

# HIGH NEWS

October 2009

Taking back the CBD

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High Street used to form the heart of the Central Business District. Recent times have seen the 'mallification' phenomenon where businesses in Grahamstown increasingly retreat into walled complexes. Both economic and security concerns are behind this move. See page 4 and 5. Pic: Jaap Pronk



The CBD is a transient space. It forms the meeting point for all areas of Grahamstown, and brings multiple communities into a common place. Shoppers busily dart between cars as enterprising vendors hawk their wares. It is both rooted in history and engaged in the present with the diverse social milieu it attracts. Despite this, it lacks a cohesive sense of community, resulting in a number of negative consequences.

One such example is a lack of communication. Community members are apathetic when it comes to involvement in common causes, such as that of gathering together to target crime. As effective as Hi-Tec is, and as much as the police should be relied upon to provide a service, Inspector Coetzer of Grahamstown's Crime Intelligence Office insists that community initiatives are a real and necessary method of crime prevention. A community watch is only as successful as its contributing members, and as more people take an interest, the potential to overcome crime is strengthened.

Thami Mbanda backs this cause strongly, as he takes it upon himself to patrol the Thompson street community, to an extent beyond that which he is employed for. The feeling seems to be each person for themselves, as private security companies flourish. People will more readily push their panic buttons than dial 10111. This feeling has transgressed to businesses as well. The 'malfication' phenomenon, which Professor Vale speaks of, refers to the tendency, spreading even to Grahamstown, of people wishing to retreat behind walls to safeguard their property. Those who travel to the CBD no longer have to engage with all members of the community, as private parking means that shoppers are conveniently shielded from the undesirable sight of social inequality.

This is dividing rather unifying the community, and security concerns are now informing where Oatlands residents shop and interact. The fault lines are appearing as divisions emerge between the formal and informal business sector, affluent and lower income communities and public and private security systems. What is required is a call to arms. All members of the community should be informed of the existing problems and should come together to target them. Steps such as attending community forums and reporting crimes would go a long way to reaching a solution. Know your neighbours, raise awareness and immerse yourself in community concerns. Let's begin the discussion – start talking.

## Pushing the panic button

By Marisa Lourenco

Like most businesses in the CBD, African Street's bar/pizzeria House of Pirates subscribes to the private security company Hi-Tec. Manager Macdonald Chikaonda says that if there is a problem he will call Hi-Tec first because its units respond quicker than the police do. Hi-Tec will then detain criminals until the police arrive.

Chikaonda does not regard reliance on Hi-Tec as evidence of a lack of faith in the police force. "There is a greater confidence in Hi-Tec because they are paid to do this. You expect the level of service to be equal to the amount of money you pay. The police have a lot to deal with, but Hi-Tec is client-based, so as a client you expect the highest standards. They have more resources, more vehicles, and they're physically closer." He notes that it also depends on the situation. "Let's say there is a brawl – all that is needed is Hi-Tec to dissipate it."

Chikaonda has lived in Grahamstown for six years, and currently

resides on New Street. He says that having House of Pirates opposite from Pepper Grove Mall, where guards are employed to watch the premises, is probably safer for him. "Sometimes, after working the night shift, I leave here around two in the morning," he says. "There's no one in the street, but being across from security makes me feel confident and safe. It's not like walking past KFC."

What is it that makes residents wary of Bathurst Street? Chikaonda explains that it is not necessarily the street's downtrodden look nor its reputation as an unsafe area. "There's not as much visible policing that side, and so there's no deterrent for crime," he says.

Chikaonda believes that there is no obvious sense of community amongst residents in the CBD. "During the municipal strike though, the community really came around to help clean up," he comments. "So it's not something that you feel everyday. Grahamstown is a peaceful place. But if I pass by a break-in, I will report it."



A Hi-Tec vehicle ready for action. Pic: Maserati Motlounq

## Hi-Tec and the SAPS are team players

Beth Wyrill

"There is no us and them." These were the words of Inspector Coetzer of the Crime Intelligence Office at the Grahamstown Police Station. Pens poised, mouths gaping, we had to have a quick re-think about our own assumptions.

