



A CEO

who remembers her roots

Dr Thandeka Ellenson is young, kind, respectful and brilliant. Her character has not been changed by the accolades she has gained over the last two decades. This year she graduated from Columbia Southern University (USA) with a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) and just last year, she was confirmed as CEO of the Moses Kotane Institute (MKI) in Durban. MKI is an entity of KwaZulu-Natal's (KZN's) Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs and it focuses on research and development to drive innovation, technology and economic development in KZN.

Dr Ellenson has always been determined not to disappoint her grandmother and her mother, the two women who instilled the values that she has always upheld. These are respect (and self-respect), altruism and integrity, and they have been the cornerstone of her success. Each time Ellenson succeeds, she remembers her roots – her family and her *alma mater*, MUT, where she started her career. Whenever she moves into a new position, she carries the heart of MUT with her. When took her next job at UKZN she would always channel opportunities to MUT. This continued even when she moved to the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) where she opened construction opportunities to MUT graduates. At the South African Sugar Association (SASA) she went on to spearhead collaborations between MUT and SASA, resulting in SASA bursaries being offered at MUT and a support programme being kickstarted for the Department of Community Extension.

Thandeka's current flagship collaboration with MUT culminated in a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) being signed between MUT and MKI. This collaboration will hopefully facilitate more engagement for MUT in innovation, research and development work, and assist us in playing a pivotal role in shaping the KZN economy. But that is not all. "If

I had my way in curriculum development, I would like to see MUT consider introducing a qualification in maritime studies. It cannot be that being so close to the sea, we do not have a qualification in maritime studies," she lamented.

"My journey has not been a straight journey. It has been a meandering one albeit with an intention of finding myself. As a learner at Ongoye High School, my dream was to study for a qualification in chemistry or chemical engineering. However, my arrival at MUT showed me that there are other options in the business sciences. I studied for a National Diploma in Human Resources Management and I was just drawn into business science. I never looked back and tackled the most feared qualification – the MBA. When I succeeded there, I knew that I was crafted for the business world and I embraced everything that I had learned in different business units where I had worked. That has come in handy and I believe that this was to prepare me for the position that I now hold," Ellenson said.

Dr Ellenson finds inner peace in reading, listening to music and watching comedy. Her personal development journey included reading both the Bible and the Quran. She is well travelled and seems drawn to the Asian countries, especially Hong Kong and Shanghai. "I love the fact that these cities are open 24/7 and this gives me time to relax and not rush because the city is shutting down for the day," she said.

She has two key messages for MUT students:

"Imfundo ayikhulelwa – you can still learn more regardless of your age."

"The youth needs to consider delving into the digital economy. That is the future."