



The Saaberie Chishty Ambulance Service

- Three Decades On

Fakir Hassen





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** Sammy Naidoo and Shumarlan Naidoo, of the Apple Group of Companies, who have graciously printed this book in their continuing support of my community ventures for the past decade.*

** Chivonne Cousins for the proofreading*

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Contents

Preface 1

Message From Sammy Naidoo
Chairman of the Apple Group 4

Message From Aboo Sayed
Chairman, Saaberie Chishty Ambulance Service 6

Part1
A Brief History of the Ambulance Service 8

Part 2
*Some Glimpses From Activities of the Saaberie
Chishty Ambulance Society* 15

A Few Accolades 44

The Covid-19 Conclusion 45

“Whoever saves one life -
it is as if he had saved the entire mankind”
- *Al Quran, 5:32*

This book is dedicated to the Saaberie Chishty members past,
present and deceased; and the thousands of supporters who
have made the service the success that it is today as a true
public service organisation.

PREFACE

In 2018 the Saaberie Chishty Ambulance Service marked three decades of unstinting service to the community of Greater Lenasia.

The occasion brought back scores of memories of my personal association with the Saaberie Chishty Society, going back more than two decades; before the Ambulance idea was even initiated by the brothers Shabier and Abbas Sayed who had become the backbone of the Society started by their forebears.

When they shared the idea with me at the time, I could hardly have foreseen what the Ambulance service would evolve into – a major facility that the people of Lenasia and its environs would become so reliant on.

The ambulance was born out of the dire need at the time of the community that was serviced by a single hospital, Coronation, more than 30 km away.

One of the cruelties of the abhorrent apartheid system of the white minority government was that even treatment for life-threatening situations was segregated by race, with advantages of multiple hospitals for that community and denial for others. In fact, people from Lenasia were known to have died enroute to Coronation Hospital in ambulances that arrived late in crisis situations.

The establishment of the Saaberie Chishty Ambulance service was therefore, not unsurprisingly, heartily welcomed by the community and willing donors, especially business houses.

One of the primary objectives of the founders was that it would be a community service for all, rendered free of charge.

This spirit of community service extended to the many volunteers who came forward willingly to learn and serve, some even going on to qualify as paramedics.

Rapidly increasing demands for the service, coupled with spiralling costs, failed to deter the resolve of the Ambulance team to persevere, often against great odds.

I recall how the annual fund-raising Bazaar Fête, which assisted in meeting the ever-rising costs, had to be shelved because of the red tape involved in securing the Lenasia Cricket Stadium as a venue.

It is a matter of great pride for me to continue the association that started with one generation and continues into the next under the dynamic leadership of Aboo Sayed.

In recent years, Aboo and his colleagues have brought in a fresh dynamism at the annual fund-raising banquets in particular.

At the 2019 fund-raising banquet, my co-publisher Sammy Naidoo of the Apple Group was so impressed by the presentations made that he pledged to provide a copy of this book to every supporter and volunteer as a permanent record of their involvement.

It is therefore a special privilege for us to compile this brief record of some of the activities from the past 32 years of the Saaberie Chishty Ambulance Service.

I have been privileged to follow, photograph and report on the Ambulance Service and its ups and downs throughout this period through my association with the Lenasia Times and later the Post.

This book contains a selection of some of that coverage, with a lot of the earlier material unfortunately lost through various incidents in the days when digital technology did not exist.

This attempt at compiling its history could never be a complete record of the history of the Saaberie Chishty Ambulance, which would require much greater research than that done in the time that was available, but with the intention of placing it in school and public libraries, it will hopefully preserve for posterity at least some of the valiant efforts of volunteers over two generations.

We trust that the many long-time supporters, volunteers and staff will enjoy seeing themselves in the pictures and reflecting on just how their valuable contributions, no matter how large or small, have made a huge difference over the years to thousands of lives.

In closing, I must record a special tribute to Osman Sayed and particularly his younger brother Abbas Sayed, who both succumbed to the dreaded Covid-19 pandemic even while they continued to serve others who had been struck down by it. May their souls rest in peace, looking down and noting with pride that their legacy continues.

FAKIR HASSEN
AUTHOR

MESSAGE FROM SAMMY NAIDOO

I recall the birth of the Saaberie Chishty Ambulance Service more than three decades ago, when my then young family and I still lived in Lenasia South.

The service established to cater for the community, which was so neglected in the apartheid era, also holds a special memory for my family and myself because we were ourselves recipients of the service when my dear Mom was ill.