The common perception in Grahamstown is that the police and Hi-Tec are on opposite poles of the protection spectrum. One might expect a degree of animosity between the two services. A certain amount of hissing and snide commentary was not only expected, but relied upon for our story.

Imagine our surprise then, when we learned that the two have formed a sort of less than glamorous modern crime fighting duo (minus the superhero spandex). The trick is to know what can be expected of the respective services, and the best strategies for involving everyone in crime prevention.

Nomfundo Gysman, manager of Ellerines in Market Square Mall, is emphatic about her priorities in an emergency. "We use Hi-Tec, they're very good. When you phone the police, they take so long. Hi-Tec don't ask questions, they just come." Coetzer, however, is realistic about the police's limitations. "There is always a human element involved with the police, there is a delay that you will never have from an armed response unit. It is not fair to expect that from the police," said Coetzer.

Andre Wille, manager of the



The inside of the Hi-Tec control room: a security camera on the corner of the road of Prince Alfred and Somerset Street has recently been installed.

Pic: Marisa Lourenco

Hi-Tec armed response unit, also concedes that "our role ends at the arrest. The police then arrive and carry on from there."

As with all public services, there are, according to Coetzer, "good and bad apples" when it comes to staffing. Wille, too, admits that you come into contact with "a broad spectrum". The main problem, however, seems to be commonly held misconceptions.

"The perception is that the police don't do anything," said

Coetzer, while explaining that their job is to determine hotspots. If there is a low reporting rate in a specific area, then patrol vehicles will be deployed elsewhere. "I don't like the feeling that the police are support for Hi-Tec," she said, "it will take a lot of effort from the police's side to buy back the confidence of the community."

Hi-Tec also keeps an occurrence book to inform the police of incidents, but Coetzer stresses that the most important first step

is to lay official charges. "No crime is too petty for anyone to report. I would rather Grahamstown's crime statistics skyrocket, if it speaks the truth."

A privately funded security unit is always going to have better resources and faster response rates than the police. The inside of Hi-Tec's control room resembles a *Star Trek* set, with its wall to wall blinking lights and computer monitors, busily decoding the details of each alarm that comes through so that a guard can be dispatched with movie-style speed.

Meanwhile, the police are getting involved with something far more down to earth. "We need to work together to combat crime," said Coetzer.

Getting residents to attend the monthly sector meetings, headed by Sergeant Mackenzie, would be an accomplishment. "I would like them to come and give me ideas as to how they can get involved in crime prevention," she said.

Lesser known initiatives include the Community Policing Forum, where residents and business owners can gather to air grievances, and the recent launch of a domestic workers self-defence workshop. The biggest problem being faced is apathy. "I am as much a community member as I am a police official," said Coetzer. The message was firm: report crimes, attend meetings, and involve the community, a community which includes Hi-Tec and the police, and should learn to play to the strengths of both.

# Shop around

By Daniella Potter

High Street used to be the main shopping zone for the Grahamstown community. However, the development of malls has brought secure and convenient shopping spaces which now impact people's decisions of where to shop.

Pepper Grove Mall on African Street employs three to four 24 hour Hi-Tec guards. Manager of Hi-Tec security, Andre Wille said, "Three to four vehicles patrol Grahamstown at any one time, they are alert on High Street but obviously they are not as close to the shoppers as at Pepper Grove."

The informal sector has crept in to juxtapose the formal shops on High Street which clogs the sidewalks for pedestrians. Inspector Coetzer of the Crime Intelligence Office of Grahamstown's Police Station said, "Grahamstown pre-empted unhappiness and criminality by the municipality delegating permits and areas to hawkers." Hawkers do not necessarily bring the crime but as Wille said, "It shows that there is no controlled access to High Street." People beg outside businesses while opportunists await the chance to pickpocket and parking spaces are minimal. As a result shoppers have to take safety precautions.

