

# Her winning formula is unmatched

By Amn Tebogo Kekana

Photo: WO2 David Nomtshongwana

Although females make up more than half the population of South Africa and the world, women and girls have endured discrimination in most societies for thousands of years. In the past, their husbands or fathers treated them as property, they could not own land, and they could not vote or go to school. They were also subjected to beatings and abuse and could not do anything about it.

Fortunately that is, however, not the case with the Department of Defence (DOD), specifically within the South African National Defence Force (SANDF). Inspired by its slogan "An employer of choice", the DOD has a firm belief in empowering deserving female personnel to occupy powerful positions.

One such is Brig Gen Marthie Visser, recently promoted to the post of Director Corporate Communication (DCC). Brig Gen Visser is testimony to the fact that the ability to hold a job should not depend on the arrangement of the body's chromosomes, but on the abilities and capabilities of the person as well as on a strong character.

Brig Gen Visser is proof that over the last hundred years progress has been made in gaining equal rights for women around the world, especially in the working environment.

"I take my work very seriously and I do it with passion. I set achievable goals and strive to attain each one of them, no matter how long it takes. I am a realist and am very handy when it comes to small home projects; everything I start, I finish. I believe that I have the same competencies as men



**Brig Gen Marthie Visser, the newly promoted Director of Corporate Communication in the Department of Defence.**

have, although I do not aim to compete with them. I am feminine and I do not plan to lose my softer side trying to match other people," she said.

Asked how she dealt with the pressure and workload, she was adamant that her approach played a crucial role in distinguishing when to think with her heart and when to use her head. She added that she tries to stay level-headed when making decisions.

This remarkable fifty-three-year old woman, the eldest of four sisters, was born in Vanderbijlpark in the Vaal Triangle. As the first-born, she had to take responsibility at a young age. She had a normal upbringing and the love of her siblings is the essence of her childhood memories.

"I am an extrovert, although I value my private space and sometimes feel the need to be alone with nature and 'connect'. I just thrive on

the peace and tranquillity of nature. My partner and I, with our dogs, enjoy exploring the countryside at every possible opportunity and appreciating life. We enjoy birdwatching, long walks and of course, nothing beats a good braai on a summer's day! When I am not busy in the office, you might just bump into me wearing my binoculars and appreciating life," she beamed.

She feeds her mind by reading biographies of people who have made a difference to society, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and works on the social sciences. She is also a member of the South African Air Force Association (SAAFA) Pretoria Committee, where she contributes her time to assisting former military members in need.

Although she is not married, she loves her kitchen and cooks well and also enjoys getting her hands dirty in her garden. She adores children and her family, and that is why she is a godmother to her sister's three children and admits to spoiling them every chance she gets.

## **AD ASTRA MAGAZINE OPENED A WINDOW INTO HER WORLD**

Her career background and experience in Corporate Communication includes the following:

- At the age of seventeen, she was among the first group of females to be trained in South Africa after World War II. It was in January 1974 at Air Force Base (AFB) Waterkloof.
- She did her Officer Forming in 1982 and held various positions before she ventured into the field of Corporate Communication.
- In 1993 she became a Lt Col and reported to Lt Gen A. Masondo.

- In 1998 she was appointed Col (SSO Internal Communication) and reported to Maj Gen Gert Opperman.
- In 2000 she was appointed as SSO Corporate Communication (SAAF) under the leadership of Maj Gen L.C Pepani.
- In 2004 - she became SSO SPP (DCC) reporting to Maj Gen D.M. Mofokeng and later to Brig Gen K.D. Mangope.

*Q: How many years of experience do you have in Corporate Communication?*

*A: Sixteen years.*

*Q: Where and what did you study?*

*A: I did a BA in Political Science and Communications at UNISA, a Professional Certificate in Government Communication and Marketing with Wits Business School & Government Communications and Information System (GCIS). I also did an Executive National Security Programme (ENSP) at the SA National Defence College, followed by Public Relations Practice and Management with the Public Relations Institute of South Africa (PRISA).*

*Q: How did you feel when you were given this post?*

*A: It is a privilege and honour to serve in this post and it is a true milestone in my career. I am a people's person and it adds to the vast amount of experience that I have acquired over the years.*

*Q: Who did you first share the news with?*

*A: I initially shared the news with my partner and sisters.*

*Q: Were you expecting it?*

*A: Not really, but then again I watched my career grow from strength to strength and I took things step by step and prepared myself for any eventual-ity. My Christian background has also taught me that God is the architect of our lives and all I have is because of Him.*

*Q: What changes can be expected during your tenure in Corporate Communication?*

*A: I have a vision to share with my directorate how to communicate better and understand what it means to fully understand our environment. We all have a purpose in life, and that is*

mainly to be of service to our fellow man. I plan to create a fruitful working relationship with my fellow communicators so that we will be able to have a dedicated professional mustering.

*Q: What leadership style have you adopted?*

*A: • Teamwork approach: Together Everybody Accomplishes More*

- I have an open-door policy, and
- Leadership is production, not position
- I believe the chain is as strong as the weakest link (the stronger ones must empower the weak), and I have learned to take every person seriously and understand the dynamics of team leadership."

What AD ASTRA Magazine has learnt from this remarkable woman is that the crux for women in senior posts in the workplace is to remain humble in their professions and to keep the eye on the ball. When women thrive, the whole society benefits and succeeding generations are given a better start in life. 