

Green heroes

Four South Africans show us the way as they live – and work – sustainably.

AS TOLD TO LYNNE GIDISH

GOTTLIEB ARENDSE

GOTTLIEB ARENDSE (44) Chief Director Environmental Quality, Department of Environmental Affairs and Developmental Planning, Western Cape.

Growing up in the Western Cape township of Bonteheuwel, with a father who was a keen gardener, set the scene for Gottlieb Arendse's lifelong love of the environment. "My Dad was passionate about gardening and grew his own fruit and vegetables. Our small backyard was crammed full of fruit trees: quince, lemons, pomegranates and mulberries, and an avo tree that took 20 years to bear fruit," says Gottlieb.

"He was very proud of his surroundings, of creating a beautiful Garden of Eden in a harsh environment. My siblings and I put in many hours working at his side. He loved working the land. He made his own compost and cleaned up litter, leading by example and instilling a huge amount of respect for the world we live in."

It's a small wonder then that Gottlieb qualified as a microbiologist and started working at the University of the Western Cape, teaching and managing the labs, where safety and cleanliness, especially sterilisation, featured very high on his agenda. "I focused on preventative measures, championing, from a safety aspect, ways of dealing with microbial and hazardous waste." Finding himself in the right place at the right time in the changing South African political arena, he moved into environmental management in the National Department of Environmental Affairs in 1995, at a time of growing awareness in all things to do with the environment. Five years later, he was heading up the province's Pollution and Waste Management

Directorate, where he deals proactively with establishing preventative measures for the impact of waste and pollution. This involves policy-setting and drawing up guidelines, strategies and action plans on a day-to-day basis. His department works very closely with the municipalities to facilitate waste reduction and to encourage communities to buy into this.

Gottlieb has always practiced what he preaches, making full use of the Green projects his department sets up. "We've always recycled at home," he says. "We make our own compost and separate all of our waste. I like supporting recycling initiatives with the added socio-economic benefits of conscientising more kids about the value of recycling while generating much-needed funds. Our glass used to go to my son's school as it had a good recycling programme to raise funds. Now I drop it, together with our cans, in the receptacles at our local shopping centre, as the school's recycling programme has stopped. Our newspapers go to my father's neighbour as his son's school has a good recycling programme up and running."

Both of Gottlieb's sons are aware of the importance of using water sparingly and of switching off lights. "It's all about values and having respect... respect for your fellow human being while limiting the harm being done to the ecosystem around us," says Gottlieb. "If each and every one of us would take responsibility for the world we live in, it would have a huge impact universally."

IMAGE: NEVILLE LOCKHART



Greening the world: Gottlieb Arendse in the roof garden he established on the top of his offices in Cape Town.

LYNN WORSLEY

LYNN WORSLEY (57) Owner of AllWomenRecycling, a Cape Town-based empowerment company that upcycles PET plastic soda bottles, transforming them into unique gift boxes, the Kliketyklikbox™.

One man's trash is another man's treasure. Lynn Worsley makes no bones about the fact she's trying to change the world – one bottle at a time. Stuck in maintenance courts 10 years ago during a messy divorce, she realised there were lots of women in the same situation or worse off than she was, and, determined to give them a voice, Lynn went Green in the process. Initially passing on information about her experience in the courts to ease their struggles, she then decided to take it one step further. "I started researching what I could do to help them – and me – generate some income, and ended up with AllWomenRecycling, a community project, which I find far more fulfilling," says Lynn from the depot in Diep River.

Recycling wasn't new to Lynn (her sons own a recycling company that collects waste) and, after playing around with numerous ideas, the Kliketyklikbox™ came into being. Lynn delights in doing something for the environment as she'd been "pretty lazy" up until then. "PET plastic takes hundreds of years to decompose and is filling up landfills in huge quantities," she explains. "I like the fact that I'm involved in a sustainability

venture that also gives women some form of financial independence. There's other great synergy too. Women are the teachers in the family and through our project they are learning the importance of keeping their own communities clean and the plastic off the streets. They are spreading the word."

Lynn sources the bottles from dumps all over the Cape Town area and supports both Bergvliet High School and Oasis, a recycling company staffed by intellectually disabled people by buying her bottles from them and returning the top half, which they then sell on.

It didn't take Lynn long to accept that being Green in her business wasn't enough – it had to extend to all areas of her life. "We do a lot of training here – it's a whole learning process for the rest of the women's lives – so it's really important to lead by example. Essentially, we're educating the community. Since it spills into their homes, why not mine? Today, I separate my waste, my paper, my glass and my tins. I have a worm garden for soft waste, and a funnel to water my plants with rainwater. Just like my business, I take it very seriously, right down to the indigenous plants in my garden. It's a brand new way of life; a very necessary one, I believe, because we can only go forwards, not back.

"I had a forced shower-change that completely cleansed me of my past and I had to look for a new beginning. It turned into the adventure of a lifetime, a wonderful Green journey, and I'm loving every minute of doing my bit for the world."

