

Classic car restorations offer keys to tackle rural poverty

Inspired by a TV show on restoring vintage cars and with R2 000 in her pocket to buy a rusted 1947 Pontiac, Nosipho Kholutsoane saw a road out of poverty and an opportunity to develop industry and skills in the remote rural town of Mount Fletcher in the Eastern Cape.



Photo by cottonbro© from [Pexels](#)

Five years later, Kholutsoane employs four people in her business Lereku Trading Classic Cars with a customer base of vintage car enthusiasts from all over the world, and is currently completing the Small Business Academy (SBA) programme at the University of Stellenbosch Business School (USB).

She is one of 19 small business owners sponsored by the Joe Gqabi Economic Development Agency (JoGEDA) to participate in the programme aimed at empowering entrepreneurs to grow sustainable businesses in the Eastern Cape's northernmost district.

Previously involved in the construction industry, Kholutsoane now combs the dirt roads and farms of the area in search of disused classic cars dating from the 1930s to the 1970s, buying and restoring them to their former glory and marketing them around the globe via social media.

She has taken on commissions from all over South Africa from owners of old cars in need of restoration, and also hires out her restored vehicles for special events and photo shoots, as well as participating in classic car shows all over the country to promote her business.

“ My team and I have a passion and a love for these classic old cars. Reconstructing them and restoring them to an excellent standard and value for money, brings joy to us and our customers who get to drive a unique vehicle and feel like a king or a queen. ”

The mother of four sees her business as a way to develop skills in the youth of the impoverished, underdeveloped area, and build a future for her school-going children.

The location has a strategic advantage in that Mount Fletcher is on the R56, the shortest route between KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape, gaining international customers for her business as tourists travelling from Durban to Cape Town stop to take a look at the sight of classic cars being worked on “in the middle of nowhere”.

Skills training

Competing against established classic car restorers and custom outfits in Johannesburg, Pretoria and Mossel Bay, she says the SBA programme has inspired her and equipped her with the skills to “put Mount Fletcher on the map of classic car restorers in South Africa”.

“The Small Business Academy has made a big difference to my business and opened my mind to opportunities to grow the business and market it better. I didn’t understand profit and loss before, but now I can track whether business is growing or going down – and the best part is that I can see that the business IS currently growing.

“I can also see now how many more people I can employ, how I can spread skills to more young people and create job opportunities,” she said.

The SBA programme has also helped her to map and plan for future needs such as a proper workshop under cover and a much-needed chroming machine for restoring bumpers and metalwork.

This was the fourth year of the JoGEDA partnership with the USB Small Business Academy to bring their development programme – specifically designed for historically disadvantaged entrepreneurs in low-income areas – to the district and sponsor participation by selected local entrepreneurs.

JoGEDA chief executive, Ayanda Gqoboka said that results for the more than 60 businesses that have now been through the programme had been “outstanding” in enabling entrepreneurs to structure, focus and plan for their businesses.

Gqoboka says that empowering small businesses to move out of survivalist mode and become sustainable engines of economic growth and employment creation was part of JoGEDA’S strategy to diversify economic activity in the district, unlock the potential for growth in sectors such as agro-processing and manufacturing, and create local employment opportunities that would retain young people in the district.

Dr Marietjie Theron-Wepener, head of SBA, says the programme was developed, and first rolled out in the townships of Cape Town, in response to the high failure rate of small businesses, and she was delighted with the positive results seen in its extension to the Eastern Cape.

“Our vision is to make a difference in the lives and businesses of small business owners in low-income communities,

building sustainability and eventually supporting them in such a way that they can play a vital role in alleviating poverty by creating employment,” she said.

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