

Here is the copy I sent to the Citizen with some pictures

Centenary rose for Nelson Mandela

Alice Spenser-Higgs

A fiery orange rose named in honour of Nelson Mandela, this week launched the Centenary celebrations of the birth of South Africa's most revered statesman.

Archbishop emeritus, Desmond Tutu and his wife Leah, Gauteng premier David Makhura, writer Mandla Langa, and struggle stalwart Gertrude Shope, were among the guests of honour at the event organised by the Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory in Houghton.

In a powerful speech, premier Makhura said it was fitting that a rose, which is the symbol of love, should be named for Nelson Mandela, whose life was about love for humanity.

In referring to Mandela's unique ability to see opportunities where others saw problems, Makhura said, "He saw roses where others saw thorns."

Despite the present uncertainty and anxiety, he said the centenary celebrations were a sign of renewed hope, and an opportunity to return to the path of Mandela, that of justice and equality for millions of people, adding that there could be no better gift to Mandela than a return to ethical leadership that was accountable, and that served the people and not themselves.

Sello Hatang, CEO of the Foundation, said the story of the Nelson Mandela™ rose was one of resilience, going back to 2000 when veteran horticulturist Keith Kirsten and Achmat Dangor, from the Nelson Mandela Foundation, first discussed naming a rose for Nelson Mandela.

It was put on hold in 2001 until three years ago when the Foundation contacted Kirsten to proceed with the project. He travelled the world looking for the rose and put together a collection of possible roses for consideration by a panel, including Graca Machel.

The rose that they chose, like the man after whom it is named, grows strongly, is tall (reaching head height), and matures into a stately floribunda bush, covered by shiny, dark green, foliage.

Like Madiba's shirts, that were flowery, loose-fitting and informal, this rose eschews the classical, formal rose shape for semi-double blooms that are carried in profusion on the bush.

It is a disease-resistant garden stalwart, that can stand proudly on its own as a focal point in a garden or can be planted as a screen for a wall or fence.

South Africa's largest rose grower, Ludwig's Roses, have grown the first roses and in the months ahead more growers will become involved with the aim of introducing the rose world-wide.

Speaking at the launch Kirsten said that proceeds from the sale would be donated by him to the Nelson Mandela Foundation which is a facilitator of Nelson Mandela's living legacy; and is mandated to promote his lifelong vision of freedom and equality for all.

For Kirsten, this week's naming comes 28 years after he first met Mandela, when they were planting trees in Alexandra for Arbor Day. He subsequently helped Mandela establish roses in his first garden in 13th avenue, Houghton.

President of the South African Nursery Association, Tanya Visser spoke about the healing power of gardening, a sentiment echoed by Foundation CEO Sello Hatang who said that Nelson Mandela's appreciation for gardening was linked to a wider desire to nurture nature.

"His rose reminds us that we are because of others."

Although he did not speak, Archbishop emeritus Desmond Tutu, was nevertheless at the centre of the celebrations and even got up to dance to the songs sung by the choir, Imilonji. Premier Makhura paid tribute to this great man by referring to him as 'our moral compass, and spiritual leader, who remains our guiding light'.

The Nelson Mandela™ rose joins a gallery of roses named after eminent South Africans including that of Archbishop Desmond Tutu (a full, deep red rose), Walter Sisulu (a large red shrub rose) and Albertina Sisulu (a fragrant creamy-white shrub rose) and Dikgang Moseneke (deep red rose).

Kind regards

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