Visit allwomenrecycling.com



Girls on top: Lynn Worsley and the team at the AllWomenRecycling depot in Diep River.

IMAGE: NEVILLE LOCKHART



IMAGE: DOMINIC BARNARDT

DORAH MAREMA

DORAH MAREMA (38) National Coordinator of GenderCCSA – Women For Climate Justice, a non-profit organisation that works on the impact of climate change in different communities.

Dorah Marema had no idea just how green she was about being Green when she joined the Greenhouse Project 12 years ago. The new information manager, who was responsible for researching Green material to build an environmental centre in the inner city of Johannesburg to inspire people to a Green way of living, would return to the office with her lunchtime takeaway in a polystyrene container and wonder what the fuss was about – her colleagues would be up in arms.

"It didn't take long for me to accept I had a lot to learn and to discover just how big my carbon footprint was," she laughs. "I never thought about where water comes from – I just turned on taps or flushed – and when I needed light I simply switched one on. I've come a long, long way since then."

Dorah had no inkling that her new job would set her on a path that would completely transform every aspect of her life and her view of the world, and that her Green voyage of discovery would be shared with others every step of the way. To this end, in her present capacity with GenderCCSA, she has partnered with the Greenhouse Project where she remains on the board, and has branched into outreach programmes in

Gauteng, Limpopo, the North West and the Western Cape. "We target rural and peri-urban communities, particularly women, empowering them to be self-sustainable by growing their own food, recycling their own waste and generating income by transforming the toils of their labour into something that makes sound economic sense, while doing good things for the environment in the process," says Dorah.

She also tries to influence policy and works closely with government in terms of climate change, aiming at making small changes in communities, starting with awareness of consumption patterns. "A lot of people think I'm crazy trying to save the world – to them it's an impossible task – but I see as it as an incremental problem that can only happen from the community up. We tend to forget that things that are gentle on the planet are gentle on our bodies.

"Compare the sprayed-on chemicals, the carbon emission from transport, the packaging that needs to be buried at landfill so that you can buy your spinach at your local supermarket, with growing it at home. Not only is this good for the environment, it's also far healthier for you." Dorah proudly walks the talk by growing her own spinach – her townhouse is the only one with a veggie garden – recycling her waste, using low-energy light bulbs and questioning all products before purchasing. "If I feel it's not Green enough, I look for alternatives. Living Green makes me very happy and I'm far healthier too," she smiles.

Visit globalonenessproject.org/videos/The_GreenHouse_Project or contact GenderCCSA on 011-762-4713

CHARLIE CROWTHER

CHARLIE CROWTHER (44) Owner of Glen Oakes Farm in the Hemel-en-Aarde Valley between Caledon and Hermanus, where he farms pigs and livestock, and offers ecotourism on the side.

When one of Charlie Crowther's little piggies finally goes to market, it's at the end of a totally stress-free life, having enjoyed the freedom of an unfettered natural environment and a completely relaxed lifestyle. Pigs have always been Charlie's passion. He recalls feeding them as a very small boy on his father's wine farm where they kept a few livestock.

"Pigs are very intelligent animals but are usually kept in pigsties because they are so destructive. I hate the idea of any form of animal confinement and, although they do uproot everything in sight, we've managed to find a way around it which has resulted in our fully sustainable pig production system. Our pigs are given the freedom and space that animals deserve; they live in an outdoor pasture where they're free to roam, in turn aerating and fertilising the soil."

Charlie's pigs live a life of luxury sleeping in little wooden A-frame huts, enjoy mud wallows that are crucial to their wellbeing, and are only fed three times a week with a balanced ration of barley, maize, canola and soybean. They are then left to graze and forage, enjoying a hormone- and antibiotic-free life in a piggy heaven of valleys, mountains, woodlands, streams and acorn trees, the source of their favourite food.

Farming his pigs this way is a far longer road than commercially rearing the animals, but the spinoff, says Charlie, is huge. "Apart from the fact that these are seriously happy animals, the end product is far superior in terms of taste, texture and flavour," he says. Being Green comes naturally to Charlie. "It's always been a way of life. I was brought up close to nature and continue to enjoy, respect and appreciate it."

His mission is to work with nature and "not fight against it, as so many commercial ventures do by using damaging chemical fertilisers and sprays." His self-sustaining Green approach is apparent in other aspects of his life. "We grow most of our own veggies as organically as we can, have our own free-range chickens, beef and lamb, recycle all our waste, and use solar-heating with gas as a backup." He's also keen to share and spread the Green message with his two small eco-cottages (and campsite). They are built almost exclusively from raw materials gleaned off the farm so that others can enjoy the whole Green experience.

"People are always amazed by the fact that there's very little smell here since commercial pig farms do stink, which just goes to show what happens when Nature is content and everything's in balance."

Visit glenoakes.co.za

IMAGE: HANSE OOSTHUIZEN

