

GUEST OF HONOUR

Meet the 2014 Guesthouse of the Year winner

In the guest house industry, there are a few gems that stand out from the rest. Comfortable and with distinctive South African characteristics, they have reputations as first-choice accommodation for business travellers and holidaymakers alike and are run by owner-managers offering personalised, efficient customer service.

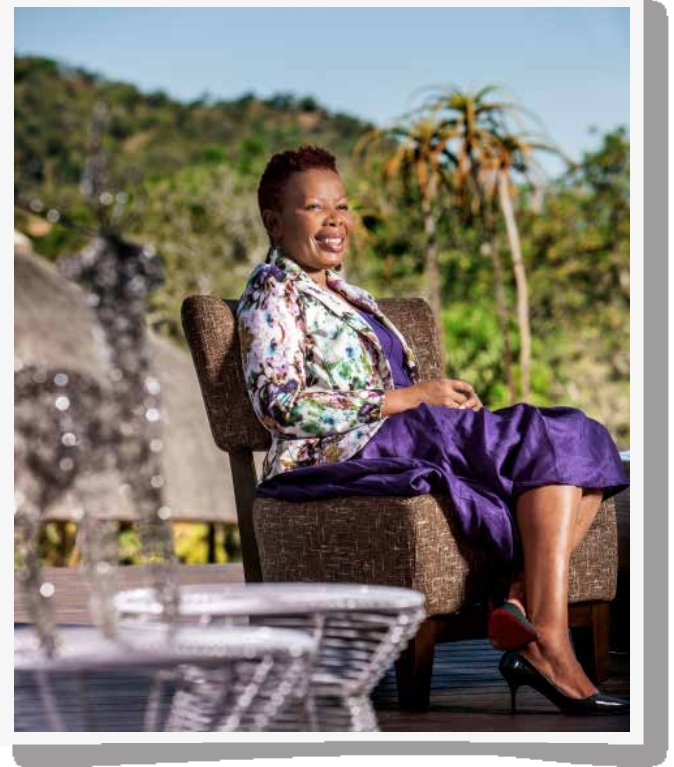
If you find yourself checking into a guest house with these features, the chances are you have stepped into an establishment that is part of a network of private hospitality enterprises being nurtured by Tsogo Sun. More than 30 proprietors have passed through Tsogo Sun's Book a Guesthouse programme so far, with an additional 50 or so participating in years one to three of the curriculum.

Training covers the range of skills essential for running a superior hospitality business, from front-office management to food and menu preparation. Participants are tutored on the latest information technology available for property management and receive support with the installation and implementation of systems in their own businesses.

As the name of the programme suggests, guest houses are added to a list of establishments recommended by Tsogo Sun, which does not compete with small private hospitality businesses. The hotel group operates a website matching visitors to qualifying guest houses on behalf of these independent proprietors.

Each year the list of Book a Guesthouse programme participants is narrowed to a group of five, who compete for the Guesthouse of the Year title. More important for finalists than the R10 000 cash prize are the skills development and publicity associated with this award.

This year's winner, Carol Sanderson of Casambo Exclusive Guest Lodge near Nelspruit, Mpumalanga, says she has benefited



suit her flair with people and contribute to her long-term asset-building plans. Skills development is also a strong concern for her. Her 52-strong

a Guesthouse programme. Alumni of the entrepreneurial development course have continued access to mentors; in turn, sharing their knowledge with new participants. This way, the initiative delivers on its goal of empowering an expanding group of black entrepreneurs, particularly women, to run sustainable enterprises.

Candy Tothill, the group's special projects and internal communications manager, explains, 'The programme is proving to be a fantastic way for Tsogo Sun to add value through skills enhancement within the hospitality industry, as well as investing in the growth of the economy.' ●

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from the coaching to improve her management style and sharpen her business acumen. 'Being part of the Tsogo Sun programme gave me the opportunity to identify my weaknesses and work on them,' she notes.

Sanderson has also worked on plans to grow her business. These range from developing ideas to add a boutique, cultural centre, restaurant and spa to her stylish premises, to rolling out marketing campaigns.

Since winning the prestigious award in May, bookings have already shot up at her establishment, which offers two conference venues and 20 rooms set in landscaped gardens with views of the rugged Lowveld escarpment. 'The award has increased awareness about the lodge and highlighted that guests can expect quality,' she says.

The former radio journalist opened the guest house two years ago after deciding to pursue a career that would

staff includes people hired to work on the initial development of the guest house and the surrounding gardens.

The lodge has a project to provide training and support to a group of women who produce beads and beaded jewellery. Sanderson buys their stock and hands out earrings and other items as courtesy souvenirs. 'I've always been an advocate of women's empowerment,' she adds.

Empowerment is also a major theme of the Book

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