Many Oatlands residents admit that they would rather shop at Pepper Grove Mall than on High Street. This is due to convenience as Pepper Grove Mall is more accessible to them, but security considerations do impact these residents' decisions of where to shop. Resident of Henry Street in Oatlands, Dr. Ron Hall said, "I shop at Pepper Grove rather than on High Street mainly because I go past it on my way home and I'm guaranteed parking whereas

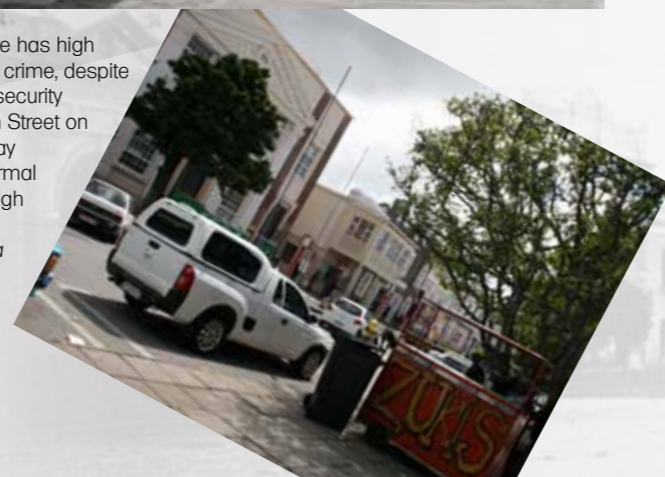
on High Street there is never any parking but I do find I am more aware of my belongings when I shop on High Street than I feel I need to be at Pepper Grove." Oatlands resident Catherine Finn shares a similar view, "Safety doesn't play a part in where I shop however I am more wary of my surroundings and my handbag when I am on High Street as once someone put their hand in my bag when I was walking on High Street which has never happened to me at Pepper Grove." Oatlands resident, Steffi Collett has also experienced attempted crime on High Street. "Once I nearly got mugged on High Street so I feel safer shopping in Pepper Grove which is a secured property," Collett said. Another Oatlands resident, Brydone Graham admitted, "For the most part, safety does influence where I shop, I don't feel like a target shopping on High Street but I definitely don't feel as safe as when I shop at Pepper Grove."

Although Oatlands residents feel that Pepper Grove Mall is more convenient and safer for them as shoppers, they are still willing to shop on High Street. Both Wille and Coetzer encourage shoppers not to be discouraged from visiting shopping areas because of crime. Wille said, "People must use their common sense while shopping and be vigilant of the large cases of petty theft that do occur." Coetzer said, "Grahamstown is not a crime free city, people must just be aware when they are talking on their cell phones while shopping and be aware of their belongings."

"Be alert but relaxed while shopping," Coetzer said. "It's what the police call the condition of yellow, be a vigilant yellow," she said with a smile, leaning back in her chair.



Top: Shoprite has high incidents of crime, despite the private security  
Above: High Street on a normal day  
Left: An informal trader on High Street  
Pics: Marisa Lourenco/Jaap Pronk

