first coalition government.

Novick, a BSc Computer Science student at the University of Cape Town, was studying and working at an AI-driven marketing company when he decided to take on this ambitious project.



He became so engrossed in the project, in December 2023, he joined forces with one of his classmates to create a company, Intelli AI, that would be used by various political organisations in the run-up to the national elections in May 2024.

"It started as a pro-bono initiative with one simple goal: to increase voter registration in South Africa," he said. "As we gained momentum, we realised that by commercialising Intelli AI, we could amplify our impact. Today, Intelli AI leads the way in optimising election campaigns using AI, big data analytics, machine learning, and live media integration, replacing one-size-fits-all messaging."

During the 2024 elections, Novick managed multimillion-rand campaigns for challenger political parties, sending millions of AI generated messages to targeted voters that amplified his clients' campaigns.

"By integrating economic, demographic, and hyper-local news, we can craft highly personalised content that resonates with people as it highlights issues they are facing in their communities," Novick said.

He immersed himself in the country's opposition political circles, working tirelessly to get them to use his product. "This allowed me to collaborate with politicians and business leaders determined to effect change in the political landscape," he said. "The experience has shaped my leadership journey, as it's not every day that a young entrepreneur gets the chance to influence the political landscape of their country."

Novick said he believed that Intelli AI's efforts "played a small yet significant role in influencing political change and establishing a more balanced government in South Africa".

His leadership is defined by "action, chutzpah, collaboration, and a deep-seated passion for the country. While others focus on personal growth, I've been working on a grander scale, aiming to create a lasting impact on the country I call home."

Though Novick said many would rate having built a multimillion-rand business at 21 as his biggest achievement – not least of all the day the company crossed the R1 million revenue mark – it wasn't. Although he did phone his dad, Gidon, as soon as the money had been paid, it was being there for his best friend at a time of need that he believes was his finest moment.

Novick has big plans for his future. "I want to build something big. I want to change South Africa. I want to be the next era of South African business Jewry," he said.

### Gabrielle Onay

**P**icnic&Thrift has become an integral part of the lives of the alternative youth in South Africa among others. And what started out as a small market in the back garden of Gabrielle Onay's business partner, Ruby Lee Prager, has become a thrifting empire in Johannesburg, Pretoria, and Cape Town.

Onay was just 18 when it sounded like a good idea to creating a market to pay for her university fees. Onay and Prager went into the venture in 2019, not knowing that in five years, it would amass a huge following where young people look forward to their events at the end and beginning of every month, and travel to all parts of their city to attend.

"The first market in 2019 truly blew my mind," said Onay. When 300 people showed up in Onay and Prager's garden, it changed her life.

One of Onay's highlights of the Picnic&Thrift journey was the 2022 Pride Market that attracted more than 8 000 people. "It was something incredible to see that Ruby and I had worked so hard and diligently to create an environment that was known as a safe space for business owners, queerness, and community," she said.

Picnic&Thrift has become a small business development hub, creators' space, and a thrift market for those passionate about sustainable fashion, according to Onay.

Since she was 16, Onay has been a passionate thrifter, and this has manifested itself in businesses. "I wanted people to view discarded goods as valid," she said. Onay is also the founder and owner of Crybaby Thrift, which takes preloved clothes or recycled fabric and creates an array of custom clothing from them.

In her ventures, Onay goes all out to make a community and space



where all can be accepted. "In many ways, I'm used to being on the sidelines of the fashion world and its events," she said.

"Early on, I realised that so many other people needed a space that allowed them to be themselves."

Her businesses are an extension of herself, she said. "I'm a being entirely consumed by love and creating, in little and big ways. I share it, receive it, and embrace the multitude ways it can be moulded."

"Crybaby Thrift has developed into an online forum with more than 11 000 followers, and is a platform for creativity and expression in which we run pop-ups, competitions, and giveaways, and share business tips and strategies," Onay said.

"It has become a tight community – buying sustainably sourced goodies and sharing adventures in second-hand goods, with tons of loyal customers seeking out custom clothing and prints."

Furthermore, Onay has continued to make sure that Picnic&Thrift is a place where everyone is accepted, no matter what, despite recent challenges in dealing with antisemitism since the start of the war in Israel.

