

# Council to launch TV network

The Communications Department has redesigned the city's website and *MetroBeat* magazine, reports **Siyabonga Maphumulo**

**A**S IF IN response to a recent call made by the MEC for Local Government, Housing and Traditional Affairs to KwaZulu-Natal municipalities to provide effective dialogue between government and communities, the eThekweni Municipality's Communications Department has not only improved on its existing communications tools but is introducing new ones.

Not only will this unit be launching a new-look *MetroBeat* magazine, the council's official magazine, and an internal TV network in September, but it has also redesigned the municipality's website, [www.durban.gov.za](http://www.durban.gov.za), adding lively graphics and reorganising the site.

The department also launched the *eZasegagasini Metro* three years ago, a

fortnightly 12-page tabloid with a print run of 400 000 copies, distributed throughout eThekweni.

"There is a lot of change," said the outgoing Acting Head of the department, Vasantha Angamuthu.

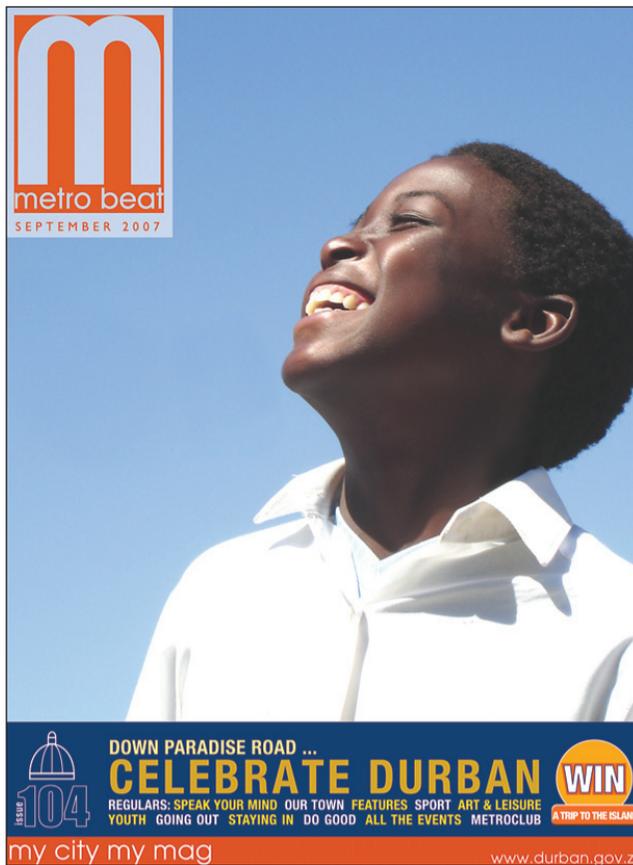
"The magazine now more appropriately reflects all the communities of eThekweni.

"It's fresher, younger, more in touch with our readers. We are also going out of our way to draw readers in."

She said new features would be introduced in the coming months, which delve deeper into eThekweni's varied communities.

"In September we will launch Our Town, a feature which will look at a different street, suburb, unit, township or community in eThekweni. Our first feature is on KwaMashu and will appear," she said.

Durban Family, is another



**CLEAN:** MetroBeat magazine has a bright new look

new feature. It's a place where citizens can write in with stories about their families, with pictures from their family albums.

She said like *MetroBeat*, the website was an important marketing tool for the city and needed to be updated to remain relevant.

"Our new website is easy to navigate, clearly organised and now speaks to all the businesses of the municipality.

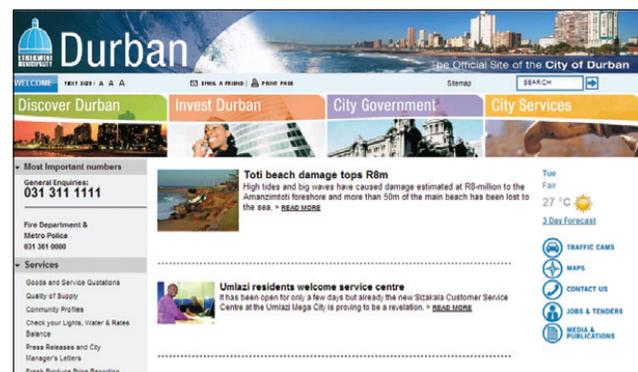
"It is designed around how people use a website and we plan to introduce, over the next couple of months, a

range of great innovations so that people get onto the site daily," she said.

Included in these innovations are features which enable users to log on and customise the site to their own requirements.

Angela Spencer, who is the webmaster, said some forthcoming functionalities for the site include users being able to host online discussions around city and host their own blogs on the site.

"There is also a 'mayor's blog' where the mayor writes about his daily life in



**FRESH:** The official eThekweni Municipality website – [www.durban.gov.za](http://www.durban.gov.za) – has been redesigned

office and flash movies about aspects of life in Durban," Spencer said.