What a pleasant surprise it was therefore, to see how the service has grown over the decades when in 2019, my wife Rooko and I had the privilege of attending the annual fundraising banquet of the Saaberie Chishty Ambulance at a very professionally organised event in Ormonde. Highly laudable is the fact that despite the lack of funding from state coffers, the service continues to render the facilities with a handful of paid staff and many more dedicated volunteers.

The mere fact that they have found support to continue to do this for over 30 years is a testament to value that the community, who contribute to the annual costs, finds from them. The legacy of the founding fathers of the Ambulance Service continues in a new generation of officials and volunteers, who must also be commended for their adaptation of fund-raising initiatives and continued high levels of commitment.

Beyond just commendation, these efforts need to be recorded for posterity. It is therefore a special privilege for my son Shumarlan and I, as we attempt to do this with Fakir by co-Publishing this book as a tribute to not just all those who started and continue to provide the service, but also those well-wishers and donors who help sustain it.

I am praying as hard as you all probably are for the annual banquet to be resumed as soon as the circumstances caused by the Covid-19 pandemic allows it.

May I also, on behalf of my family, extend our sincere condolences to the Sayed family on the untimely passing of brothers Abbas and Osman Sayed, who were instrumental in the establishment of the Ambulance Service.

Their legacy will live on as long as the ambulance sirens keep blaring across Greater Lenasia.

SAMMY NAIDOO
CHAIRMAN
APPLE GROUP



Sammy Naidoo with MEC Michael Sun, Gauteng Premier David Makhura, Deputy Minister Andries Nel and the author as we handed over the first copies of our latest publication, 'Milestones Inside 25 Years of Democracy', at the Saaberie Chishty banquet in 2019.

MESSAGE FROM ABOO SAYED

While we will always treasure this book as a special one put together with care and detail, the Covid-19 pandemic put a disappointing damper on our plans to launch it at the 15th annual fundraising banquet that was scheduled to be held on 4 April 2020.

Saaberie Chishty took a difficult yet responsible decision to postpone the annual fundraising banquet due to the Coronavirus pandemic until further notice.

Despite plans having been at a very advanced stage, this prestigious event was postponed following consultation with all parties concerned. This was in line with the safety precautions for all against the Covid-19 virus, even before President Cyril Ramaphosa announced the national lockdown, which brought with it new challenges for the ambulance service.

As the lockdown continues at different levels amid declarations by leading world experts, including the World Health Organisation, that Covid-19 is set to remain challenging the world for many months to come, or at least until a vaccination drive can be fully implemented across the globe; it is now even more critical that you open your hearts and make contributions and donations towards the running of the ambulance as we can only anticipate a growing number of calls as the days go by.

We rely on donations to fund this essential service to the community of Lenasia and surrounding areas. What has also been extremely gratifying is that not one of the sponsors and supporters who bought tickets to the banquet disagreed with our decision to postpone the event.

We apologise for any inconvenience caused and have requested that they retain your tickets until an official date is set in the future. We will confirm a date as soon as the current Coronavirus situation subsides.

We value your continued support and generous contributions in making Saaberie Chishty ambulance one of the most committed resources in helping saving lives.

I must also place on record our grateful thanks to Mr Sammy Naidoo and his team, and our long-time associate and friend Mr Fakir Hassen, for their effort in publishing this record of activities and placing it in schools for future reference.

At a more personal level, I must pay tribute to my father Osman Sayed and his younger brother Abbas Sayed, who both succumbed to Covid-19 within a day of each other at the height of the epidemic. Their untimely demise has left a huge void because of the critical role that they played in the Ambulance services.

ABOO SAYED
CHAIRMAN
SAABERIE CHISHTY AMBULANCE SERVICES

PART ONE

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SAABERIE CHISHTY AMBULANCE SERVICE

Saaberie Chishty Ambulance Service is a registered Non-Profit Organisation (NPO) and a Public Benefit Organisation (PBO) which aspires to help better the community by providing professional Emergency Medical Service (EMS) to the less fortunate within Region G, which encompasses the Southern Suburbs of Johannesburg, including Lenasia and surrounding areas. The service is funded by generous sponsors and contributions from the public.

What started out as a small community ambulance approximately 32 years ago is now a 24-hour fully operational service with ambulances manned by 17 qualified paramedics and administration staff. Since its inception the ambulance service has grown from strength to strength, allowing the Society to extend the emergency medical services to areas such as Eldorado Park, Lehae, Zakariyya Park, Lenasia South, Ennerdale as well as the neighbouring informal settlements, rendering much needed medical assistance to the destitute and needy.