She plans to grow and expand her companies, solidifying their positions as leading platforms for sustainable fashion and small business development, as well as empowering a new generation of entrepreneurs and creatives.

### Joshua Pimstein

**A**t only 22 years old, Joshua Pimstein has entrenched himself as a leader in the Johannesburg Jewish community through his work with Bnei Akiva; the South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS); as choirmaster at Sydenham Shul; and through coaching the Under-16 rugby team at King David Linksfield.

"I'm a passionate and driven individual, and believe wholeheartedly in the bright future of the South African Jewish community," he said.

"Investment in South African Jewish youth is the best way to sustained success. My involvement in Bnei Akiva, SAUJS, and being a King David rugby coach allows me to do this."

Pimstein, who is studying to be an actuarial scientist, got involved with communal work because he wanted to give back to the community and organisations that gave him so much growing up.

"Bnei Akiva is a huge part of who I am today, and SAUJS was a natural addition to ensure the vibrancy and safety of all Jewish students on campus," he said.

He said he was thrilled to be appointed Rosh Machaneh for Bnei Akiva, the largest Jewish youth movement in the southern hemisphere, for 2024. He's excited to take on the challenge of what he believes will be as many as 1 100 campers in December.

His love of sport has also kept him involved in the community. He was part of the winning rugby team at the Maccabi Games in 2022, and



thought he could share his passion by helping to improve King David's rugby players.

As one of the coaches for the Under-16 rugby team at King David Linksfield, he says he nurtures athletic skills and community values. "By focusing on team building and personal development, you contribute significantly to the students' growth on and off the field. Coaching fosters discipline, teamwork, and resilience, which are essential qualities for young athletes."

Through sport, young people can build community and a sense of camaraderie, Pimstein said. "This connection extends beyond the rugby pitch, reinforcing a cohesive Jewish community within the school. By celebrating achievements and encouraging a supportive environment,

coaching helps integrate Jewish values into students' everyday lives, strengthening their connection to their heritage and each other."

As choirmaster at Sydenham Shul, Pimstein plays a role in enhancing the spiritual and communal life of the shul. "Through leading the choir, you connect the community with the rich traditions of Jewish music and prayer, creating a harmonious and uplifting worship experience," he said.

Pimstein is inspired by his father and grandfather, who "both taught the immense value of humility and respect", he said. "I try to live my life every day with these two values at the forefront of everything I do."



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### Hannah Rudnicki

Since the age of three, Hannah Rudnicki has had a love of dance. This year, at 25, she opened her own dance studio in King David Linksfield's new sports complex.

Rudnicki did ballet, modern, tap, and hip-hop all through her childhood. She was 11 when she met singer, dancer, and actress Talia Kodesh, also a King David alumna, and it cemented Rudnicki's desire to perform. Kodesh "took her under her wing" and taught her everything she needed to know about dance, performing, running a business, and a work ethic.

After completing school, Rudnicki enrolled at Oakfields College in Pretoria, where she obtained her diploma in musical theatre and dance in 2019, and moved on to performing in various productions.

However, like so many performers, Rudnicki's career came to a halt because of the COVID-19 pandemic. "I needed to do something as the theatre industry was struggling and no shows were being put on at that time," she said. "I decided to post dance classes on Facebook so children could have classes at home."

From there, she realised she had a real aptitude as a teacher, and

was approached by Cabaret Kids to teach musical theatre. She taught there for two years while still performing.

Rudnicki was teaching dance at Roedean High School for two years, when she was approached by her alma mater, King David Linksfield, to open a dance school in its new sports complex.

H21 Dance Studio opened in January this year, and already has more than 100 students coming to classes in many styles including jazz, contemporary, musical theatre, hip-hop, modern, stretch, strength, technique, and lyrical.

Said Rudnicki, "H21 Dance isn't just a dance studio, it's a safe



space and a dance family for all levels. I teach from the heart and ensure that every dancer reaches their full potential.

"In a performer's life you go through many disappointments, as there are many 'no's' that you will receive at auditions and throughout your career. I teach my students that when they don't come first place or can't master a step yet, this is when the hard work starts, this is when you work even harder and then you can turn around and say, 'Well done for giving it my best shot.'"