She agreed with Angamuthu that the current design, which had been in place since 2004, needed "a fresh look which embodies the atmosphere of our city. The volume of information on the site has grown and the site had to be reorganised accordingly.

"Finally, there are new web technologies and practices that we wanted to support, like blogging for example," she said

Spencer said the aim was to make life much easier for the city's customers.

She said although there was not yet a feature on the site which allowed the public to make online payments, they could nonetheless check their city services account balances online.

Job seekers and people bidding for tenders can also download city job and tender advertisements on the homepage.

Another brave new venture that the city has embarked on is the launch

of an internal TV station, which is expected to go live in September.

The station, which will broadcast mainly marketing material and short films about municipal projects and programmes, will be available through large screens at all Sizakala centres – the municipality's one-stop customer service centres.

"Customers queuing to do municipal business – whether to pay their rates and utilities bills or to make inquiries – will be able to watch this television network while waiting in the queue," said Angamuthu.

She said while the station would only be available at only the 40 Sizakala centres at first, "with the rapid expansion of technology, I am hoping everyone will soon be able to have easy access to this facility".

The station will be run by the video unit located within the Communications Department.

The unit will also provide the footage for the station and is being expanded to perform this function.

# Communications boss bids farewell

## METRO REPORTER

ACTING Head of Communications Vasantha Angamuthu has resigned from the municipality to take up a new post in Delhi, India on September 1.

Angamuthu, who joined the municipality in January 2004 after 17 years as a journalist, returns to the media with her appointment as Vice President: Product Development and Content at one of India's largest media companies, Hindustan Media Times Ltd.

She said making the decision to leave the municipality and Durban had been difficult. "I agonised over this for months before saying yes. Durban will always be home."

Angamuthu said she joined the eThekweni Municipality because of the exciting and innovative development work being done and the communications opportunities which were not being tapped.

"When I was presented with the opportunity to join South Africa's best run municipality in 2003, I had to take it. From the beginning we have said our approach to communications would be a developmental – that communications at a government institution is not about spin doctoring and good PR; it is about connecting the citizenry to opportunities and engaging people in the development process."

She was appointed as a project executive, with the task of restructuring the communications unit and launching a newspaper for the council.

She stepped into the role as acting head when the head of communications, Sandile Thusi, died in 2004.

"My three-and-a-half years here has been challenging and rewarding. EThekweni has innovative, forward-thinking leaders."

During her leadership of the Communications Unit, it has grown and a



**NEW CHAPTER:** City Manager Michael Sutcliffe, outgoing Acting Communications Department Head, Vasantha Angamuthu, artist Peter Machen, and Deputy Mayor Logie Naidoo at the launch of *Durban: A Paradise and Its People* this week. Angamuthu has resigned to take up a plum press job in India

Picture: THEMBA KHUMALO

number of outsourced services have been brought in-house, resulting in cost savings.

She said highlights of her time at the municipality included:

□ The creation of the council's fortnightly newspaper, *eZasegagasini Metro*;

□ The redesign of *MetroBeat*, the longstanding monthly council magazine which was re-launched this week and which will be in people's homes in September;

□ The redesign of the municipal website to appeal more directly to users and citizens who need to engage instantly with the municipality;

□ The creation of an in-house graphics team which is expected to save the municipality at least R600 000 a year;

□ The organisation of the communications unit into a more effective team;

□ The provision of a media monitoring service;

□ The development of an internal television network which will launch in the next few weeks;

□ The publication of books and marketing materials such as *Innovations, Making City Strategies Work* and the recent *Durban: A Paradise and Its People*. And having the

municipality collaborate on other books such as *Durban in a Nutshell* and *Facts about Durban*; and

□ The creation of communications teams dealing with portfolios of municipal units.

She said working with City Manager Michael Sutcliffe, Deputy City Manager Siphon Cele and colleagues such as Head of Geographic Information and Policy Jacque Subban, Head of Planning Soobs Moonsammy had been a great experience.

Angamuthu said she was very sad to say goodbye to the municipality's communications team.

"It is not surprising that many people in the council want to work in the Communications Unit. I may be biased but this must be the best communications team in the country, government or otherwise.

"It is a team with a diverse range of skills, complementary personalities and hard-working professionals.

"It is a relatively young team with much drive and energy."

Asked what she would miss about home, Angamuthu said: "This great bunch of people I have worked with, my family and friends, all my favourite restaurants like *Spice* and *Café 99*, the beach (even though I rarely went it was great knowing it was there), the second hand bookshops like Bookbase on Florida, Botanic Gardens and the city centre which some people stay away from but which still throbs with life and colour and where you can find great stuff at little hidey-hole shops."

Angamuthu, who was headhunted for the prestigious job at Hindustan Media Times Ltd said the job offer was unexpected but that it presented an opportunity to return to the media industry.

Her 14-year-old daughter Nina will move with her to Delhi and, she said, they plan to come back home as often as possible.