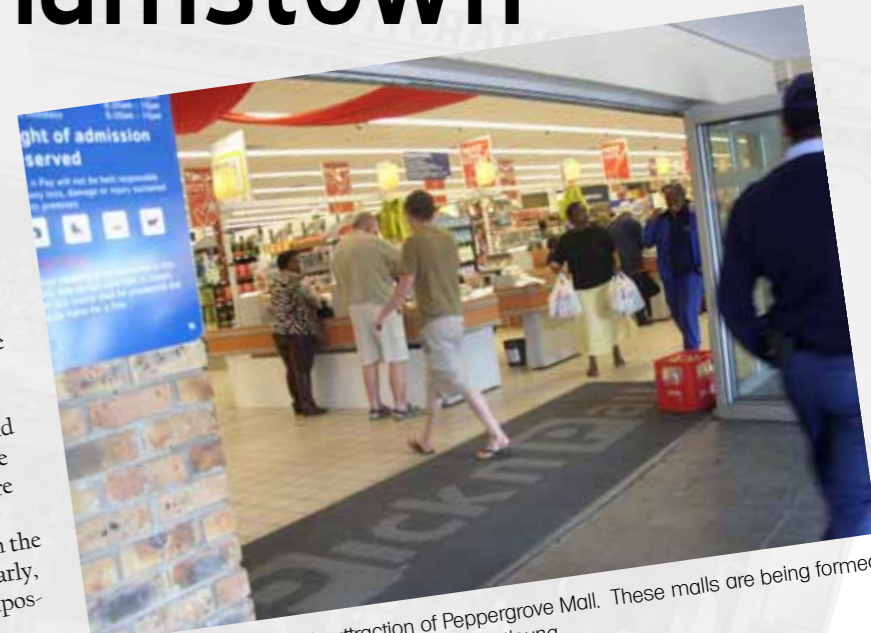


# Gating Grahamstown

By Beth Wyrill

Despite Grahamstown still being one of the safest places to live in South Africa, crime is, by general consensus of the community, on the rise. The result is a fundamental change in the town's configuration. Residents double check their alarms at night, Hi-Tec vehicles patrol the streets like purposeful bumblebees, and businesses creep behind the solid, comforting walls of mall complexes. The incidences of crime that are becoming a reality for stand alone shops simply do not occur within the secure confines of Pepper Grove mall. A manager from Pick 'n Pay, Charles Opperman, agrees that being in an enclosed area helps. "There's one entry and one exit. It becomes a lot easier to monitor," said Opperman. The proprietor of Androniki's Jewellers had similar feelings. "I'm sure they've thought of us, the criminals, but it's so busy on a Friday and Saturday that if you try to stop your car for two minutes in the middle of the parking lot people are going to hoot at you." Clearly, staging an armed robbery in this situation would be nearly impossible.

This is not to assert that malls are being created purely for safety reasons. We are all quivering underlings to the raging tyrants of capitalism and consumerism, and a one stop multi-shop is particularly enticing to a car owning clientele. "Pick 'n Pay is the main attraction, and the parking has probably got a lot to do with it," said Alan Hart, manager of The Vineyard liquor store. However, as per the materialist world we live in, it is out with the old and in with the new. The excitement created nearly 20 years ago by the establishment of Market Square Mall is hard to believe now. None of the shop owners here cited security reasons for their decision to operate from a mall. "Its business related," said Nomfundo Gysman, manager of Ellerines at Market Square Mall. "It's got Pep stores, Shopright and Jet. They're known to have the best prices." In terms of safety, Saleen Abboo, manager of Tekkie Town, felt that "there's no difference between here and High Street. You know we don't get a lot of customers from that area because of the crime." The differences in the income brackets of the clientele, and the resultant internal security measures the stores can afford, may account for these dissimilarities. Many Peppergrove stores are monitored by CCTV cameras, and have internal alarms and panic buttons. Market Square Mall, by comparison, must rely on the security provided by the centre management.



Pick 'n Pay forms the main attraction of Peppergrove Mall. These malls are being formed for safety and convenience. Pic: Maserati Motloung

For Sheet Street, there is no point in employing extra security. "Their salaries are too low, so the guards get bribed," said Zandile Gxala, the assistant manager. According to Siyabonga Jali, a Nyati Security guard, the trolley thefts and muggings that occur in the parking lot at Market Square Mall are harder to control because of the area's foot traffic. "On busy days they rob people at the ATM's," he said. Social inequality forms the basis of nearly all South African crime, and there is no denying that this has informed much of the architecture of our larger cities, in particular the appearance of gated communities. The reasons behind the differing levels of safety at Grahamstown's two malls are varied, but the undeniable distinction here seems to be, simply, a wall. Grahamstown has not yet started gating off its residents, but its businesses are receding into defensive districts. The capitalist convenience culture that makes mall formations good business sense also forms the sordid root of social inequality, and subsequently crime. The Central Business District is shifting, and the closing in of business interests, and closing out of crime, is informing the arrangement of Grahamstown as much as anywhere else.