The Annual Fundraising Dinner is the main source of funding and the past few years this annual event has been dubbed by corporate and business as one of the best social events in the calendar.

In November 1988, the Johannesburg Municipal Ambulance Services were delayed by an average of two hours in reacting to emergency cases in the Lenasia, Kliptown and Eldorado Park areas. The Star newspaper reported in November that ambulance services were dangerously ineffective.

This prompted the decision to start the Saaberie Chishty Ambulance service, which was enthusiastically welcomed by the local community. But the euphoria around the service was somewhat short-lived, as the single ambulance with one full-time staff member had to take a break after the ambulance was written off following an accident in February 1989.



By the time service was resumed in November 1989, demand was increasing. According to a report in the Lenasia Times, in 1990, there were an average of 20 calls per month. Monthly running costs were about R3,000 while an ambulance cost R60,000.

The introduction of the hugely successful Bazaar/Fête in 1992 and a subsequent one in 1993 saw the organisation acquiring two ambulances.

By 1994 the first ambulance had clocked up a formidable 380 000km. In the same year, a well-wisher donated a heart machine; full-time staff had increased to six; and many more volunteer staff joined. The invaluable service provided caused a number of local organisations to run special thanks advertisements.

The recognition of the yeoman service being rendered resulted in a third ambulance being acquired in 1995, with two more full-time staff and the volunteer force growing to 16, of which 12 were fully qualified.

Two years of not having a fund-raising event because of objections from the United Cricket Board about its use for this purpose only bolstered the determination of well-wishers, with letters of support streaming in about the refusal. One donor even sponsored a second heart machine in 1996 at a cost of R42 000. Between 2000 and



2004, Albaraka Bank and Jumbo Cash and Carry sponsored new ambulances.

With monthly operating costs escalating to R42 000, it had become imperative to find alternative funding sources. The idea of the banquet was born in 1995 and has continued every year since then. In the same year, Trade Route Mall donated a new ambulance.



SAABERIE CHISHTY AMBULANCE CORPORATE CREDO

The corporate credo of the Ambulance Service is:

- To save lives, reduce suffering and enhance the quality of life.
- To provide accessible response and quality care through accountability, integrity, innovation and organised management.
- To lead by example, work with expertise and deliver the best outcomes possible for our patients.
- To strive to contribute to society by improving our capacity to provide a comprehensive emergency service solution with infrastructural capabilities to sustain this service.
- To develop and implement successful healthcare solutions for all, regardless of colour or creed.
- To observe the sanctity of life, personal respect and dignity in everything we do.



A TYPICAL DAY OF THE SAABERIE CHISTY AMBULANCE TEAM

There can be no dedication to assist during trauma if it is not founded on a labour of love. A road accident is especially traumatic and is an emotional and often dangerous situation.

The teams will evaluate these situations with the best medical knowledge at their disposal, then with the least amount of stress to those involved, apply the appropriate treatment, provide the earliest interventions, and transport to a hospital or other facility, if required.

Home injuries and accidents unfortunately occur often. Staff need the best decorum, handling and sensitivity in these circumstances, where emotions run deep and tensions may be high.

Settling a crowd of anxious bystanders or family members may call for special appreciation of their concerns in such situations.

Sometimes a deep cut, laceration, sting or burn may mobilise teams to an emergency. These eventualities may call for specialist medics for specialised treatment.

Many people in local communities suffer from chronic problems such as heart disease, diabetes, or conditions like asthma. An emergency call in these cases may be life-threatening, and service teams must act decisively and quickly.

Level-headedness on the part of the care-giver is important to uphold the motto of “He who has saved a life is regarded as if he saved the entire mankind.”



PART TWO

SOME GLIMPSES FROM THE ACTIVITIES OF THE SAABERIE CHISHTY AMBULANCE SERVICES



Spaza shops are known to have small mark-ups and not make huge profits, but when the play of the same name had the debut of its Gauteng season at the Gandhi Hall in Lenasia, the Saaberie Chishty Ambulance Society benefited. Chacha's Spaza Shop, the side-splitting play led by veteran comic duo Essop Khan and Mohamed Ali, had the audience in stitches with the antics of the cast. Our picture shows the cast of the play with Abbas Sayed.

Earlier a qawali show from India sponsored by the Consulate General of India as part of its cultural outreach programme also helped raise funds for the Ambulance Service.



