

Charity veterans aim even higher

Volunteers past and present plan to take on Mount Kilimanjaro

ANDRIQUES CHÉ PETERSEN

Do not be surprised to see former ballerina Fiona Budd jogging through suburbia in Johannesburg with heavy bags of sugar on her back.

This is how she will prepare to conquer the highest peak in Africa.

Budd and fellow Vodacom Change the World volunteers Tammy Dutton and Gerhard Greyling will extend their charitable endeavours by climbing Mount Kilimanjaro.

Budd and Greyling were part of the inaugural group of last year's volunteers; Dutton is currently serving her time.

'We really wanted there to be a message of hope in all this'

The volunteerism campaign, which is run in conjunction with Times Media Group, publisher of the Sunday Times, pays 10 skilled South Africans to work for a year at a charity of their choice.

The trio will tackle the mountain with the lead singer of local rock band Wonderboom, Cito Otto — and possibly Olympic rowing gold medalist Sizwe Ndlovu, if he is able to take a break from training — in July next year.

"I already go to gym and I'm a former ballet dancer so that's part of my training," said Budd, the former managing director of the South African Ballet Theatre.

"Our expedition leader will be giving us a training schedule. We'll be doing things like running up and down hills with sacks of sugar because apparently it helps. We'll be carrying heavy backpacks on the climb at high altitude."



'I reckon it will be good for my head and for my heart'

Budd said that the expedition was conceived by Greyling to include only Vodacom Change the World volunteers.

"Gerhard contacted me when he had the idea . . . I said definitely because I've always wanted to climb Kilimanjaro. It's on my bucket list and it's for a really good cause."

"And to do it, we had to fundraise. And with my previous experience in fundraising and marketing, I said I'd be very happy to take over that role."

The team must raise a total of R300 000 to pay for the climb. Otto will release a song early next year, composed specifically to raise funds for the climb. He runs an organisation called Peace Starts, which promotes the International Day of Peace on September 21.

He said: "We were working together with the Charities Aid Foundation with our Pledge for Peace campaign and that's how we got involved with the climb."

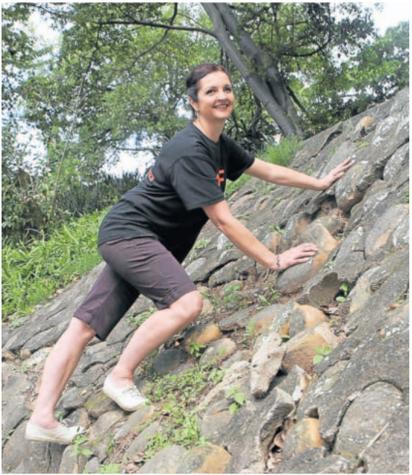
He said that although he planned to do the climb without his fellow band members, they were backing his efforts all the way.

"Wonderboom will always back me when I do the climb to Kilimanjaro. I'll obviously be doing it as myself but [the band] will always be around and willing to take part in charity events and such."

Nothing can keep him from climbing Africa's highest peak.

"I'm definitely going to do it. I'm more excited than nervous. I know it's going to be challenging but I reckon I'll be more excited than anything else. I love challenging myself. I love adventure. I reckon it will be good for my head and for my heart."

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ROCKY PATH: Fiona Budd will be part of the Vodacom volunteers' group climbing Kilimanjaro. Picture: THEMBINKOSI DWAYISA

The team will raise funds for the Sandton SPCA, the Charities Aid Foundation Southern Africa, the Association for Persons with Disabilities and the Jane Goodall Institute's Roots & Shoots initiative.

"Besides the fundraising side of it, we really wanted there to be a message of hope in all of this. There are so many things

that people get downhearted about," said Budd.

"We want this to be a climb of hope. We'll be taking peoples' messages of hope up the mountain with us," said Budd. Photos of their messages will be shared via social media.

"We want to show how different people can come together and climb for a common cause."



TRIBUTE TO MARIKANA: The work of Khaya Witbooi, a self-taught artist from the Eastern Cape, is featured on the walls of a run-down mansion in Cape Town. The space was 'donated' to 20 artists to display their work before the building is turned into a boutique hotel. Picture: HALDEN KROG

BOBBY JORDAN

ARTIST Khaya Witbooi has helped transform a historical building that was once a haven for drug dealers into a work of art.

Just last year he was living in a city night shelter and had only ever sold a few drawings.

Now he's one of 20 artists whose work will be part of a new boutique hotel in Cape Town.

The San Remo Guest House, one of the country's oldest buildings, was home to more than 80 tenants when the run-down property was bought on auction last year by investors including artist Marion Geiger.

The 30-bedroom mansion, near the famous Mount Nelson Hotel, fell into disrepair and was identified as a problem building by city authorities. It was in such poor condition that floorboards were missing, doors broken and rooms partitioned with asbestos.

Geiger and her husband initially hired a team to assess the potential for turning the 200-year-old building into a boutique hotel. But then the couple set tongues wagging

Artful move to turn a squat into exhibition space

when they brought in the 20 artists to create a temporary art gallery on the property.

The building became the centre of an art project to highlight their work until renovations begin. Each artist will donate some of their work to decorate the new hotel.

