

Meet Sandra du Rand, executive manager at Ekurhuleni Disaster and Emergency Management Services

Sandra du Rand's fire fighting career started in September 1982 when she joined Benoni Fire Services. She was only 21 when she joined the emergency services, putting on her fire fighting gear, hard hat and boots, to serve the community. "There were no women in fire and emergency services in the 1980s. My boyfriend was expecting to be called up to the army but joined the Springs Fire Department instead. During this time, a newspaper article about the first female fire fighter in South Africa been appointed by Benoni Fire Services, caught my attention and I was intrigued. I decided to also apply for a position at Benoni Fire Services," recalled Du Rand.

"Only one lady was employed by Benoni Fire Services at that time, namely Lea Roos and I thought that fire fighting would be an exciting and fulfilling career. My application was successful and I was appointed as a fireman, not a 'fire lady' or ambulance assistant but as a fireman. I was the second woman in South Africa to be appointed as a fireman," said a proud Du Rand.



Du Rand was the second woman in South Africa to be appointed as fireman

She added, "I had to complete all physical fitness tests and courses that the firemen were expected to do. I was not promoted all though I complied with all the necessary qualifications and had the years of experience as the then management had doubts about the performance of female fire fighters.

I completed the National Diploma in fire technology and applied for a position as divisional officer at Bedfordview Fire Station. Consequently, I became the first woman in South Africa to be appointed in a managerial position. From 1990 to 1995 I served as the divisional officer for fire safety at Bedfordview Fire Station. Although no additional women were appointed at Bedfordview Fire Station during that period, a number of women were appointed at emergency services such as Springs, Boksburg and Germiston."

"In 1995 I was appointed at the Kempton Park Fire Station as senior divisional officer. I also completed a Higher National Diploma in Business Management and in 1997 completed the Masters Diploma Fire Technology at Pretoria Technicon, now Tshwane University of Technology. During the formation of the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality, the chief fire officer (CFO) position in Kempton Park remained vacant due to the amalgamation of the nine towns that formed the City of Ekurhuleni. ▶



Sandra du Rand was the architect of the postage stamp launch commemorating fire fighters in 2105



She is the longest serving female member in the SA emergency services sector



Sandra du Rand



Du Rand was part of a team who broke the Guinness world record for continuous CPR

► I was nominated as acting CFO for extended periods during the absence of the CFO. From 1995 to 2008, I was based in Kempton Park serving as an executive manager: proactive services before relocating in 2008 to the current headquarters of Ekurhuleni Emergency Services' in Bedfordview, still my current position," said Du Rand.

"In the position as the executive manager: proactive services, I am responsible overall for all fire safety related matters, including emergency planning, public information, education and relations (PIER) activities and risk management."

Highlights

Du Rand's career sports many highlights, which includes projects such as the Gautrain, Aerotropolis, 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup and the recent launch of the International Fire Fighter's Day stamps in June 2015. She is also the longest serving female member in the emergency services sector in South Africa and proudly achieved all relevant qualifications required for both fire and ambulance services. She also cites the couple of times she was promoted, especially when she was the first woman to be promoted to executive manager and the first woman to complete the Master's Diploma Fire Technology.

A passionate career

Although she is passionate about her career in the emergency services, Du Rand said that, "I don't think there is a person in the world that doesn't have a passion or certain level of commitment to impact on the lives of their community or understand the importance as well as responsibility of the role the entire emergency services plays, both fire and ambulance. In fact, I have never got to a stage in my career where I said, "I have had enough, I have achieved all the professional and personal goals or reached the peak of this wonderful career, seeing that there are always new opportunities or challenges. I still adore and cherish every minute of my career and believe that it is a blessing and privilege."

She continued, "Serving other people results in authenticity. From the very beginning of my career as a fire fighter, I understood that you are responsible not only for yourself but the next fire fighter or member of the public. As such your code of conduct should be of a high standard at all times. In essence, fire fighting or the emergency medical services never became just a job but a great passion, commitment and dedication. I have a never-fail attitude towards this wonderful career."

Mentors

During her career, Du Rand saw each and every woman she worked with and who excelled in their careers, as mentors.



A project highlight of Du Rands was the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup

She highlights Lena van den Merwe who emphasised that responsibility and discipline form the core of your career. "I see each woman in the service as a mentor but most importantly, my husband and sons. The support of your family is paramount when you serve people in a career such as the emergency services. It is assumed that this industry will have a negative impact on your family life. It is a blessing to have such a supportive family. They are very proud of me!"

A career in the emergency service

Du Rand added, "The emergency service is a dignified career that is diverse and allows for specialisation in various fields such as fire safety, fire operations, public awareness, rescues services and advanced life support. There are copious opportunities for personal and career growth and development. New recruits must understand that commitment, dedication and discipline are key factors to a successful career. Stay truthful, authentic and professional because the responsibility is immense. Be an outstanding reflection of what the service stands for. Make the

people proud of the service when you don the uniform."

Challenges

Du Rand quoted her first couple of years in the emergency service as her most challenging as there are only a few women who tried to excel and adapt in this very male-dominant environment. "I believe it was difficult for both men and women, though. The general perception was that women would not last in the fire or emergency services. However, I kept assuring myself of my commitment and that I will complete all the relevant qualifications necessary. I was adamant to perform the duties required of me as a fire fighter to the best of my abilities. It also proved to be an ideal opportunity to demonstrate that anybody can excel and that gender is not career limiting. The real challenges as well as opportunities lie within women. Opportunities are there for women to seize and currently women have so much going for them. I have personally noticed many dedicated, career orientated women in the

emergency services, especially the younger generation. However, it is critical to find the balance between their careers and family lives."

She added, "Women entering the service must strive to contribute positively by actively enhancing the image of the emergency services as a professional, dedicated, disciplined workplace. They need to be fire fighters on the ground when there are fires and they must be women, mothers and wives when there are no incidents."

Du Rand had a long term vision from the beginning of her career and she was adamant that she wanted to study in both fire and ambulance fields of service. She wanted to ensure that she obtain all relevant qualifications, not only to better herself but to ensure a better service to the community she serves. "I enjoyed being a trail blazer and making it easier for my fellow female officers. I am very proud and thankful for the people I work with, especially the women. Everyone worked hard and deserves recognition." Salute! 