5pm at Peppergrove: the amount of cars in the parking lot speaks of the convenience culture, encouraging people to shop in private shopping spaces subsequently giving rise to the mallification phenomenon. Pic: Marisa Lourenco

# Thank you for shopping with us

By Marisa Lourenco

*Peter Vale is a Nelson Mandela Professor of Politics and works at Rhodes University. Here he speaks about the nation-wide phenomenon that is the establishment of malls. While the effects of this phenomenon are not easy to ascertain immediately, he offers some insight into such, and it is evident that there are problems relating to the making of public space private. Professor Vale looks at Grahamstown and the changes that have occurred within it, and also at some of the deeper socio-political problems that are at the heart of such changes.*

**Do you believe that there is a sense of community amongst the Grahamstown residents in the CBD and, more specifically, amongst the middle class?**

I really doubt that. Grahamstown, as far as I know, and I don't think it's

changed, does not have a business representative group. There are no Grahamstown shop-owners or something like that, and I think that's just an indication that building those kinds of interests is very difficult here. And to believe that those people can have an interest with African traders, or traders in the township, or other people involved in the same kind of businesses, is a thing that is very difficult to do, so I think that . . . I think I must say no.

**How do malls affect such apathy?**

Well, my own sense of malls is that they're enormously destructive things. They cut people off, they are focused on one thing only, which is the act of purchasing in some form or another. So they take people out of a social life and they insert them into a constructed social life, which is very different to how most people are socialised. And I think that the Pepper Grove Mall in Grahamstown has been particularly so, because

what it's done is that it's – let me start by saying, like all malls elsewhere, it's created a neo-Apartheid situation. There's a new form of Apartheid, those who shop at the mall and those who don't shop at the mall. Those who go to the mall are excused the "hassle" of having to deal with those people who live in this community who are not as fortunate as those who go to the mall. The beggars, and those who are excluded from the mall, in a sense they're policed away from the mall. It's a little like these attempts in Natal and other places now to close down squatter areas, because you don't want the poor and poverty to be near, you don't want the rich to be contaminated by poverty. So I think that there's that process going on . . . that's at a deep level. At another level, which is much more mundane, almost, is what this mall has done is that it's effectively destroyed, in many ways, the jewel of this city, which is the High Street. This [street] is a wonderful example of a sort of a mid-Victorian High Street, almost unique in the world, and certainly unique in this country. And what the mall has done is that it's pulled people out of the High Street, and then the High Street has become less and less of a showpiece, a living showpiece, and more and more of a museum-piece, which looks tatty, and in which levels of disruption, social disruption, occur much more. And the sad and ironical thing is that this process has been embedded by very poor decisions around public policy. For example, this complete stupefaction of people who believe that people who park in High Street should pay. And nobody pays to park in the mall. If you know anything about public policy you will know that the worst thing you can do is to charge people to park there, because the city's responsibility is to attract people to shop. So what has happened here is exactly the opposite. You're punishing people for shopping, and that's just very bad policy.

**Malls make public space private and push vendors away from the CBD. Inspector Coetzer of the Grahamstown Police does not believe that this is necessarily a problem though. She says that before Pepper Grove was built, there was a meeting between the vendors and the managers of Pepper Grove, and parts of the town were delegated for both.**

Well, this is sort of unintended consequences. I mean, when you sat down with those traders, did you say to them, that's going to happen, the whole centre of the city is going to be turned into something different. Of course, people can't see into the future, so you can't have this kind of agreement. You can now say, well, we had an agreement, everyone was happy about it, and that makes it legitimate – well, of course it doesn't make it legitimate. The fact that you had a conversation twenty years ago – a different set of circumstances apply now, and what she [Coetzer] is saying might be right – and I have the highest regard for her – but I don't think that makes it legitimate, because I would now like to hear the voice of the people who've been affected in the last fifteen years. Are they happy? I would imagine that they are not happy. Of course, you can't undo the thing – but I don't think that's a way of trying to justify it. **Do you think that the community can change any of these problems? Perhaps if they came together and become more aware of the problems related to private space and trading? Or is it something that will have to come to pass?**



Pick 'n Pay now has longer trading hours to attract more customers to shop there, especially at night, with the added benefit of secure parking. Pic: Marisa Lourenco