Last week an open house exhibition revealed how some of the rooms' mouldy walls were transformed into drawing boards. A huge plastic installation took the place of missing floorboards in one of the rooms.

"We were looking for a building where we could create a hotel," said Geiger, whose husband works in property.

"We felt the building needed life and we thought let us bring

in artists," she said. They approached the University of Cape Town's fine art department to help identify suitable candidates.

The couple also arranged for a photographer to document the building's tenants. "Even during the art exhibition some of the people who used to live there came back to share their stories," Geiger said.

"The building has a life. It has a long history, and it will have a long future," she said.

However, the biggest surprise was the emergence of Witbooi, a once homeless artist who grew up in Kwanobuhle township in the Eastern Cape.

His painting of a slain Marikana miner was the highlight of the show.

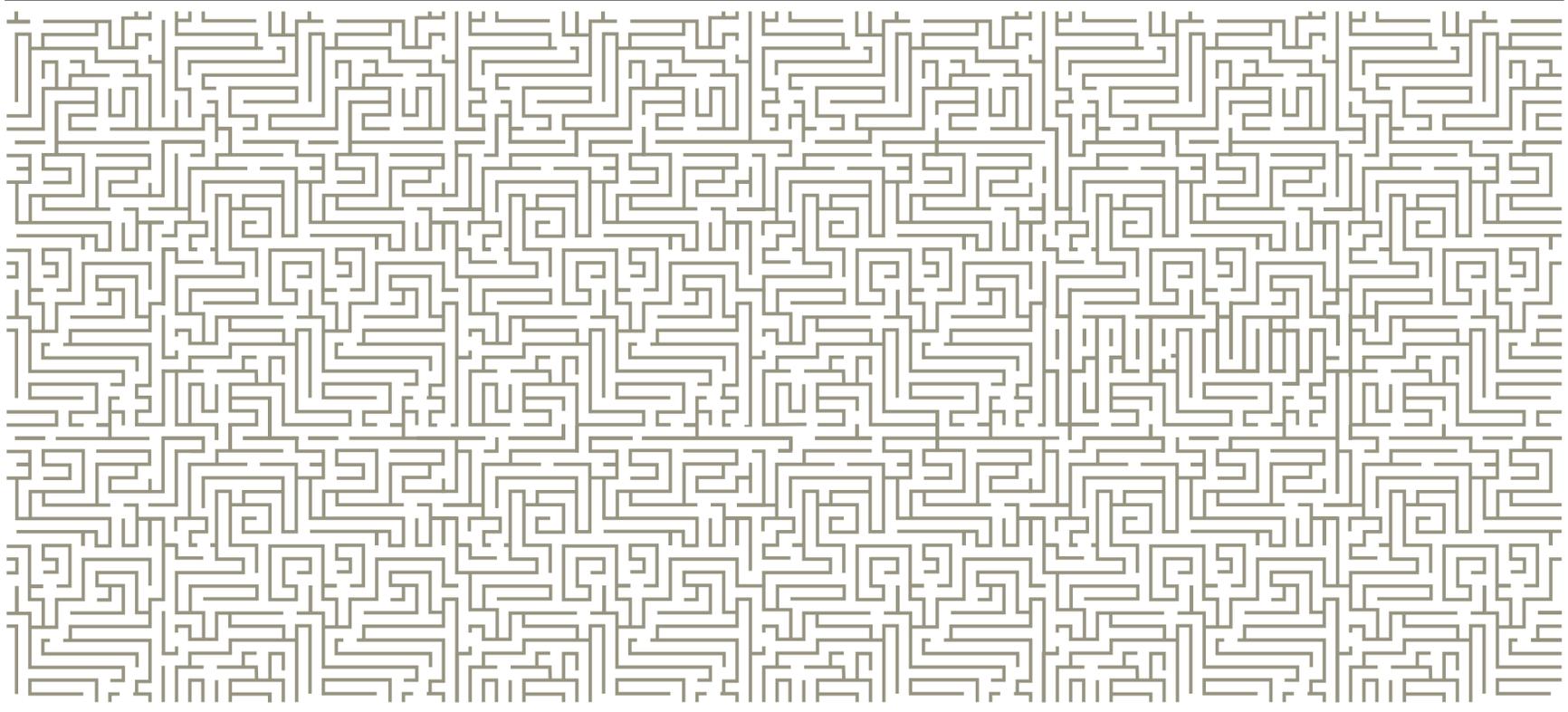
The stencil-style painting, based on Michelangelo's famous *Pieta*, which depicts Jesus and Mary, shows a slain Marikana mineworker in his mother's lap.

Only last year Witbooi was living in a shelter. He was discovered by a local gallery owner. Witbooi said: "If [the building] looked kind-of old and scary but, having no other option, I began to appreciate what it is — and actually it is the nicest place you could ever find."

Witbooi previously worked at a McDonald's outlet and as a freelance courtroom illustrator for a newspaper.

He said artists had a vital role to give voice to a nation in mourning: "I feel like we are too afraid to say, okay, what the hell was that? It is almost like everyone is speaking through a small hole, not wanting to get their voices heard because our government is flammable — they catch fire too easily."

Another exhibiting artist, Bianca de Klerk, said: "Exhibiting in this amazing old building is every artist's dream and we had such supportive hosts together with a dynamic group of people."



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