

A homecoming revolution bankrolled by FNB

 By Louise Marsland

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"I wouldn't have missed the last 10 years in South Africa for anything..." those were the sentiments echoed by the businessmen, politicians, sportsmen and celebs gathered at the announcement of First National Bank's sponsorship campaign for The Homecoming Revolution, revitalising it and adding impetus to the initiative.

FNB is encouraging and helping South Africans living abroad to return home by providing financial support to the Homecoming Revolution, an independent non-profit initiative, aimed at touching the hearts of South Africans overseas and assisting them in their journey home.

At the heart of the initiative is a new-look website, www.homecomingrevolution.co.za, to assist ex-pats who want to return home. FNB will be using this website to support them by providing homecomers with all the information and support they need. This may include opening bank accounts, securing homeloans, obtaining vehicle finance and medical aid information, to providing help and advice with starting a business.

The Homecoming Revolution is no flight of fantasy, as the winged-Angel Jones, of morrisjones&co, attests.

Decked out in her latest trademark set of wings, this time made up of patriotic South African flags, Jones, spoke with passion of bringing home the enlightened and skilled South Africans abroad: "We are fighting a global war for human capital. If we can spread more positive news about South Africa, it will stimulate investment. The time is ripe for South Africans of all races living abroad to come home... this is your invitation."

Raconteur, David Rattray's stirring tales of South African heroes - unsung and well-known, from Jan Smuts to Nelson Mandela - moved the crowd. With a catch in his voice and tears in his eyes, Rattray used his talents to weave magic on the crowd.

His message was that South Africans have a great capacity for forgiveness, as demonstrated over decades, and that "we, as South Africans, forget how far we've come".

"The story of our country is not a story of war - but of reconciliation... Not of conflict - but human compassion..."

Even the suits had lumps in their throats and there was much throat-clearing during the national anthem, stirring led by songstress Yvonne Chaka Chaka.

Michael Jordaan, CEO FNB Customer Solutions commented: "FNB and the Homecoming Revolution would like to see South

Africans returning from abroad, rolling up their sleeves and finding new and relevant ways to help make this country even greater.

"This has come at a very important time in South Africa's history, as we celebrate 10 years of democracy, a smooth third general election and our successful bid to host the 2010 World Cup," Jordaan adds. "South Africa is in the midst of an economic revival, consumer confidence is at an all-time high and the opportunities for South Africans back home have never been better."

FNB will help provide the banking support and advice expats need to finance assets and to meet their personal financial needs such as insurance and investments on returning to South Africa.

The Homecoming Revolution was founded by advertising agency morrisjones&co and was launched in January 2003 to 28 000 South Africans worldwide with the message: 'Don't wait until it gets better, come home and help make it even better'.

The website has attracted thousands of visitors each month, with the highest recorded in February 2004 at 40 000 individual visitors. They are primarily from the UK, USA and SA, and secondarily from Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Those most likely to come home soon are young professionals from the UK.

Jones, founder of the Homecoming Revolution and Creative Director of morrisjones&co, explained where the need was: "We need expertise particularly in the fields of medicine, engineering and information technology and would therefore like to see more ex-pats returning."

Official figures for returning citizens are not available as yet, but the trend established through the Homecoming Revolution website, removal companies and estate agents show that they are on the increase.

"Elliot's Removals have reported that, in 2003, for every one outbound client, there's one inbound client... mainly foreigners but also locals returning home. Pam Golding reports an ever increasing flood of enquiries from South African expats for property back home," Jones says.

The Homecoming Revolution estimates that there are over 5 million South Africans living overseas. Approximately 28% of these are based in the United Kingdom, 17% in Australia, 10% in the United States and New Zealand, 8% in Europe and 5% in the Middle East.

The trade off for returning home is a deeply personal one. Reasons given on the website for returning are: the opportunity to make a difference; the feeling of belonging; friends and family; the lifestyle; the can-do culture; and the hospitality of the people.

"Everybody, in their own way, can make a difference in South Africa, even if they're not yet ready to return," says Jones. "The new website offers inspiring ways to make a difference, from volunteering to sharing advice and being an ambassador."

She pulled no punches about the obstacles for South Africans returning home: "The biggest concerns about returning are political stability, crime, unemployment and lack of international exposure. The perception of political instability can be addressed by educating people about what has happened in South Africa over the last 10 years. We cannot ignore the issue of crime. It is real and worrying - our motto is don't give up. Every South African, in their own right, can do their bit to fight crime. Our new website reflects the importance that we place on this concern."

And, as she explains, one of the ways to overcome job shortages is to bring people home with skills to create new jobs.

The Homecoming Revolution and FNB will support the initiative with a fortnightly newsletter which will be sent to a growing database to keep them up to date with activities, advice, information and services. Fast Trek (financial services guide) will

continue to evolve and a lifestyle management service will be developed to ensure all the needs of homecomers are met, from school recommendations to pet vaccinations and converting drivers' licences. They will also offer a social network for homecomers in the three major cities - Durban, Cape Town and Johannesburg.

There will also be a series of roadshows for potential homecomers in the UK, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand to share the vision and offer practical solutions for those who are tempted to return.

ABOUT LOUISE MARSLAND

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