

Grave shortage warning

KIROSHA NAICKER

THE city's Head of Cemeteries has warned that eThekweni will face a crisis unless a solution to the lack of burial space is found.

However, Thembinkosi Ngcobo, Head of the city's Parks, Recreation, Cemeteries and Culture Unit, said proposals were on the table to tackle the problem but would require a "change of mindset" by religious and community leaders.

The proposals include placing a time limit on graves, with corpses exhumed after a maximum of 10 years and then cremated; efforts would also be made to encourage cremations rather than burials. The council was looking at three options after cremations: to develop a site for the disposal of remains; reburial of ashes; and disposal at sea.

Ngcobo has confirmed that 98% of cemeteries in eThekweni have reached full capacity, with the exception of the new Etafuleni cemetery. This meant families were having to bury loved ones in recycled graves.

He said this was to be expected given the seven-fold increase in demand for burial facilities over the past seven years. "There is no space anymore," said Ngcobo.

Campaigning was one way of encouraging cremations, but Ngcobo said a campaign three years ago in the city's black communities had been poorly received. "Politicians and community and religious leaders did not want to hear anything about it and in one community an elderly man stood up and angrily commented that in effect we were forcing him to 'sleep' with his mother," said Ngcobo.

Since then, however, many have realised how serious the situation is and there had been an increase in cremations, he said.

Ngcobo, who is also the President of the Institute for Environmental and Recreational Management, will

meet officials managing cemeteries in other municipalities early next month. The aim is to assess the situation and finalise proposals. This is to be followed in April with plans to convene a national cemeteries conference which would include religious and community leaders.

Ngcobo hoped the proposals would be implemented in the first half of next year. He said he planned to interact extensively with the leaders to make the process of consultation as tangible as possible to the public.

Opposition

"The main Christian communities are opposed to cremation but have not had big issues with recycling.

"Muslim leaders have indicated they support recycling but will oppose the removal of bodies after six or seven years to cremate them," he said.

The time limit on graves and the recycling proposal aim to find a solution before a crisis develops, Ngcobo said, adding that there would be chaos in the future if the matter was not resolved. "Families may have to wait for up to a month for a gravesite. Mortuaries would be full and standards would be compromised," he said.

Many people would have to undergo a "radical change of mindset in their cultural and religious beliefs to cope with realities of diminishing burial space", he said.

Also proposed was a ban on concrete slabs on top of graves; this would make maintenance and recycling easier.

He said the council was making progress in educating the public about the issue. "We are arranging for schools and the public to visit our facilities and observe a real cremation taking place," said Ngcobo.

Ngcobo stressed that "no one would be forced to take in our proposal. We will phase in the implementation over the next few years," he said.



SMART START: Pupils, eThekweni and provincial dignitaries attend an opening function at the newly-built R7-million Illovu Primary School

SWITCHED ON: Public Works MEC Lydia Johnson and eThekweni Mayor Obed Mlaba pay a visit to the computer centre at Velabahleke Secondary, in Umlazi

Pictures: BONGA MSIMANG

Council lends support to some 'special' schools

VERNON MCHUNU

THE 2007 school year opened on a high note in Durban with a top-level visit to two of the city's "special" schools.

Mayor Obed Mlaba was flanked by KwaZulu-Natal Premier S'bu Ndebele, Education MEC Ina Cronje and Public Works MEC Lydia Johnson recently, as they welcomed pupils to the newly-built R7-million Illovu Primary School and later to the top-performing Velabahleke Secondary in Umlazi.

As the trio announced a donation of computers and sports gear to the schools, the message to the pupils was loud and clear: "Work hard, play hard and succeed."

Velabahleke Secondary was paid a visit in recognition of its improving pass rate over the past four years, while Illovu Primary was special in that it had been erected as a result of efforts by city councillors.

Ndebele congratulated Cllr Stanley Xulu for his hard work that had helped speed the project to its finality.

Christi Naude, spokeswoman for Cronje, said the double-storey primary school would take the pressure off several neighbouring schools.

Thanks to the education department, it would be equipped with computers to help introduce children to computer-aided studies at a much early age.