Rudnicki will always remember the first time she set foot in her studio and the pride she felt when she knew that she could cultivate an environment fuelled by the love of dance.

### Rachel Smith

Rachel Smith, 18, has loved water from the time she was a baby, and swimming is an activity that brings tranquillity and comfort.

This King David Linksfield matric student has used her love of the water to soar in competitive swimming on a provincial and national level, achieving things she didn't believe she could do through hard work and dedication.

Smith surprised onlookers as this year's Midmar Mile when she swam in the top 10 alongside women who competed in the Olympics. She has been selected for Central Gauteng Aquatics, and will be representing the province in the SA National Open Water Championships in Jeffreys Bay in March. She was also selected for the South African National Junior Championships.

Smith lives by the saying, "Day by day, we get better and better, until we can't be beat, we won't be beat."

"Swimming at provincial and national level is extremely difficult and competitive," she said. "The number of hours, years of training, dedication, and commitment it takes compared to other sports is unique. I have morning training at 05:00 followed by afternoon or evening training six days a week.

"My biggest challenge has been managing my swimming training, my school day, and the academic goals I have set for myself. Training six days a week, sometimes twice a day, and still studying, was achieved by becoming expert at time management and prioritising what's important."

Smith said davening daily helps keep her grounded. "I always thank Hashem," she said. "I like to lead by example as I'm a quiet person. I talk through my actions. My results are more than 90% hard work, belief, and sacrifice. I hope other people see that in their chosen fields: put in the work silently, hour after hour, day after day, and the results are initially slow and gradual until you shine."

Smith takes each achievement as it comes, as she knows the hard work it warrants, but she has also encountered more disappointments than anyone knows. Nevertheless, she keeps pushing to do better than the last time. "Each achievement was preceded by countless hours of work and lots of

disappointments," she said.

Smith recalls the immense pride she felt on standing on the podium after winning gold at the Maccabi Games in the junior women's 1 500m open water swim in 2022. She's a firm believer that anything is possible, and in not allowing obstacles to get in her way.

She believes swimming will always be a fundamental part of who she is, but is seeking a career in medicine so that she can help those who haven't had the same opportunities as herself.



### Ben Stein

When Ben Stein started Ben's Bubble Tea as a pop-up shop in Melrose Arch in March 2021, he never dreamed that in less than four years, he would be overseeing 17 stores across South Africa and Bahrain.

Stein entered the niche market of bubble tea or boba with very little business knowledge and no experience in the food and beverage industry. He saw a gap in the South African market for bubble tea, which he described as a booming industry overseas.

He was faced with his first major hurdle when winter and the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic hit him hard in July 2021, just months after he launched. "I vividly recall sitting with my staff member under the gazebo in the cold at 21:30, having worked since 10:00. The prospect of spending my weekend working in the cold, not making but rather losing money, was a truly humbling and challenging experience," he said.

This experience lit a fire under Stein, and pushed him to grow his business. In the three years since, he has expanded his business to becoming the largest bubble tea brand in South Africa, with 17 locations nationwide and two in Bahrain. Through a franchise model, he has enabled 12 entrepreneurs to open their own business, employing 58 people.

As the managing director of the Ben's Bubble Tea Group, he ensures that all employees have important skills, development, and training. "I'm deeply involved in all aspects of the business," Stein said. "This includes overseeing franchisees, enhancing and developing our menu, securing new store locations, refining operations and systems, directing marketing efforts, ensuring store design consistency, and much more."

Although being a leader may seem glamorous, "it's demanding and comes with high expectations and can be stressful", he said.

He learned this lesson when in late 2023, Ben's Bubble

Tea was expanding rapidly and opening new stores and he realised that he "lacked quality control measures and checklists to ensure that each store operated at its full potential. We had to revamp a few underperforming stores and even let go of some managers due to these oversights." Stein was able to turn this around quickly, and got the business back on track.



He believes his biggest challenge has been "managing relationships with franchisees, managers, and staff members. I navigate conflicts and disagreements daily." However, he knows that "thoughtful disagreement is preferable to a culture of blind agreement".