OCTOBER 2006

Co-owners of the Trade Route Mall in Lenasia, Sayed Mia and Ismail Valli, handed over a brand-new ambulance to the Saaberie Chishty Ambulance Society.

The event at the Mall turned into an afternoon of festivity as surprised shoppers who found the Lenasia Muslim Brigade marching through its corridors followed the sounds to an area where a host of dignitaries, entertainment and refreshments awaited them all. Popular local singers Iqbal Khan and Bash Hoosein were among those who rendered items before the sirens of the new ambulance blared to herald the handover to the Society.





Some of the younger members of the Saaberie Chishty Ambulance Society – back fltr – Mohammed Ali Bhikhan, Faheema Bhikan, Shahana Sayed, Bibi Fatima Rahiman, Ayesha Begum Sayed, Sharifa Kassim, Raashika Sayed, Kamroonisa Choonara, Mohammed Ameen Sayed, and Fehmida Begum Mia. In front fltr - Hasina Begum Sayed, Allahuddin Sayed, Baby Mikaeel Kassim, Amina Bhikan, Baby Aatiqa Begum Sayed, Zaiboon Deedat and Muhammed Aslam Sayed.



The Indian community of South Africa needs to rethink its approach to avoiding the public service in the interest of the country, and also stop preferring being employers rather than employees. That was the challenging message from Yunus Chamda, Executive Director of Planning and Development for the Sedibeng District, who was the guest speaker at the Saaberie Chishty Ambulance Society fund-raising banquet held at the Lenasia South Civic Centre.

Highlighting the relationship between community service and the official public service, Chamda lauded the Ambulance Service for the free service that it provides to the local community, irrespective of creed or colour. He said this was a sterling example of commitment to the broader citizens of the community, but Indians also had to consider taking up positions in the public service, where they could play a very important role.



“The community should stop focusing inwards and rather look at ways in which they can contribute to the good of all. I have noted an increasing interest by Indians in the security services, but there are also many other areas where there are opportunities,” Chamda concluded.

MAY 2007



A surprise item by the velvet-voiced Hoosen Vally helped raise a huge amount when he sang a song in praise of mothers that tugged at everyone's heartstrings.



Guests were thrilled at being serenaded by father and son singing duo Soppy and Ridwan Dawood.

MAY 2007



Guests Shauket and Naziera Khan with entertainer Afzal Khan (now late) and his wife Sumayya. The serious message from Chamda was offset by the hilarious antics of Afzal Khan, the stand-up comedian from Durban who had the packed hall falling over with laughter as he reflected on realities of life that they could identify with easily. Below are Zayu Mayet, guest speaker Yunus Chamda, and Rashid and Zarina Motala.



Well-wishers packed out the Nirvana School Hall to help fill the coffers of the Saaberie Chishty Ambulance Society at its annual fundraising dinner.

Besides entertainment by Mervyn Pillay, guests could snap up items at an auction and pledges from generous donors helped meet a target of R100,000 to keep the free ambulance service going a little longer.

The guest of honour was former Minister and then Chairman of the Board of Eskom, Mohamed Valli Moosa. Right in the centre of current controversial hearings into proposed huge price hikes by Eskom, Moosa related why, when there was so much surplus electricity in the country in earlier days, it had kept prices down to among the lowest in the world. But with the current huge demand in line with the growth of the country, there had to be increases to keep pace with this demand, he explained.



Guest speaker Mohamed Valli Moosa with his niece Fatima Ismail, veteran journalist Boetie Eshak and entertainer Mervyn Pillay.

MAY 2008



Ahmed Samaria and his daughter Aqeela (right), who bid R5 000 for a historic framed picture of a Saaberie Chishty Ambulance with sentimental value.

South African Muslims enjoy more freedom than their counterparts in any Islamic country in the world, newly-appointed Deputy Minister of International Relations Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim told an audience at the Nirvana School Hall.

“South African Muslims are free to practice their religion, culture and customs as they wish, protected by the Constitution, unlike any other country in the Islamic world,” Ebrahim said in his keynote address at the annual fundraising banquet of the Saaberie Chishty Ambulance Society.

Ebrahim, a specialist in the Sri Lankan situation which had seen over 25 years of civil war between the ruling Sinhalese and Tamils who were fighting for a separate state, also highlighted the plight of thousands of Tamils there after the government announced that they had wiped out the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

“There are ten times more Muslims than those in South Africa among the Tamil community there, and we should also rally to their aid,” said Ebrahim, who two days earlier had issued a statement calling for a UN investigation into atrocities in Sri Lanka.





