

Birdi *is best*



Len Lewison, Managing Director, and
Charlene Lewison, Marketing and Sales Director

Birdi is a highly acknowledged company that has been serving the golf fraternity and corporate organisations for 16 years, during which time it has become a leading golf brand. Birdi was born out of the association between the initial members of the Birdi Golf Apparel Close Corporation and Morui Investment Holdings.

As Marketing and Sales Director, Charlene Lewison works hand-in-hand with her father, Managing Director of Birdi Clothing (Pty) Ltd, Len Lewison, to supply high profile events with golf apparel and corporate clothing for both men and women. The company provides excellent quality products that further enhance their clients' brands.

"When Birdi first started out, it was manufacturing golf trousers that were fashionable and comfortable, only selling to on-course golf shops," explains Len. "As the company continued to grow, it became apparent that there was a greater demand for shirts, resulting in a natural progression of our product range to also incorporate other golf clothing items as well as golf accessories. It was during this time, in 1995, that we bought shares in the company and developed the Birdi brand into what it is today – one of the leading golf brands in the country."

Len is quick to add that much of the company's success is due to Charlene joining Birdi three years later, implementing her years of experience in merchandising. "Birdi started out as a small company, but Charlene took it to the next level," says Len. "In 2004, we recognised a need to uplift previously disadvantaged individuals, and part of our commitment to enterprise development encouraged us to finalise a deal with a black-owned controlled company, Morui Investment Holdings (Pty) Ltd, owned by four high profile businessmen. Consequently, they bought a 27.5% equity in Birdi."

All four members were invited onto the Board with **Victor Nosi** appointed as non-executive Chairman. Nosi had worked for several blue chip companies that included Absa, SAB, Sasol and also South African Air-

ways. Most of these positions were in marketing communications. He is presently Commercial Director of SA Football Association (SAFA). In addition, Nosi is also a trustee of the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund. The other Board members include Philip Zondo, Kenny Setzin and Joe Nalane.

"Birdi's focus is two-fold," says Len. "We cater for retailers, including on-course golf shops and golf discounters, and we supply large corporates with golf apparel for high profile golf days, where corporates entertain their clients, spending money on them by means of our beautiful golf shirts, as well as on drinks, dinner and various forms of entertainment."

Birdi's strong brand has enabled them to build lasting relationships with high profile corporate clients. Birdi is so highly regarded in the industry that the PGA of South Africa has chosen them as their preferred supplier.

Achieving and giving

As a proudly South African company, Birdi is totally committed to the principles of black economic empowerment, and it ensures where possible that all its suppliers are BEE compliant as well. Furthermore, for the last two years Birdi has achieved level one compliancy, the highest level a company can achieve. Understandably, both Len and Charlene are extremely proud of this achievement. "Most of our top clients will insist on Birdi supplying them with BEE credentials, as they are BEE compliant themselves," adds Len. "Being level one complaint also assists corporations with their BEE credentials for a preferential procurement score. For every Rand that a client spends at Birdi, they can claim R2,70 for their procurement scorecard."

Charlene notes that Birdi is also actively involved in providing assistance to a number of causes in pre-

viously disadvantaged communities and for the youth. As such, Birdi is a clothing sponsor of the SA Disabled Golf Association, Special Olympics, women's golf programmes, to name a few.

"As community upliftment is extremely important to Birdi, we decided to take it a step further and give a subsidised amount of money to two young black ladies to assist them in starting their own small business, so we not only supply the finances, but we also offer the necessary support," Charlene humbly states. "We also believe in empowering our staff to move up the career ladder. For example, we offer in-house training, which is why one of our top salesmen is a true up-and-coming success story."

A unique product

According to Charlene, when co-ordinating a new collection, Birdi is always conscious of world trends in terms of design. "There are a many fabrics that we don't use in South Africa due to our unique climate," she says. "I am a firm believer in fabrics that are holistic and support the green initiative. For this reason, I stand by products that I believe in, especially those that work with one's body temperature. As a result, we don't use synthetic materials at all; we only use 100% cottons that are produced at local/international mills. They produce mercerised double cotton – a crucial fabric for a golfer as it is a raw, natural fibre that is treated to offer sheen and comfort for sheer pleasure."

Birdi's greatest source of information regarding their products is the market's demands, guiding Charlene in terms of what the company should be producing. "I engineer our own designs, and knit every fabric, which is approved by the SA Cotton Board, before it goes into production. We also have a large collection of certified organic fabric that is grown in



Len Lewison, Managing Director, Victor Nosi, Chairman and Charlene Lewison, Marketing and Sales Director

Thailand, which ensures that our fabrics are breathable, and therefore important for a golfer to feel good and comfortable.”

Charlene goes on to say that there is great depth involved when coalating a collection. “Our collection is derived through immense thought and care,” she states. She also emphasises the crucial role that colour plays in clothing, as certain colours can affect a golfer’s psyche in a certain manner, which in turn can also affect their performance on the course.

Speaking on personal attributes that Charlene believes has resulted not only in her success, but also the success of the company, she highlights that she never procrastinates in terms of daily completion of work. “I also have two excellent personal assistants who balance me and take a load off me,” she says. “With the support of our highly focused employees, and a superb product, Birdi truly is a brand to be reckoned with.”

Birdi is a company built on a solid foundation of values, principles and a hard work ethic, which has afforded them much success and an influential brand in the market. Anyone wearing a Birdi garment can be assured that much thought, effort, passion and love has gone into a piece of clothing made to be enjoyed, and worn with pride.

Birdi Board on the Ball

Philip Zondo

Zondo has spent most of his working life in the marketing and sales related environments. He occupied senior positions at various companies, including Nedcor, Standard Bank, Liberty Life, Telkom, the Sowetan newspaper, and also served as an Account Director for Leo Burnett.

Kenny Setzin

Setzin was an Executive Director of New Africa Investments Limited (Nail). Setzin is the Non-Executive Chairman of J. Walter Thompson SA and he is also Non-Executive Chairman of Ince (Pty) Ltd. Prior to that he worked for Telkom and lectured on a part-time basis at North-West University (South Africa) for a period of six years.

Joe Nalane

Nalane has extensive law experience and he has represented individuals and institutional clients including para-statal. He was previously a partner at Werksman’s Attorneys and is an active and successful member of the Johannesburg Bar.

These Board members, along with co-founder of Birdi, **Alan Altshuler**, ensure the continued growth and success of Birdi going forward, while **Len** and **Charlene** hold the reigns and steer the ship, and **Victor** as Chairman keeps an eye on things.