

Breaking the all-boys club

By Achieve Correspondent

Creating sustainable jobs and reducing the high rate of unemployment is a key strategic thrust in South Africa. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) play a crucial role in the economy. Research shows that SMEs contribute more than 15% to gross domestic product (GDP).

After the death of her husband, Buks Brits, who owned Buks Brits Engineering, Rhoda Brits took over the business and continued to operate his legacy.

Imbued with astute leadership qualities and an ability to lead from the front, Mrs Brits is no pushover.

Possessing a B.Com degree, she continued to run the business, assisted by an apprentice, Mr Jan Abraham Dietrichsen, who is registered with the merSETA. The

engineering business, which started in 2001, focuses mainly on the repair, maintenance and manufacture of farming implements.

After showing signs of growth the business relocated to Clocolan in the Free State in 2005, with two centre-lathes, a guillotine, a bender and a pedestal drilling machine. Since then, the company has grown in leaps and bounds and more fitters and turners have qualified. In 2008, Buks Brits Engineering was recognised as a top training

company by merSETA in the Free State.

The award is given in recognition of companies with a proven track record of successful participation in skills development –companies that have helped merSETA to reach two-thirds of its targets in terms of its service level agreement.

“In our country, the future for someone with only a Grade 12 certificate is not bright at all. Skills development enables us to





Rhoda Brits ... On top of things

improve the lives of our employees. At Buks Brits Engineering, skills development is our philosophy and we continuously strive to develop students and produce qualified fitters and turners. Our motto for skills development is to focus on the fine detail and precision work. From day one, Buks Brits Engineering reached for new horizons and I see us being no different in the years to come," she points out.

Globally, SMEs have been recognised as a priority sector for growth and



development and South Africa is no exception. In India, SMEs contribute over 45% of the country's industrial production and around 40% of total exports. About 13 million SMEs employ more than 31 million people. This sector provides total earnings of US\$140 billion.

Mrs Brits does most of the milling, grinding and sheet metal work herself and her clients are mostly the farming community in the Marquard, Ladybrand, Ficksburg and Excelsior districts.

She attributes the success of the business to the fact that, from the start, she did not turn any work away, no matter how big or difficult.

She recommends engineering to any woman interested in a technical career. "It is second nature for a woman to work to close tolerances and ensure the final product is well

finished before it gets delivered to a client".

Engineering runs in the Brits family. Her eldest daughter is a chemical engineer.

"Working as a woman in a 'man's' world has obstacles, but I choose to think of them as challenges to rise up to. You have to be willing to work twice as hard as men to prove your worth and, of course, take some knocks along the way," she says.

Overcoming these challenges takes time and sacrifice from both parties to enable the development of a future trusting relationship.

"There is a need for more women to contribute to the mainstream economy of our country. Women have the ability to make good business decisions as well as the ability to know what their workers need," concludes Mrs Brits.

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