Stein said that though he has made many mistakes over the years, he knows they are an important way to move forward so that he never settles for mediocrity.

He hopes to continue to expand Ben's Bubble Tea to more locations across South Africa, which will open the door to a store in America, his dream since day one.



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### Eitan Steinberg

Those who cannot be present at the *simcha* of a family member or friend know the sadness and frustration of not being able to attend. However, at 24, Eitan Steinberg offers the next best option to being there in Johannesburg, enjoying the *simcha* virtually through his streaming services.

Steinberg learnt about filming as a child from his late uncle, Gary Block, who set up the video and editing facilities at King David Linksfield before he died in 2012. Since then, Steinberg's passion for video has grown.

After school, he did a media and broadcasting internship at TV MallSA in 2018 and in 2021, he worked at the iownit expo at Wanderers Stadium, producing, directing, videoing, and editing, which offered great career experience.

The idea for his business, Simcha Live Streaming, came to him when he live streamed his cousin, Saul Block's, wedding in 2022 and thought how easily he could do it for other people.

Steinberg said he loved the idea that everyone could be involved in their family and friends' *simchas*, no matter where they are around the world.

He specialises in live streaming Jewish functions like weddings, Barmitzvahs, Batmitzvahs, and *brit milot*. His business is unique, he said, in that through specialised techniques, he is able to give people a "guest-eye-view" in which it feels like the viewer is a part of the *simcha* due to the camera having a focal length similar to

the human eye.

"Rather than reverse engineering live streaming abilities for a bulky video production camera, we use purpose built, specialist cameras, designed to get in among the action, with built in live streaming capability," he said. "The GoPro cameras we use deliver high quality video - up to 5K - and being action cameras, have clear advantages over traditional video cameras."

Steinberg does all the live streaming himself because he wants to be sure that the end result is the best it can be for his clients. "I care about all the people I work with, and the outcome of my events are important to me, so I'm hesitant to bring other people in because I like to be involved in anything I do."

Steinberg believes that offering consistent great work is the most important thing that he can do in his business. He takes the job of sharing someone's special day very seriously.

"I can unite families from anywhere in the world so they can participate in the *simcha*, and the recorded live stream is given to the client on a private part of our website."

Steinberg has a completely mobile setup, so he's able to travel all around Johannesburg to help people capture their special event for those who are far away.

He is thrilled at how popular his service has become. When he started in 2018, he had little to no activity and six years later, he's completely booked up.



### Zach Tobias

At the age of 25, Zach Tobias has been able to blend his passion for music with a love for engineering, working as a successful DJ for more than 13 years.

Tobias discovered his passion for music when he joined the King David jazz band at the age of nine under the tutelage of Dave Holland.

"His influence sparked my curiosity about the music industry and the possibility of turning my passion into a career," said Tobias.

He got his first mixer, and started performing at small events 13 years ago. Since then, he has established a reputation within the community for performances at big and small corporate, community, and private events.

Tobias adds a unique touch to every event by playing his saxophone during each of his sets. "This combination has set me apart from others in the industry, giving people a whole new experience," he said.

Tobias possesses the unique ability to blend two seemingly different worlds - music and engineering - seamlessly into a unique and impactful career path. While working as a DJ, he was studying mechanical engineering at the University of Pretoria, which he completed last year.

"It taught me the importance of precision, creativity, and time management, all of which have been essential in balancing my dual passions. My approach to DJing is influenced by my engineering background. I have a strong understanding of the technical aspects of sound

and event production, which allows me to create a sophisticated and tailored experience for my clients. And my background in engineering and entrepreneurship equips me with a strategic mindset and creative approach to problem solving."

While in Israel on an internship programme earlier this year, Tobias worked as a DJ for Israel Defense Forces soldiers, which enabled him to bring some joy to those fighting on the front lines.

"It's not just about entertaining, it's about bringing a sense of normalcy and joy to those who need it most.

Being able to do this during such challenging times was incredibly fulfilling," he said.

Tobias always tries to stay one step ahead of the curve. "The [DJ-ng] industry is always evolving, so I make a point of never getting too comfortable or stuck in one style. I'm always exploring new sounds, experimenting with different techniques, and finding ways to incorporate fresh ideas into my sets," he said.

