

## MEDIA RELEASE

8 February 2016

### **HIGH ROLLERS ENTER OCC 2016 WHEELCHAIR RACE**

Competitive sporting spirit is running high as entries roll in for the 2016 Outeniqua Wheelchair Challenge (OCC) – a day of wheelchair racing that fills the streets of George with spectators as over 1000 athletes whizz along the route to the finish line.

This year's event takes place on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> February in George, which has been the host city for this prestigious event since its inception in 2002.

The 2015 champions – the high rollers – will be there in force to defend their hard-earned titles in 2016. Well-known wheelchair athlete Ernst van Dyk flew over the finish line in record time last year, with second- and third-placed athletes only seconds behind him. Will he remain unbeaten at this event for a fifth year running? That remains to be seen.

And, not to be outdone, the women's 2015 42.2km champion, Ayishetu Sidu from Ghana, has entered the 2016 marathon. She will travel all the way from West Africa to maintain her championship title.

But it is not only the serious athletes who enter. Everyone and anyone with physical disability is encouraged to participate – there are several different races that take place on the same day - a marathon (42.2km), half marathon (21.1km), 10 km race and the 5km Fun Event for those who just want to enjoy themselves.

So what is it, exactly, that inspires athletes to converge on George from all corners of South Africa as well as other far-flung countries in Africa and Europe, some travelling for two full days, just to enter this popular OCC event?

OCC race organiser Ansie Swart explains, 'It is so much more than the R236 000 prize money that is up for grabs. What this event does for people with physical disability is to restore their dignity, gives people faith in their own ability, gives people a chance to feel human again and to get fit with a goal. And, of course, the OCC gives competitors the chance to have loads of fun and make new friends!'

So far, at least 20 Zimbabwean athletes will line up under starters orders on the day, alongside a contingent from Ghana, and plenty of local South African athletes – with entries continuing to pour in from all over.

Swart, who has served on the OCC committee for the past six years, praised the OCC sponsors for their support. 'The staunch and ongoing support of our main sponsor, George Airport, for the sixth year running, and the help of our other sponsors, enables us to present the OCC event, assist disadvantaged athletes with travel, provide meals, accommodation, prizes and all the other aspects that ensure the athletes' safety and make the event a success.'

Brenda Vorster, George Airport manager is proud to align George Airport with the OCC. 'People with physical disabilities benefit directly from our support of the OCC challenge. As a responsible corporate citizen of South Africa, this fact is very important to us. The knowledge that we are making a positive difference to an often-overlooked sector through our sponsorship, highlights the importance of our ongoing involvement. The provision of mobility to those with physical disabilities, and the highlighting of their plight, is key to improving facilities in the future.'

Thanks to tireless work by Swart's team of OCC committee members – all volunteers, together with the Rotary Club of George – the OCC races happen without incident each year.

Swart is endlessly grateful for the community support. 'This year, the event is also supported by these sponsors – *The George Herald* is the media sponsors, Kempston Truck Hire and Kempston Motor Group Trust transport sponsors, and Mr Ice the drinks sponsor. Other goods and monetary sponsors are: Safari, Orthopaedic Services George, ER24, Millers Attorneys, R&S Communications, Lancewood, Garden Route Mall, Dept. Sport & Recreation, Town Lodge and Oakhurst Hotel'

George Municipality has acted as host city for the OCC for the past 14 years, providing monetary and essential logistical support. With the safety of athletes the key objective, George Municipality assists by giving permission to close the entire route to traffic, with more than 130 volunteer George residents serving as marshals to assist the local Traffic and Law Enforcement officials on the route.

And on the Big Day, the community comes out in force to help – over 1000 volunteers push participants in the Fun Event, hand out wheelchairs, prepare post-race meals and assist with 'anything and everything!' according to Swart. Any volunteers keen to help in 2016 – please contact the organisers.

All OCC participants must be physically disabled and in a wheelchair for the duration of the race. Some wheelchairs are available to borrow, but this must be booked in advance on the entry form. A wheelchair may be a buggy, racing chair, hand cycle, rugby- basketball- or tennis wheelchair or an ordinary wheelchair.

Entry forms can be faxed to 088 044 8736766. Entries can also be done online at [www.georgeocc.co.za](http://www.georgeocc.co.za). Further details, photographs, and accommodation deals can be found on the web.

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ENDS (850 words)

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**Pic 1:**

Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> February 2016 – diarise this! It's the date that the Outeniqua Wheelchair Challenge (OCC) takes place in George this year. Here, race organiser Ansie Swart gives a passionate "Thumbs Up!" as Ernst van Dyk wins the men's 42.2km marathon. Van Dyk, who has won the race for several consecutive years amidst fierce competition, will be defending his title in 2016.



**Pics 2 - 5**

Thousands of athletes enter the OCC wheelchair race in George, which takes place on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> February this year. While some competitors train hard for the 42.2km marathon, the half marathon and the 10km races, there are many who just enjoy themselves in the 5km Fun Event. These fun pics show a friendly wave from a young boy in his wheelchair, a group of entrants in the fun race, a proud medal-winner in the 10km event and and one man providing musical entertainment for his wheelchair pusher and all who are near him!