Entertainers Krijay Govender and Leeanda Reddy, seen here with then budding stage star Sajjad Sayed, (now a renowned Qawali artist) had the audience in stitches with their stand-up comedy acts, even politicians like keynote speaker and Deputy Minister of International Affairs Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim, Isu Chiba and Ismail Vadi.



Veteran freedom fighter Ahmed Kathrada and internationally-renowned humanitarian Dr Imtiaz Sooliman, founder of the Gift of the Givers, were the chief guests . Both men gave highly inspirational and motivational speeches.

They are seen here with the founder chairman of the Ambulance Service, Shabier Sayed.

Uncle Kathy, as the affable leader was popularly known, spent just one year less as a political prisoner than the 27 of Nelson Mandela as a political prisoner.

Sooliman shared how he had been inspired to give up a potentially lucrative private medical practice to launch the aid organisation after being urged to do so by a religious leader.





Aboo Sayed, Megan Wilson, Sales Manager of Qatar Airways; winner of a trip to any destination of her choice Tasneem Dockrat and MC Muthu Murugan.

Durban-based comedian and motivational speaker Muthu Murugan was again roped in by the Saaberie Chishty Ambulance Society to help it reach its R500,000 target at a fund-raising banquet in Lenasia.

It paid off as Murugan used the same skills as in the previous year to get everyone to open their hearts and pockets to make contributions large and small.

Singling out several wealthy businessmen in the audience, Murugan succeeded in convincing them to write out huge cheques, which were supplemented by auctions of a wide range of items donated by well-wishers.

Muthu Murugan is an old hand at assisting charities, but he was bolstered by the presence of Riad Moosa of Cape Town to help raise more than R600,000 at the annual fundraising banquet of the Saaberie Chishty Ambulance Society.

Still basking in the unprecedented success of his movie *Material*, doctor-turned comedian Moosa was the main drawcard at the Nirvana School Hall as he held the audience in stitches with his special brand of Muslim-oriented comedy. Moosa also lauded the Society for their community work and got a standing ovation for his innovative film.



Motor-mouth Muthu Murugan, again using motivational anecdotes in his own unique style as well, had guests dipping into their wallets and purses with pledges that brought in almost R500,000.

An auction of hand-crafted religious items by the late celebrated artist Ebrahim Karolia of Lenasia, exclusive signed cricket bats and a range of other items further boosted the funds raised.

“Saaberie Chishty is such a shining example to charitable organisations in this country, where they look after the poor, who cannot extend their lives like the rich can,” Murugan said.



The gratitude of the community for the 25 years of free service that the Saaberie Chishty Ambulance Service had been providing to the communities in and around Lenasia was shown when R500,000 was raised during a banquet to mark the occasion.

“We started the service in a small way at a time when there were no state or private hospital facilities in Lenasia despite thousands of people being moved there by the apartheid government. People sometimes had to wait hours for an ambulance to ferry them to the Coronation Hospital in Johannesburg, which was designated for Indians,” co-founder and former President of SCAS Shabbier Sayed reminded the audience.

Durban-based comedian brothers Muthu and Sagren Murugan had the audience in stitches at the banquet, with Muthu succeeding as he had for several years earlier to get the audience to open their wallets and purses to secure the annual running costs of R500 000 in just a few hours.

“In today’s times health and life-saving issues are prioritised by the well-off and neglected for the poor. Medical aid schemes, hospital plans, private clinics, specialist medics, and even ambulances, all seem out of the reach of the poor. The health service offered by the State is far from adequate and in need of serious attention,” said the Chairman of the Ambulance Service Aboo Sayed as he reminisced on how it had been started.

Sayed lamented the current state of health care facilities, including ambulance services, which had almost resulted in the same situation that led to the need for the Saaberie Chishty Ambulance Society being established.

“Our service compares well with the commercial ambulances that are mushrooming amid the poor service delivery from official ambulances, but they come at a cost which many cannot afford. We offer the same quality of service at no charge, thanks to the support of the community,” Sayed said.

A special video tribute was played to honour the founding Chairman of the Ambulance Service, Shabbier Sayed, who passed on in October 2013.



MARCH 2015

The annual fundraising banquet of the Saaberie Chishty Ambulance Service at Nirvana School Hall received a welcome boost from the introduction of young talent who steered it in a slightly different direction from the usual event.

