



A very special person & a very special facility!

La Vie Care at Waterkloof Marina is about to open its doors and like everyone, there's one particular person who is so "super excited", she's counting the hours until D-Day!

By Terry Owen

There's an iconic song in the first Muppet movie. It's sung by Kermit the Frog and it's called "The Rainbow Connection." It's such a beautiful, pensive and powerful song that it tugs at your heartstrings. Kermit sings: "Someday we'll find it, the Rainbow connection..." and it's all about finding that something that will make your life complete.

You may think this is an odd opening to a story about La Vie Care, but it's the perfect fit. La Vie Care is renowned for its group of healthcare and retirement facilities. It may, however, have been lacking that something that makes the group complete. Not anymore.

Anyone travelling in the Waterkloof area would have been aware of the hive of construction activity that has been a feature here for some time. You would have seen the cottages going up in the residential part of the complex, and, indeed, they look simply stunning.

What you may not have seen because it's on the other side and in the middle of a very hectic construction site, is the rise of La Vie Care's brand-new baby. It's called La Vie Care at Waterkloof Marina, and if it sounds rather grand, believe me it is. This is the new jewel in La Vie Care's crown, and, boy, does it sparkle!

It takes your breath away

It comprises residential units on three floors, a state-of-the-art frail care centre and the company's first dementia care centre. It's huge, sophisticated and beautiful. It takes your breath away.

Even when I recently toured the site and witnessed the incomplete array of buildings, it presented an indelible impression of competence and care.

Now, if this is the rainbow connection of La Vie Care's offering, there is someone who is the connection to all La Vie Care's facilities.

Her name is Rencia Opperman, and I grabbed at the chance of speaking to her about her involvement with the company. She has been with La Vie Care for some 17 years and has borne witness to the growth of the company she holds very dear. A more gracious, caring person would be hard to find, and it's no wonder she has become the "face" of the company.

She smiles as she reminisces: "It's amazing to think that I will have been with La Vie Care for 17 years this coming May. I started at Lynnwood Clinic in 2003 and was mainly involved with the data capturing of debtors and creditors on the admin side. Then Dries Hauptfleisch, CEO of La Vie Care, sent me to Potchefstroom University to do a Business Management course. One of my subjects was Hospital Management. That was naturally to stand me in very good stead for the years ahead."

She says that it was tough to study as a 40-year-old and really stand out among the youngsters, but it was so rewarding.



Intensive and thorough

"What I studied in Hospital Management is exactly what is needed in the daily running of healthcare facilities, such as those belonging to La Vie Care. You learn what to do in situations you will encounter in such facilities. It is a very intensive and thorough course but if you're going to be aware, say, of all the risks and dangers you might be faced with, you will be fully equipped to do so.

"You really can't belong in a management position of any caring facility without all the knowledge that is imparted with this course. There are many situations that you must face, and you naturally learn about what to do in theory. It is only by practice that you refine your skills and get to do the job the way it really should be done. This happened to me and was only possible with years of experience.

"I love people, and taking care of them, and I think you must feel this way to be involved with a job like mine. In the early days I used to pray about it and ask the Lord how this was going to be possible, working a 9-to-five job and then having to go home and care for my family. There was no time for me to go and cuddle HIV infected babies.

"Then the La Vie Care position came my way, and that was really an answer to prayer. I'm doing exactly what I always wanted to do, 10 hours a day."

She says that she has the time now to be someone's "hande en voete" (hands and feet), which shows the heart of a real caregiver.

Can't wait to get moving

"Obviously you can get very physically and emotionally tired, and I have been heard to say I'm like a dead man walking on a Friday afternoon, but on Monday I'm back with my newly applied red lipstick, and I'm ready to go! It's much more than that – it's like I can't wait to get moving! Where do you find a job and you long for Mondays to come? Very rare! I'm very lucky that I have such a job and I thank the Lord for that."

Rencia says that she has been active at Oosmed for five and half years. She was still manager of Lynnmed when she was called upon to open Oosmed in November 2014. So, simultaneously she was manager at Lynnmed and at Oosmed!

"That was hectic to say the least," she says. "I was involved with everything, including the marketing! We started Oosmed with myself and a sister, so apart from helping in the wards, I was doing the design of letterheads, the invoicing, and all the office kind of stuff. I had to design systems and get them running. This was multiskilling that even I was amazed that I could do.

"There were so many things that was my brainchild and as the staff complement grew, people added to what I had started and made everything just wonderful. It still gives me a thrill to see my original work and ideas still very much in evidence."

She says that when they were so few, Dries stepped in quickly and made sure that staff was added to enable us to get things done optimally.

Elmed and Bronmed

Two years after going to Oosmed, Elmed was up and raring to go, and once more Rencia stepped into the breach. "I had to help get Elmed going, while still being manager at Oosmed. A year later, Bronmed opened its doors and then I was in the position of advising and overlooking Elmed and Bronmed. I put in managers there and I help if they have challenges, but the managerial post at Oosmed still must be filled.

All the above activity was all leading to Rencia's crowning glory – La Vie Care at Waterkloof Marina.

"We're about to get a manager at Oosmed, and then I'll be moving to Waterkloof. Naturally I'm very hectic now (so what's new?), but I'm so excited to be going to Waterkloof. I must be there by March 16 and I'm looking forward to getting off to a flying start.

"Now with Izel doing all the marketing, it has become much easier for me. I still remember when Oosmed opened, I had to do all the welcome packs for the launch and remember to pop the sweets inside!"

Listening in to the doctor

She says that her healthcare experience has grown enormously, and this is due largely in part to listening in when the sister or doctor are talking to families of residents. She has picked up an enormous amount of knowledge from that activity.

"Waterkloof is opening on Monday, March 16 and I am going to get the key to open the door! There are 216 units (about 350 people) moving in from March 16 to April 1. If there's any resident that needs frail care immediately, we are equipped to see that they get it. We must be fully operational from the time that the key goes into the door!

"From day one, we will have a sister and cleaner in frail care. We have had many doctors showing interest in the facility. He or she will be allocated a certain number of hours per day and residents can make an appointment for meetings. There will be an occupational therapist working on the same kind of basis. If there are any emergencies, the residents involved will be taken to hospital.

"We are also not far away from our other facilities, so if any extra staff is needed at any particular time, we can loan from these places.

"Our dementia facility will open on July 1. This is our first official dementia unit although dementia and Alzheimer's are not new to La Vie Care. Some 30% of residents presently in the company's care are affected by it to some degree.

"Having this new unit, though, will increased our capacity, and being a totally dedicated facility, is a great first in specialised care for us."

Rencia says they are all "super excited" about the opening of La Vie Care at Waterkloof Marina. It's quite clear that the facility opening mania is still very much alive and well with her.

"It's the highlight of my career," she says proudly.

Like the facility itself, you just get certain people that are very special indeed.