Well, very powerful people own Pepper Grove Mall, and in terms of the local economy, I don't think you can undo it. I think you can find ways to work around it to make it fairer. Could you allow people to set up vending things there? Then you begin to talk about standards. Say for the sake of the argument, you allow people to sell hotdogs in Pepper Grove Mall, I bet you the people who sell food there would complain, because this would be a threat to their trade. It kind of gives them exclusive rights over certain things, and I think that that's a problem . . . so could the community do something? I think the answer to that is no. I think you'll have to have much deeper forms of leverage working, though, at the moment, I just can't imagine what they could be.

# Local volunteer busts CBD crime

By Daniella Potter

Stand at the corner of High and Thompson Street and call “Thami”. A tall, thin man wearing a navy beanie and a frown will come bounding to your call. Thami Mbande takes the onus upon himself to ensure the Thompson Street community is secure.

Mbande is employed as a security guard by High Street’s popular coffee shop Madhatters, but his security watch does not stop there. Mbande patrols High Street up to Marx and Bennett doctors’ rooms. He marches up and down sloping Thompson Street to protect the residents. “I’ve been doing this job for 13 years, I have a good CV and a lot of experience,” he said with a reassuring thrust of his head.

“Students live in digs down Thompson Street and the bed and breakfast is there and an old lady who lives in a flat and they need me to keep watch,” Mbande said. His forehead glistened in the midday sun. “The problem here is that there is a lot of crime, people take things which don’t belong to them,” he said wiping his brow with an old rag. Mbande acts as a deterrent to crime mongers in the area. “The problem here is these naughty boys,” he said as he points his rough wrinkled fore-finger to a group of boys sitting on the island on High Street opposite Madhatters. “They just wait to cause trouble so I’m watching them always,” he said. It is mainly petty crime which happens in the area. “Students will leave windows open and people that come to the bed

and breakfast don’t know crime is a problem and they just leave things in their cars, so I must walk there and warn them to put their things away,” he said as he gestured to cars along the street.

The Thompson Street community is aware that Mbande secures their property of his own accord and they question his humble service. Resident Kristy De Kock said, “We’re not quite sure why he does it, he doesn’t get paid very much and yet he is determined to do more than he is required to protect us.” Mbande is also affectionate to the residents. “He calls us his children and says he is protecting us and he often informs us if something has happened in the neighbourhood which is nice to know,” De Kock said. Another Thompson Street resident, Stacy Moreland admitted that Mbande’s service is useful. “During the Grahamstown Arts Festival he spotted a couple who were stealing people’s bags and he chased them away,” Moreland said.

“During the Festival I worked during the day and night because there is just too too much crime,” Mbande said as he raised his eyebrows. Generally Mbande works day shifts during the week and at weekends. He takes it upon himself to extend his hours when there is a problem in the area.

“The main crime is they push the burglar bars open on the windows,” he said as he gestured to a window on Madhatters’ building. “They took the wireless and emptied the till and threw it on the ground and broke it, it’s bad bad bad.” Mbande said that the doctors’ rooms were



Thami Mbande patrols Thompson Street ensuring the community is safe.

Pic: Marisa Lourenco

also recently broken into. His cheeks bulged as he proudly pointed at the barbed wire he put up to deter further break-ins.

Mbande is adverse to carrying weapons. He sliced the air with a downward stroke of his hand. “No, no I don’t like weapons and I have no licence,” he said in a raised voice. This law-abiding citizen calls Hi-Tec or the police in the case of an emergency or an incident happening. “When there is a problem I run here to Madhatters to use the phone,” he said pointing at

the old coffee shop building. “They know me well at Hi-Tec and the police even know me well, well,” he said with a half-toothed grin.

“Grahamstown is a small town, but it has many many crime problems,” he said holding his chin which creased his waxy cheeks. “People need to know this and watch out for crimes like bags being stolen, breaking into houses and rapes,” he warned. Mbande will continue to loyally inform and defend this community – even when it is beyond his call of duty.