“Although we always get great support from the business sector and individuals, we have always believed that they must get their money’s worth. By handing over the arrangements to younger members of the Society, we felt that they would introduce innovative elements that would find greater favour with our audience” President Abbas Sayed said.

Chairman of the Ambulance Service Aboo Sayed concurred, saying that the feedback from the audience as he walked around the venue was very positive.

Durban-based comedian Masood Boomgard regaled the audience with his style of humour which had not yet been exposed to local audiences. Two young local ladies acting as comperes also presented a fashion show that featured abayas.

One young woman bid successfully for a car, with the proceeds above the cost going to the ambulance service.



Gauteng Health MEC Molebatsi Bopape promised to escalate to the Premier's office the dire need for funding by the Saaberie Chishty Ambulance Society. She was the keynote speaker at a function where schools in the greater Lenasia area received awards for their participation in the Save-A-Life campaign run by the society.

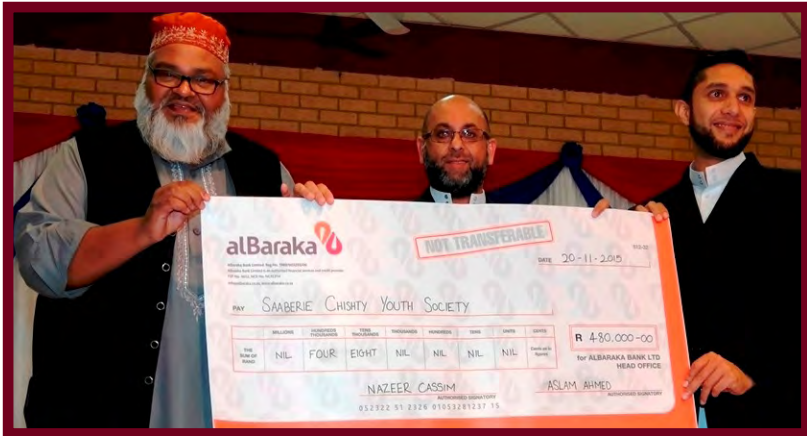
"I saw here today a community that is determined to serve the community with resilience," Bopape said after watching a video of the services rendered by the Ambulance Service despite its constant funding constraints. Bopape said that the Society was helping to build the nation and help humanity. Commending the Society for its 28 years of yeoman service, as well as the businesses and individual donors who had contributed to ensuring this, Bopape gave them an assurance.

"I have noted that you need particularly an emergency response vehicle and better things. We need to be coming in as government and appreciate what you do. I will then take this message and escalate it to the Premier - that you have done so much and what is it that we can assist you with? It can't be Lenasia business only – government must come in. You are paying taxes and those taxes must be ploughed back."

Chairman of the Ambulance Society Aboo Sayed said government funding which had not been forthcoming for 28 years now would be very welcome in ensuring the survival of the service which serves a critical role in the community, especially for the poor and indigent, for whom there were no government hospital facilities easily accessible.

Unfortunately, his hopes were dashed as five years later the promise has not been fulfilled.

NOVEMBER 2015



MARCH 2016

Saaberie Chishty Ambulance received a big boost from Gauteng Premier David Makhura at the annual fundraising banquet held in Ormonde.

“I have looked at the financial statements (which were presented at the banquet) closely, and there is indeed, as outlined in the report, a financial gap that needs to be breached. We would like to pledge a partnership with SCAS,” Makhura said as he started his address.



“I have seen how much is involved, compared to how much work you are doing in Lenz and the neighbouring communities that can be a headache for us in government,” Makhura added, as he commended the management and volunteers of SCAS for reaching out to the community in need.

But the Premier also implored those present to contribute generously, as his pledge alone would never be enough for the work undertaken by SCAS.

Later in the evening, Health MEC Qedani Mahlangu took to the stage to announce a three-step support plan to fulfil the pledge by the Premier.

MARCH 2016

“We have a Training College, which trains our EMS personnel in different levels of skills, including advanced life support. We will cooperate, support and work with Saaberie Chishty through the Training College, making sure that we train its paramedics, including the skills that they currently do not have.

“The Head of Department Dr Selebano as well as the Chief Financial Officer and the CEO of our Emergency Medical Services will meet and finalise the details as to what consumables we are going to offer, including providing ophthalmic services because sometimes they get people whose eyes need checking, so that is also something that we will provide.”

Mahlangu said that the Department would also sign a Memorandum of Understanding with SCAS, like they did with many NGO's that provided services to the community.