Encouraging

"It is encouraging that on day one, all pupils and teachers are here and learning will begin immediately. This is the culture we are trying to entrench," said Cronje.

Velabahleke's star has been in the ascendancy. It achieved an 87% matric pass rate in 2003, followed by 93% in 2004, a promising 94% in 2005, and 97% last year.

Teachers at the school told *eZasegasini Metro* that they were aiming for a 100% rate this year. In addition, one of the school's matriculants, Khulekani Nhlumayo, scored 100% for both maths and science.

Cronje announced that 20 new computers would be supplied by the government to the school.

Ndebele handed over sports kit – including jerseys and balls – and encouraged children and teachers to include sport in the school package as a way of honing talent and keeping the mind and body healthy.

"Our visit to schools will not be limited to the well-performing schools. We will also visit the poor performers to encourage them, because we believe that they can only do better next time," he said, adding that the better performing schools faced a challenge to ensure they maintain their positions.

IN BRIEF

Repairs close KwaMuhle

THE KwaMuhle Museum will be closed to the public for the next seven months.

The Ordnance Road building was recently inspected by engineers who found it needed major repairs to stabilise its structure. The municipality's Libraries and Heritage Department apologises for any inconvenience which the closure may cause. For more information on eThekweni's local history museums call 031 311 2223/9.

New floral art course

DURBAN'S Botanic Gardens, in association with Linda Larratt, is offering Floral Art courses to anyone who enjoys flower arranging.

Larratt, who is a qualified floral art judge as well as an active competitor in local and international competitions, will facilitate the course. Courses take place from 21 February to 29 March. The course content is designed to ensure novice, intermediate and experienced florists will all benefit.

For more information and prices contact Linda Larratt on 082 854 0344.

Work started on Umgeni Rd

ROADWORKS on Umgeni Road, between the N2 interchange and Quarry Road East, are underway.

The road was identified for rehabilitation by the municipality's Engineering Department.

The estimated R6-million rehabilitation is expected to be completed by 2 March.

Work will be carried out from 7pm to 5am from Sunday to Thursday.

Road users are urged to exercise caution during this period. For more information contact Seelan Naidoo on 031 311 7509.

Learn from a top gardener

DURBAN Botanic Gardens will host Rosemary Alexander as part of its 2007 lecture series.

Alexander, winner of five medals at the Chelsea Flower Show, founder and principal of the English Gardening School in London, qualified landscape architect, lecturer, broadcaster, author, designer and gardener, will be exposing people to the world of cutting edge contemporary gardening design and planting.

The lecture takes place on 8 February from 9am to noon at a cost of R100 a person.

For bookings and more information, call 031 309 1170.

City health unit helps Aids orphans

GABI KHUMALO

WITH HIV/Aids and Tuberculosis (TB) claiming many lives in eThekweni, the municipality has come up with a plan to help vulnerable families, especially orphans.

Some people think the only way to help these families and children is through food parcels, but the city's Health Department realised the council could ill afford to encourage a dependency syndrome and while it continued to help with food relief, the council has

introduced skills training and food garden programmes.

The programmes have proved very popular, so much so that demand for them has outstripped resources.

To help alleviate matters, the department has invited non-governmental organisations, churches, community organisations, and schools to help out.

The department's Social Development and Poverty Alleviation Manager Mpho Mthembu said when the project was started a year ago, it focussed on TB patients

that were identified by nurses in local clinics.

"We identified the most needy patients with TB, and vulnerable households, provided them with a decent meal once a week, and encouraged them to start vegetable gardens," said Mthembu.

Poor areas

However, the focus was later changed to people infected with Aids and orphans from poor areas.

"When we started, there were 6 000 people but now it's

hard to say how many because the figures fluctuate. Besides the meals, we also give them food parcels to take home, clothing, and we have developed a training manual for vegetable production to guide them on how to grow a garden," said Mthembu.

She said churches helped by donating part of the produce from their gardens to the vulnerable groups and have started a soup kitchen.

Mthembu urged the private sector and individuals to get involved in the partnership to sustain the programme.