



National Library Week celebration at Town Library Hall on Wednesday 22 March, an event hosted by Grahamstown Town Library, Makana Municipality and DSRAC. Photo: Azlan Makalima



Librarian Nobukhosi Mafumana assists Colin Watson (79) to take out a couple of Westerns he was keen to read. Photo: Sue MacLennan

# Open for the reading business!

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**D**ozens of eager readers had come into the Hill Street Library by mid-morning on Wednesday 22 March, the day the facility reopened after being closed for renovations for more than a year.

This week (starting 20 March), South Africa has been celebrating National Library Week and so it was especially good timing.

When *Grocott's Mail* arrived in the morning, Zamumzi Lukwe was sheltering from the blistering heat outside among the books, reading the day's newspaper from cover to cover.

"I've always come here," he said. "So the last year and a half has been really frustrating."

Born and bred in Grahamstown he is qualified as a teacher but currently has no work.

"Reading the newspaper here keeps me up to date with what is happening," said the

47-year-old from Extension 7. "Also, sometime the Classics have jobs you can apply for. Colin Watson was clutching a couple of Westerns."

"Ja, it's about time they opened again," he said. "I'll read any Western or detective story," said the 79-year-old who bought books from the Hospice shop while the library was closed.

"I also borrowed from friends."

Later on during the afternoon Makana Municipality, Department of Sports Recreation, Arts and Culture and LIASA Eastern Cape, held a National Library Week event at the Town Library Hall, celebrating 20 years of dynamic leadership.

The event was chaired by Chesley Daniels, stakeholders were welcomed by Councillor Brian Fargher and the opening item was a poetry piece from Nathaniel Nyaluza young praise-poet, Gxobhinzolo.

"The purpose of the day was the rebirth of the Town Library," said LIASA chairperson Ms N. Spondo.

Included on the item was a pronunciation and defining the word L.I.B.R.A.R.Y by the Friends of the Library.

Grade 5, 6 and 7 pupils from CM Vellem, Ntaba Maria and Mary Waters jumped in for a Spelling Bee in IsiXhosa, English and Afrikaans.

Just before the vote of thanks by Councillor Phumla Matyuzma, the librarians were also brought on stage for a more intensive Spelling Bee.

Assistant Director of Library Services in Makana Patricia Njilo told *Grocott's Mail* that the library is now fully open even though the telephones are still not working.

"The library computers are not all in full operation. Sarah Baartman District Municipality disconnected the internet coverage and DSRAC will take over," said Njilo.

SA Library Week was initiated in 2001 by the Library and Information Association of SA (LIASA) as an official commemorative period.

All libraries across the country use it as an opportunity to market their services in

an effort to contribute to the understanding of the important role that libraries play in a democratic society: advancing literacy, making the basic human right of freedom of access to information a reality, and promoting tolerance and respect among all South Africans.

Njilo said they are encouraging people in all libraries to send back books that they may still have – "and they will not be charged a fine".

"When the Public Library closed in January 2016 the renovations were scheduled to take six months."

"We were told that the library would close to the public for three months," Njilo said. "The library advertised to users that they were closing from January to April 2016. I think when they came up with this closure period they had not really taken into account just how bad the library's situation actually is."

The building is very old and the floor was predominately wooden. The boards had rotted and there were large

holes, Njilo explained.

"Also the roof and ceilings were rotting and when it was raining, drops would come through the roof. These were things that we noticed that made us realise the library needs to be renovated."

But as they were working, they saw that the floor needed not just repair, but replacement. "It needed to be started from scratch so they had to take out everything, make the concrete from scratch," Njilo said.

"It was the same with the roof. They realised that the entire roof was rotten and that meant that we had to take it all out and start again."

"Maybe our failure was proper maintenance of the building – but over the years, the municipality would do patchwork fixes here and there. We only saw the severity of the problem when we removed everything."

The delay put the re-opening of the library back a year.

"Originally we were looking to use R2.8 million for the renovations," he said. "I

am not sure about what the figure stands at now, because Makana is just a receiving party here. The Department of Sports, Recreation Arts and Culture (DSRAC) provided money to the Department of Public Works, so they were the ones who hired contractors and oversaw the whole process. As they discovered more problems, they went and got more money from DSRAC."

New library material was also needed, Njilo added.

"The books we have there are very old," Njilo said, adding that they have been struggling to get more, and new material from the department and the province.

"The Province always focuses its resources on new libraries that are opening in the Province and that is where all the new material goes," she said.

She said that while telephones and public internet were still not working, "we decided we need to open the library to the public so that people can at least access the things that we do have".