

**SPEECH BY THE EXECUTIVE MAYOR OF MATJHABENG LOCAL MUNICIPALITY,  
ME. MATHABO MOKAPO ON THE OCCASSION OF CELEBRATION OF ARBOR  
WEEK (1-7 SEPTEMBER 2006) – MELODING (VIRGINIA).**

Programme Director

Honorable Councillors

Management and Officials of the Department of Environmental Affairs & Tourism

Management and Officials of the Department of Health

Members of the Media

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

I feel very privileged and honored to address you, on this mammoth occasion, which is the celebration of Arbor Week. Arbor week 2006, should serve to mobilize the entire community of Matjhabeng, because it has become one of the most important campaigns in our environmental calendar.

The celebrations of Arbor Week in our municipality, should not only involve the various levels of government, but also business, industry, non-governmental organizations, community based structures and the green movement.

In celebrating Arbor Week, we should always appreciate the important legacy that was left, by Mr. J. Sterling, an American who, in 1872, in the United States' territory of Nebraska was a pioneer of Arbor Day celebrations across the globe, and also a keen proponent of the beauty and benefit of trees.

As we all know, celebrations of Arbor Day in South Africa began in earnest in 1983, and in 1999 our present government extended the celebration to National Arbor Week, that ranges from the 1st -7th September each year.

The broad intentions of Arbor Week among others are:

- To promote a better understanding of trees, particularly indigenous trees.
- Highlight the important role that trees play in sustainable development and the livelihoods of people, and their environment.
- Encourage communities to participate in various greening activities within their own surroundings.
- Raise awareness of South Africa's urban greening initiatives.

I believe, it is crucial at this point that, I briefly outline the importance of trees to mankind:

- Trees produce oxygen, which we need for survival and life itself.
- Trees improve the air quality through carbon sequestration and they can counteract the phenomenon of global warming which is detrimental for our planet.
- Trees make effective sound barriers, as they muffle urban noise, almost as effectively as stone walls.
- Trees act as windbreaks during the windy season.

- They provide shade during the long hot summer days and reduce the need for air conditioning in summer.
- During the rainy season, trees help prevent soil erosion and this contributes to maintaining a balanced ecosystem.
- Trees provide privacy to our homes, and give us fuel, timber, poles, crops, fodder, fruit, oilseed, fibre, medicine etc.

On the basis of the above facts, which demonstrate that trees are of crucial importance, I would therefore love to convey the following message, to members of the Matjhabeng community:

During this Arbor Week, motivate your local schools, churches, clinics and others, to get involved in tree planting ceremonies.

Organize posters, essays, poetry or debating competitions about trees at your schools. Initiate memorial tree gardens in your communities.

Gather and distribute information on the planting and care of trees and indigenous forests.

Start a vegetable garden and an orchard.

Organize tree identification excursions.

Encourage everyone to participate in tree planting and greening activities.

Raise awareness of the dangers of veldt and forest fires.

Promote a better understanding of trees, particularly indigenous trees.

Promote our indigenous forests; i.e. never cut down a tree in a natural forest, never remove an animal or living plant without permission.

Many places in our country are barren and lifeless because they do not have trees, plants or gardens. In the past, trees were not planted in townships, although many suburbs were greened. We need to plant trees in every town, city, school, clinic, street and home.

Plant trees to remember our heroes, because throughout history, people have planted trees in memory of those we have lost.

This year we are celebrating National Arbor Week under the theme "Plant a tree - grow our future". I guess we all realize that, this theme is a recurring theme from the previous year. However, the focus area for this year is business opportunities in forestry, greening, empowerment and careers in forestry.

Also, it is important for us to know that every Arbor Week celebration highlights two specific trees, i.e. one common and one rare species. I therefore wish to inform you that for the year 2006, the two trees are Wild Pomegranate (i.e. a common tree) and Kosi Palm (i.e. a rare species). As a community we need to enhance our knowledge of trees, because they are indispensable to our country's heritage, beauty, wildlife and the environment.

In doing so, we must always remember that, for centuries trees have been the source of precious roots, herbs and remedies that are now being recognized by medical science.

A reflection on the state of Environmental Health viz a viz Arbor Week, at Matjhabeng Municipality, shows that we are indeed on course.

Our IDP encapsulates a programme termed "Adopt a Park" which in essence talks to a clean and green environment. Also our IDP encompasses, among others, a project to establish environmental health forums, building of garden refuse centres in all six towns, and prevention of littering and pollution on sites.

During this Arbor Week, about 500 trees will be distributed throughout Matjhabeng, in schools and among ward councilors. In this regard, pamphlets will also be issued that explain the methods of planting and caring for trees.

As a municipality, we are currently running vegetable gardens under the project "permanent agriculture", where we give seeds to communities, so that they can begin their own vegetable gardens and orchards, and replenish trees that may have been destroyed in the process of providing fuel.

There is also a seminar scheduled for 23 November 2006, where the municipality together with other stakeholders who embrace the project, of greening our environment, will be deliberating on the cleaning and greening of Matjhabeng.

Despite the progress outlined above, we must all acknowledge that, much work still needs to be done, particularly in our townships, in the realm of environmental awareness and education.

## **Conclusion**

Arbor Week is an appropriate time for South Africans to appreciate the value of trees and their contribution to our country. Besides their life giving properties, trees play an important role in contributing to the creation of a better life for all South Africans.

Also, we should take note that, forests not only make a major contribution to the economy, but more importantly provide jobs and economic opportunities for many rural communities.

Trees are also playing a crucial role in Government's efforts to restore dignity to our people. The greening of our residential areas, particularly townships and informal settlements is an important goal of government.

**Thank you.**

**COUNCILLOR MATHABO MOKAPO  
EXECUTIVE MAYOR**