Tobias has taught, mentored, and guided many aspiring DJs, helping them develop their own technique while mastering the basics. Many have gone on to build successful client bases. "By fostering a network of skilled and passionate professionals, I aim to create a 'dream team' that can elevate the event industry," he said.



### Adam Zimmerman

When Adam Zimmerman picked up his mother's camera for the first time in the Kruger National Park at the age of seven, he instinctively knew he wanted to do wildlife photography and promote wildlife conservation through his art.

For Zimmerman, "photography is about so much more than just taking photos. It's an expression of the feelings we get in particular moments." For this reason, he started his business, AZ Photography, to show the beauty of nature and why it should be protected.

Zimmerman spends his free time travelling around the Kruger National Park looking for beautiful snapshots of nature. "I self-drive and track/spot all wildlife myself using my extensive knowledge of the bush and animal behaviour," he said.

"I seem to have that natural eye for photography and composition. And, since I picked up a camera 16 years ago, it has grown and thrived as I've gained experience and knowledge."

Zimmerman is self-taught, and learns different techniques through YouTube. "Photography is a complex discipline, but I managed to crack the code and grow my skills independently," he said.

He's studying chemical engineering at the University of the Witwatersrand, but ensures he has time to stay on the photographic path. He now has more than 58 000 followers on Instagram, and teaches photography in Johannesburg and online to students ranging in age from 10 to 80.

"When I'm out taking images in the wild,

I'm often stopped by strangers who know my online presence, which allows me to broaden my network and grow my brand. I create and promote wildlife awareness and conservation through my photographic art, which is seen by millions of people worldwide," he said.

Through his photography, Zimmerman believes he's promoting South African wildlife, the landscape, and the need for conservation.

He has won a few influential wildlife photography competitions and secured a photographic sponsorship. However, he sees his biggest achievement as being able to invest the money that his photography generates in buying new equipment.

He's also passionate about teaching others the art of photography. "Giving my first photographic lesson is a moment I'll never forget. I was so proud that I could help others get the assistance that I never received when I was starting my journey," he said.

Zimmerman hopes to combine his two passions - photography and engineering - to make a positive impact. "I would like to engineer solutions within the realm of sustainable development and environmental chemical engineering," he said.

"I have given my all to what I do. It's exhausting, but I would have it no other way. Passion is my biggest strength. When I want something, I do everything in my power to earn it."



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# Josh Weinberg

## Hot footing it to the big league

Josh Weinberg has always had a passion for business and using his ventures to give to others, so it's no surprise that he has managed to rise above the pack and excel at such a young age.

This Yeshiva College alumnus is a director of 411 Distributors, and is about to launch Soul Gallery in Sandton City. "My involvement is hands-on as I run the day-to-day operations, serving as the captain of the ship for both ventures," Weinberg said. "My specialty lies in product sourcing and deal-making, which I'm passionate about. I love navigating the deal-making process and ensuring that our business strategy aligns with securing the best products and opportunities for the markets we serve."

Weinberg's entrepreneurship journey began when he was 10 years old. He started by selling second-hand phones and clothing. This soon turned into a love for the sneaker industry.

By the age of 11, he was regularly queuing before dawn to secure some of the most coveted sneakers that he would then resell. Through this, he established himself as one of South Africa's leading sneaker resellers.

By 2019, Weinberg said he had sold more than 10 000 pairs of super-high-end sneakers and had secured a partnership with four major retail locations as well as one of the largest sneaker market places in the world – in Detroit in the United States (US).

His big break happened during the COVID-19 pandemic, where he acquired most of the high-end sneaker stock in South Africa. After holding on to it for a few months, he said, "I capitalised on the easing of restrictions by selling thousands of pairs to buyers in the US." This was a pivotal moment in his career.

Following this success, Weinberg reinvested in the South African market, and partnered with a local retail chain, operating on a consignment basis. Over the next three to four years, he helped the chain grow its weekly sales from 20 pairs of sneakers to hundreds.

This year, he took another direction with the launch of Soul, a luxury, multi-brand store launching in Sandton City. "Soul isn't just a store," he said. "It's an experience designed to transcend traditional luxury retail. Our curated selection features exclusive fashion brands and products, many of which are being introduced to the South African market for the first time."