“This will see us making monthly contributions to the running costs of the organisation. That is the commitment we are making,” the MEC said, adding that the exact amount would still be finalised by the Department.



MARCH 2016

SCAS Chairman Aboo Sayed was almost moved to tears as the MEC made the announcement.

“We are the second generation continuing the work which was started by our seniors precisely because there was no funding or service from the apartheid-era government for the poor communities in and around Lenasia, and today we and our volunteers are doubly inspired to continue this with government finally coming to our aid for these essential services,” Sayed said.

Sadly, yet again none of these promises were kept.

Sheila Malebo (centre in picture), a dedicated paramedic at the Saaberie Chishty Ambulance Services, was lauded by the Premier for her perseverance in taking up the career after starting out as a domestic worker.

“I was working as a domestic at the Sayed family in Lenasia that started the ambulance service when I dropped out of school. The late Shabier Sayed, founder chairman of the service, said to me: “Sheila, you are still young and yet you don’t want to go forward with your education?”



“I told him I don’t have money to go and study because I have only a single parent because my father had passed away. He told me not to

worry as he would send me from the following year to go and study and then we will talk again. I went and I passed my B.Sc.,” said Sheila.

MARCH 2016



Among the many guests were Fatima Vawda, Zaheda Thokan, Zainub Khota and Zarina Vawda. Special awards were made to veteran activist Laloo 'Isu' Chiba and the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation, which Executive Director Shan Balton accepted.





Dr Mohamed Moosajee and Altaf Kazi from Cricket South Africa helped Joey Rasdien auction memorabilia in aid of ambulance funds.

Osman, Abdullah and Abbas Sayed - part of the five Sayed brothers who started the ambulance serve almost three decades earlier with Premier David Makhura. Osman and Abbas succumbed to Covid-19 in 2020.



MARCH 2016



Gauteng MEC for Transport Ismail Vadi proudly showed his latest acquisition - the bike that was one of the items auctioned off in aid of funds for the Ambulance Service.

MARCH 2017

Two pre-schoolers, both named Abdullah, put up a fantastic show bidding against each other for a framed signed shirt of their football hero Lionel Messi, to the delight of the packed audience at the annual Saaberie Chishty Ambulance Society banquet in Ormonde.

With the loving support of their respective parents, Abdullah Saloojee and Abdullah Badat vied fiercely for the honour of ownership as they kept upping the stakes, with the R70 000 Saloojee snr forked out for the son he clearly doted on winning the day for him.

There was much more fun and entertainment at the banquet with comedian Darren ‘Whackhead’ Simpson and the affable Mo Magic, but the current economic climate appeared to have taken its toll in raising less than earlier years for the Ambulance service that is run free for indigenous communities in and around Lenasia.

“The economic crunch can easily be felt in the operation of our organisation whereby essential donations fail to be forth coming, hence the realisation that we need to make the ambulance service self-sustainable,” said Ambulance Society Chairman Aboo Sayed.





Saaberie Chishty Ambulance Service received a major boost with a new ambulance donated by the Oasis group.

“Organisations like Saaberie Chishty are invaluable to our society and important because they are made up of skilled individuals from within the community who take the responsibility of improving the living conditions of those around them. These men and women give selflessly of their time to assist and help others without any expectation,” said Mohamed Ebrahim, Chairman of the Oasis Crescent Fund Trust, seen here with Aboo and Abbas Sayed.

“The amount of goodwill that they generate can never be quantified, especially in times of need, and therefore it is an honour for the Oasis Crescent Fund Trust to be able to assist Saaberie Chishty with this request to purchase its new ambulance to continue their work. You guys are really an outstanding organisation and we need more of this kind of community-based responsibility rather than asking for government to be responsible in these trying times,” Ebrahim added.

The association between the Trust and Saaberie Chishty started almost a decade earlier when it funded a hearse for the Burial Society component of the varied services run by the organisation.

MARCH 2018



The Saaberie Chishty Ambulance Service marked its 30th anniversary with a gala banquet at the Unisa Hall in Ormonde.

Enthralling the audience was diminutive Oscar von Memerty, who triumphed over Maroteaux Lamy Syndrome, a rare disease which only one other person is known to have. He showed how he mastered hip-hop dancing with determination despite his disability of being just over a metre in height, with tiny legs.



Two major sponsors were acknowledged with special awards - Shaheen Essop of Oasis and Karishma Reddy of Absa Bank.

