

Women of influence lead the way at CTICC



Julie-May Ellingson



Fairoza Parker



Tracy Mkhize

The South African business events industry has produced some remarkable women known for their impressive professional accomplishments, talent and passion. At the Cape Town International Convention Centre, three women, chief executive officer **Julie-May Ellingson**, chief financial officer **Fairoza Parker** and general manager: food & beverage **Tracy Mkhize**, are co-creating an exciting new phase in the convention centre's history.

Julie-May Ellingson, chief executive officer

Ms Ellingson, the CTICC's first female chief executive officer, is as comfortable on a construction site as she is in the boardroom. Now three years at the CTICC's helm, Ms Ellingson, who played a leading role in Durban's infrastructure developments for the 2010 World Cup, took on a major expansion project alongside the leadership of the Centre.

The imminent launch of the 31 148 m² CTICC East is set to further boost the profile of Cape Town as a leading global meetings destination.

"Not so long ago, venue management was really seen as an exclusively male role," said Ms Ellingson, who is also the first representative from Africa to serve on the Board of the International Association of Congress Centres (AIPC).

"Overseeing the expansion of the Centre into what will be an event venue complex has been a unique responsibility."

Under Ms Ellingson's tenure, the CTICC has also recorded its best performance, producing record profits and contributions to economic growth. The Centre has also maintained its reputation as the preferred destination for international association conferences in Africa and has earned a nomination as Africa's Leading Meetings & Conference Centre in this year's prestigious World Travel Awards.

Ms Ellingson is particularly bullish about raising the profile of the meetings industry and the role of convention centres.

"Business and scientific events are drivers of the knowledge economy. Convention centres don't just help to fill hotel beds, they are powerful platforms that facilitate knowledge exchange, scientific discovery, investment opportunities and business growth. We – women and men – should do more to raise the profile of our industry," Ms Ellingson explained.



For Ms Ellingson, being a leader also means surrounding yourself with a strong team.

"I am fortunate and honoured to lead a wonderful team of dedicated professionals at the CTICC. I firmly believe that what sets the CTICC apart – now and in the future – is its employees. I might be steering the ship, but they are the ones keeping it afloat."

While the business events industry has produced celebrated women in leadership, Ms Ellingson points out the serious lack of women in leadership positions in the business sector, generally.

"In South Africa, young women need to see how women in leadership positions succeed. There are still far too few women in management positions.

"Volumes of academic work indicate that women leaders add a set of skills, experience and perspectives to a company which translate into better business results."

Fairoza Parker, chief financial officer

The CTICC's stellar financial performance as an entity of government (the City of Cape Town and Western Cape Government are majority shareholders along with SunWest International) and its record of four consecutive clean audits, speak to Fairoza Parker's talent and strategic financial management of the Centre.

Ms Parker has led the Centre's financial operations for the past 10 years and has cultivated a committed team to deal with the rigours of government administration and compliance and the agility of a five-star globally, competitive events venue.

"Generally-speaking, the CTICC is a fairly young organisation and over time we've made great strides in the promotion and growth of women within all levels in the organisation. I believe the venues that will be leaders in the future will have an agile, inclusive and diverse workforce."

Ms Parker added: "With the opening of CTICC East in our sights, this is an incredibly exciting time to lead the CTICC's business model development."

Ms Parker never forgets that her individual success is underpinned by great team work.

"In order for a CFO to excel, it requires a range of leadership qualities combined with the support of the board, your colleagues and your team."

Tracy Mkhize, general manager: food & beverage

Tracy Mkhize agrees that collaboration and team work are key to creating exceptional events. Ms Mkhize joined the CTICC in July 2016, after five years as the general manager of a Peermont hotel, casino and convention resort in North West province.

Ms Mkhize is especially passionate about adding value to the client experience. "I want my team to create great results

through superior client service.

"This translates into motivating your team and encouraging them to see every encounter with a client as an opportunity to strengthen a partnership."

Ms Mkhize, who also steers the Centre's Employment Equity Committee, is also committed to recognising young talent – regardless of gender – and assisting young people to advance their career in an industry she discovered only after an uninspiring stint as a laboratory technician.

"I love working with the next generation of managers and helping them learn from my experiences.

"Leading large teams is a great responsibility and I appreciate the fact that you can make a real impact by taking an interest in the careers of the young people you lead."

Ms Mkhize is also optimistic about the CTICC's expansion project and the opportunities this represents to a new generation of women in business events.

"The establishment of a new facility offers great learning opportunities for our younger generation of staff members and a chance to make their mark in a new way." ■



TeL: +27 (0)21 410 5000

Fax: +27 (0)21 410 5001

Email: info@cticc.co.za

Physical Address: Convention Square, 1 Lower Long Street, Cape Town 8001, South Africa



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