In 2022, he expanded his portfolio to become the sole importer of Don Julio Tequila in South Africa. This led to him investing in 411 Distributors in 2023, a business he said was founded by a close friend, where he would eventually become director. Together, they began importing Ocho Tequila and other premium tequila brands. In a short time, 411 became one of South Africa's leading tequila distributors. Weinberg oversees the company's growth and focuses on delivering top-tier tequila to the local market.

"My passion for tequila has driven me to learn the intricacies of the trade, understanding what makes a great product, and tailoring offerings to the local consumer," he said.

Weinberg has also delved into the entertainment industry, where in partnerships, he has helped bring out renowned DJ groups like KeineMusic and Monolink to South Africa.

Weinberg's biggest challenge has been managing his attention deficit disorder, which has an impact on focus, organisation, and written communication. "Growing up with major learning disabilities, I had to overcome obstacles that most would consider limiting," said Weinberg. "But instead of letting them hold me back, I found my passion in business and used it as a vehicle to achieve my goals. On paper, I shouldn't have achieved the success I have, but my passion for business, drive to have an impact, and determination to overcome obstacles have led me to where I am today."

His philosophy for success is rooted in his belief that success comes from responsibility. "Success," he said, "involves not just reaching milestones, but embracing a mindset of never giving up and never accepting the word 'no'".

His greatest achievement to date has been proving that conventional rules and limitations don't apply to him. "I've overcome doubts and defied expectations by building a strong, respected name within my community. The true measure of my success lies in establishing a reputation that's associated with integrity, value, and positive impact."

What's more, he has used his success to help those around him in South Africa and abroad. Early in his career, Weinberg sponsored a Fingertips of Africa food truck and food scheme during the COVID-19 pandemic that continues to provide meals to townships and underprivileged schools.

Similarly, in 2022, inspired by respect for soldiers in the Israel Defense Forces, he sponsored the construction of a shul on a special forces base. He has also been actively involved in supporting soldiers through braais and other projects. In October 2023, he organised a fundraising campaign that provided thousands of pairs of *tzitzit*, food, helmets, tactical vests, and other supplies to soldiers in Israel amidst the conflict. He has also made

several trips to Israel, visiting army bases, and hosted a braai on the Gaza border for hundreds of soldiers.

One moment he will never forget is organising a braai on the Gaza border in June this year for soldiers who had just come out of the battlefield and hadn't eaten a home-cooked meal for a week. "We provided top-quality meat including steaks, sausages, lamb chops, rice, chips, and fresh bread, offering them a truly remarkable and comforting meal," Weinberg said.