MARCH 2019

The theme of 'Under the African Skies' for the annual gala fundraising banquet of the Saaberie Chishty Ambulance Society resonated well with the audience, drawing plaudits from Gauteng Premier David Makhura as well as keynote speaker Deputy Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs Andries Nel.



The staff and Ambulance volunteers were all decked out in jackets and scarves in line with this theme as guests enjoyed a lavish meal and entertainment by comedian Carvin Goldstone, whose self-effacing humour was thoroughly enjoyed by the audience.



Chairperson Aboo Sayed recalled how the first fundraising efforts for the free ambulance service 31 years earlier was in the form of money box donations as the community was served from the humble residence of the Sayed brothers in Dahlia Avenue.





A FEW ACCOLADES



These shown here are but a fraction of the accolades received by the Saaberie Chishty Ambulance Service over the past three decades. Abbas Sayed received the Bharathiar Award for community service from Guru Marie Pillay of the Siva Gnaa Sabay. Both are now late. At the Indian Cinema Centenary Awards in Killarney, the Ambulance Service was among the first community organisation to receive a special citation. Aboo Sayed accepted from Sayed Mia, and he was again there when popular Lenasia personality Bash Hoosein made awards to community organisations and individuals at the Lenasia Stadium.



THE COVID-19 CONCLUSION

The Saaberie Chishty Burial Society, long renowned for assisting with Muslim burials, played a leading role during the Covid-19 pandemic as the usual processes could not be followed for the tradition of burying the deceased on the same day as far as possible.

Taking into account the requirements of a dignified burial and closure for those left behind, a range of projects were undertaken, said Aboo Sayed, the Chairman of the Society, whose own father and uncle passed on from Covid-19 within a day of each other.

The research department at Saaberie Chishty engaged the Department of Health as well as the National Institute of Communicable Diseases and assessed the international regulations regarding Islamic burials in order to develop appropriate procedures for South Africa.

A team of medical experts and religious leaders then compiled a guideline on the standard process for Islamic burials in South Africa.

This document was shared with various burial groups and is now used not only in South Africa, but in neighbouring African countries and is ensuring that the final rites of a deceased can be fulfilled according to Islamic rites and etiquettes.

Due to the risk factor related to COVID-19 for individuals 60 and above, who have been in the forefront of undertaking the preparations of bodies for funerals, the organisation also embarked on an effort to recruit younger male and female volunteers to reduce this reliance on the elderly as well as to assist in the whole burial process.

‘We were heartened by the way in which younger members of the community responded to this call,’ Sayed said.

A training material was also produced through collaborative work with the Islamic Medical Association of South Africa, Muslim

THE COVID-19 CONCLUSION

Judicial Council in Cape Town and other institutions. This included videos, flow charts and regulations in an effort to educate the community on ablution, the funeral processes, the importance of social distancing, wearing masks, taking the necessary precautions and adhering to government guidelines for gatherings to stop the spread of COVID-19.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

In 2019, the Saaberie Chishty Ambulance Service marked three decades of unstinting service to the community of Greater Lenasia. It was born out of the dire need at the time of the community that was serviced by a single hospital, Coronation, more than 30 km away. One of the cruelties of the abhorrent apartheid system of the white minority government was that even treatment for life-threatening situations was segregated by race, with advantages of multiple hospitals for that community and denial for others. The establishment of the Saaberie Chishty Ambulance service was therefore, not unsurprisingly, heartily welcomed by the community and willing donors, especially business houses. One of the primary objectives of the founders was that it would be a community service for all, rendered free of charge. To this end, an annual fundraising banquet has been held in the first quarter of each year. At the 2019 edition of the event, philanthropist Sammy Naidoo of the Apple Group of Companies had pledged to publish a commemorative book to mark the 30th anniversary of the service, for launch at the 2020 event. Unfortunately the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown forced the indefinite postponement of the banquet. As the scourge continues worldwide unabated, the 2021 banquet also did not place, so it was decided to publish the book and launch it virtually. Prolific author and internationally-renowned photojournalist Fakir Hassen, who has written 22 books so far, has been associated with the Saaberie Chishty Ambulance Service since the idea was first conceived. He revisits some of its history and also features some of the many stories and pictures he has taken in covering the event for local and international media.

THE SAABERIE CHISHTY AMBULANCE SERVICE

- Three Decades On

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35 Years of the Gandhi Walk has been co-published with Sammy Naidoo of the Apple Group of Companies, which has partnered with Fakir Hassen in over 25 books and other community

