

A heart of gold



Sasol Swartgoud is ideally situated and services the residential suburbs Mondeor, Suideroord and Winchester.

Embracing innovation and community is Sasol Swartgoud's recipe for success

By LAURA DURHAM

Franchisee, Letitia Visser, attributes the success of Sasol Swartgoud to the 'happy family' environment and loyal community of customers she has created since its opening in July 2004. Being one of only four C-stores to pilot the My Delight concept, which includes a hot meals replacement (HMR) offering, and pumping 800 000 litres of fuel each month is proof that she's found a winning formula.

Energetic entrepreneur

Visser comes from a forecourt background, having run a highly successful taxi site in Johannesburg CBD. After achieving a Top Four status at BP, she decided to set herself a new challenge and move into the suburbs, where her husband developed the site – which was one of the first Sasol fourcourts in the country. Sasol Swartgoud is ideally

situated and services the residential suburbs Mondeor, Suideroord and Winchester.

Day One: 15 000 litres and her diary entry read: "I will work towards the flagship site in Sasol".

Social responsibility is important to Visser and she is constantly involved in sponsorships, donations, soup kitchens, rebuilding fences and other community projects.



Six years later: 800 000 litres per month and Sasol Swartgoud has achieved flagship status.

Leader in innovation

My Delight – with its HMR offering and new sophisticated grey colour scheme – may still be in its pilot stage, but it has proved to be a hot success. Aside from the usual pies, sandwiches and confectionary, customers now have the choice of hot meals at very affordable prices. The staff cook and bake 24 hours a day and a meal of stew, vegetables and pap/rice/samp goes for a very reasonable R23.75. Visser says this offering has become very popular with bachelors stopping off after work, as well as retail staff from the nearby supermarkets during their lunch breaks. The staff is making six pots of pap a day to keep up with the demand! Quarter chicken is also doing very well but Visser says they need to promote and advertise their whole chickens as well, because customers don't expect to find them at a C-store. The menu changes daily in accordance with the seasons and

customers' requests and Visser says she would like to see hot puddings and soups in winter too, although there is limited space left in the 150m² store.

"In my store, My Delight has doubled my volumes. It's only been eight months but it's still growing," she says.

Another innovation that Visser will soon be introducing is a frozen meals section, where the HMR offering will be packaged and frozen in different portion sizes and be available for customers to take home and heat themselves.

Interestingly, Visser is even piloting a general merchandise section – complete with shavers, hair dryers, plugs, extension cords and even TV remotes – and it is proving to be very popular with customers! She also changed the menu screens to TV screens to showcase the games during

the Soccer World Cup – a bonus for both customers and staff!

Community stronghold

Visser is a philanthropist at heart and has established Sasol Swartgoud as a safe and welcoming haven for the community. She offers free coffee and car washes to all emergency, security and charity services and the regular presence of police cars works as an added security presence at the forecourt. "It gives me piece of mind for security on-site and is especially important for the customers to know we are protected," she says.

Social responsibility is important to Visser and she is constantly involved in sponsorships, donations, soup kitchens, rebuilding fences and other community projects. The recent Nigel old age home

fire is one such example, where she held a blanket drive, and she has now moved her focus to the many staff members that are now without a job since the pensioners have been moved to other old age homes. At Christmas, she puts up a Christmas wish tree that allows customers to choose a wish card (written by school children and old age home residents in need) and fulfil the wish and leave the gift under the tree. "The response is absolutely amazing, the gifts are always piling out of the doors," she says.

Appreciation and reward

"The car wash is doing exceptionally well," says Visser, "it's not there to make money but it's managed well and brings in feet". It's self-contained in terms of management and any profits are channelled back to the staff and operation.



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Forecourt storewatch



Visser holds competition days on slower days (such as after a petrol price hike) where the petrol attendants are put into teams and tasked with cleaning the forecourt and the best-cleaned pump wins a prize. This encourages team work and boosts staff morale.

She firmly believes in rewarding good work and this shows by the smiling faces and extra effort that every member of the 64-strong staff puts in to their daily tasks. "We are all chasing targets the whole time and this is very motivating. It's important to recognise what people do and reward them to show how much you appreciate it and keep the ball rolling so no-one ever gets bored," she says. Competitions are held on slower days (such as after a petrol price hike) – the petrol attendants are put into teams and tasked with cleaning the forecourt and the best-cleaned pump wins a prize. Visser ensures that independent food and safety evaluations are done twice a month to keep quality and service at peak performance.

Staff stress?

The recent strikes have seen the country's industrial sectors in crisis mode, and Sasol

Sasol Swartgoud is one of four forecourts to pilot the 'My Delight' concept, which introduces hot meals to the offering. In just eight months, Visser's volumes have doubled.



Swartgoud has also felt the pressure. However, every staff member has reported to duty every day and continued to work as usual albeit without their uniforms.

Positive morale

"I have the most fantastic team. No one bears any grudges. We admit, rectify and move on from our mistakes," she says. Visser emphasises the need for her staff to be multi-skilled and involves the team leaders in any interview processes, which also adds to the positive morale at the forecourt.

What's next?

Visser may have achieved the goal she set for herself six years ago, but she has no immediate plans to leave Sasol Swartgoud. "I love my job and I plan to be here for as long as I am healthy. Just buy me a tank of fuel and then I'm happy."



Visser is currently piloting a general merchandise section – complete with shavers, hair dryers, plugs, extension cords and even TV remotes – and it is proving to be very popular with customers!



Free coffee and car washes are offered to all emergency, security and charity services and the regular presence of police cars works as an added security presence at the forecourt.

The staff have become very creative in their decorating of confectionery as part of a healthy team rivalry at My Delight. The menu screens, which change every few seconds, actually became TV screens to showcase the games during the Soccer World Cup – a bonus for both customers and staff!