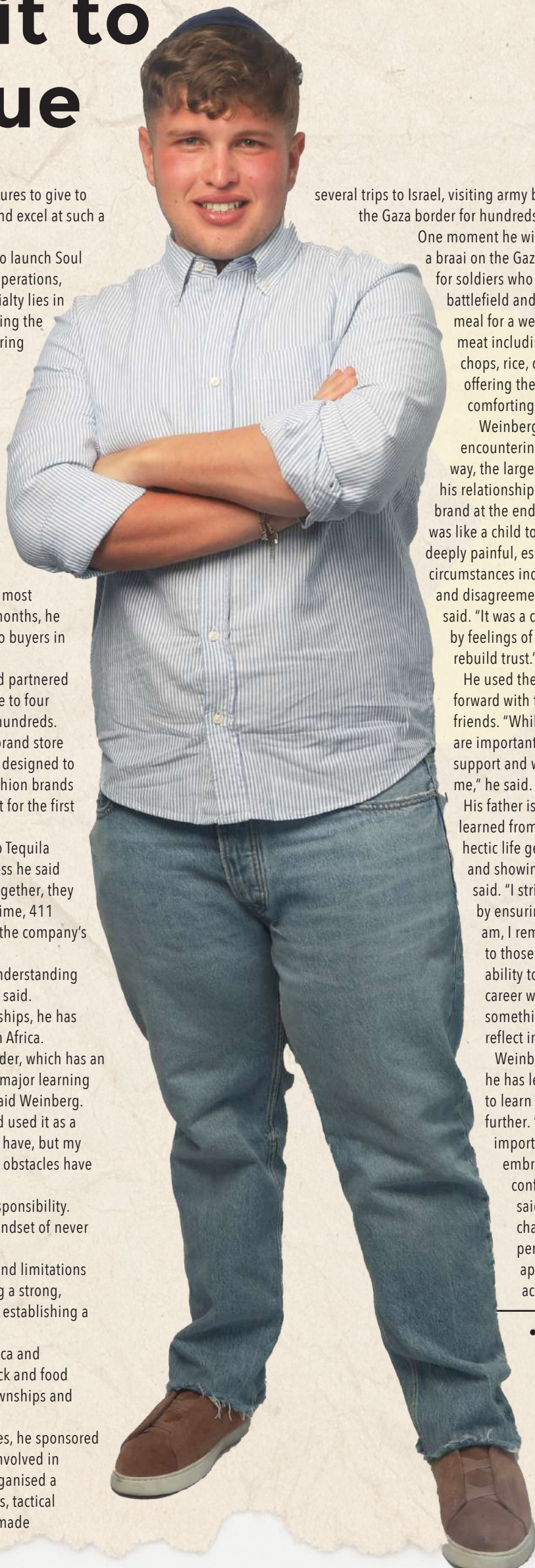
Weinberg hasn't escaped unscathed, encountering many obstacles along the way, the largest of which is having to end his relationship with a major fashion reselling brand at the end of 2023. "This business was like a child to me, and the departure was deeply painful, especially due to unforeseen circumstances including geopolitical conflicts and disagreements with my partner," he said. "It was a challenging period marked by feelings of betrayal and a struggle to rebuild trust."

He used the experience to propel him forward with the support of family and friends. "While work and financial success are important, they mean little without the support and well-being of those around me," he said.

His father is his biggest inspiration. "I've learned from him that regardless of how hectic life gets, prioritising relationships and showing up for others is crucial," he said. "I strive to implement this lesson by ensuring that, no matter how busy I am, I remain available and supportive to those around me. My father's ability to balance his demanding career while placing family first is something I deeply admire and aim to reflect in my own life and work."

Weinberg hopes to use everything he has learned and will continue to learn to propel his businesses further. "My journey underscores the importance of standing out and embracing uniqueness rather than conforming to the norm," he said. "Despite facing numerous challenges and setbacks, my persistence and innovative approach have led to notable achievements at a young age."

• Josh Weinberg is also nominated in The Eric Ellerine Entrepreneur category





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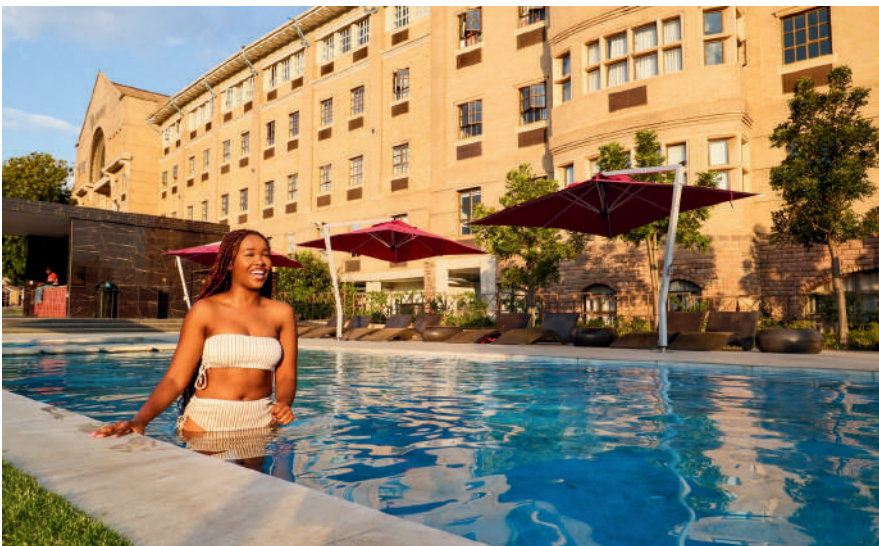


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