



*The Admission of*  
*Erica Pienaar*  
*BA MBA FRSA*  
*as an Honorary Freewoman*  
*of the London Borough of Lewisham*



Ref:566-1a

Civic Suite, Lewisham Town Hall  
7.30 pm on Friday 8 November 2013

# *Erica Pienaar*

## **Early life**

Erica was born in Cape Town in March 1952. However, she has no childhood memories of South Africa as her family chose to leave the country on Christmas Eve 1954. They boarded a ship named the Caernarvon Castle bound for Southampton. Her family quickly established themselves in Crystal Palace and Erica has been loyal to her South East London 'roots' ever since.

Erica's family revered education; it was clearly understood that it was through a good education that one not only developed as a person but also gained control of one's destiny. Education was the key to career choice and to independence. This understanding was in no way intimidating or oppressive it was simply a constant, a compass which guided her through school and then through higher education.

## **School life**

Erica's memories of her school years are entirely positive; she attended Rockmount Primary School in South Norwood and on passing her 11+ gained a place at Coloma Convent Grammar School for Girls. Coloma provided Erica with an academic education which challenged her and an extra-curricular programme which enabled her to participate in sport, drama and gave her a first taste of leadership as a member of the school council and as a house captain. She quickly arrived at the conclusion that she wanted to be a teacher. Coloma had given her the self-confidence to



participate fully in class debate and it fostered her growing passion for science. It was a logical choice for her to find a career in which she could indulge both, i.e. spend her days talking about science. The decision to teach never wavered and she fulfilled her ambition after three years at Goldsmiths' College taking up her first teaching post in Bromley in 1973.

### Teaching career

Erica could never be described as a 'bolter' as she spent the next 25 years in Bromley schools. She has never described herself as 'driven' or 'ambitious' although others have disagreed with her on this point. In fact her highest aspiration on becoming a teacher was to be one day Head of Science. She did not plan the route, she simply worked as hard as she could and took opportunities when they presented themselves. It was at Bullers Wood School in Chislehurst that this aspiration became a reality – not through a conventional application and interview but through a short conversation with the head teacher who informed her that a vacancy had arisen in the school. The head teacher had decided to amalgamate science technology and computing, and decreed that Erica would lead this faculty and her new role would begin the following Monday!



Erica with the Old Brockleians

*She did not plan the route, she simply worked as hard as she could*

The next three years were demanding and often entertaining. The same head teacher advised Erica that she had the potential for headship and she should start applying for deputy head posts. Her advice was that it would take a couple of years

of practise to be successful and she should start applying soon. Erica took that advice and applied for the deputy head's post at Cator Park school which appeared the following week. She was successful in her application and then faced her current head teacher who reminded her with a slightly sour smile that she was only supposed to be practising.

*she would walk ten miles in tight shoes to be the*  
*Head of Prendergast*

A few years later, in 1998, when the opportunity to apply for the Head of Prendergast School appeared she grasped it with both hands. She said then, and has repeated herself on more than one occasion, that 'she would walk ten miles in tight shoes to be the Head of Prendergast'. At Prendergast and in Lewisham Erica felt the deepest commitment of her career. The School's distinguished history motivated her to do all she could for the pupils and for their families and for Lewisham. Over the next 10 years she worked alongside a talented leadership team and dedicated staff to provide an outstanding educational provision for Prendergast girls. When in March 2007 Ofsted judged the school to be outstanding in leadership and in the quality of teaching and learning, no-one could have been prouder of the pupils and staff than Erica.

Although Prendergast was a small school, it had a significant mission to fulfil; first to expand its sixth form provision and then to support other schools in their challenge to be outstanding. Erica supported this outreach work becoming a consultant leader with London Challenge and subsequently a National Leader of Education. It was logical for Lewisham to look to Erica and





the Governors of Prendergast School to plan and deliver a new school for Lewisham and to support a school that had faced challenges over a significant period of time. Thus the Leathersellers’ Federation of Schools was born.

Erica moved from headship to Executive headship working with three schools bearing the name Prendergast. Her goal was expressed as simply as possible ‘to provide Lewisham families with local schools that they wanted their children to attend’. Even more simply, she wanted them to send their child to Prendergast and not to be too concerned about which one of three schools this would be. In 2008 the Federation was established and the work to create a partnership which would meet Lewisham’s needs began. Erica was very clear that the first five years of the Federation would be dedicated to designing and delivering a new school (Prendergast Vale), and to enable the neighbouring school (Prendergast Ladywell Fields) to develop pride in itself and a place in its community.



*To provide Lewisham families with local schools that they wanted their children to attend*



By 2013 these first goals had been established and Erica knew it was time to hand over to the next Executive head teacher who would undoubtedly build on the foundations of an outstanding partnership.

### Looking to the future

Erica looks back on her years of service to Lewisham with profound joy and deep pride. Her recent retirement will not be without a connection in Lewisham as she has happily accepted the role of Chairman of Governors at John Ball Primary School in Blackheath. She hopes to be of real use to our local community for a good few years to come.

## *Freedom of the London Borough of Lewisham*

### Freewoman

In admitting Erica as an honorary Freewoman of the Borough, the Council is recognising her illustrious career in Lewisham and the huge impact she has made on the young people of this borough. During her long association with Lewisham she has been instrumental in bringing about changes that have enhanced the chances and careers of countless young people.

Erica’s legacy to Lewisham is of supreme educational achievement and of shaping the future lives of our school children so they can enter the workforce and community with confidence and the necessary skills to succeed.

There can be no more fitting an accolade than to confer on Erica the highest honour the Council has the power to bestow – the Freedom of the London Borough of Lewisham.



## The scroll

The Scroll has been illuminated on vellum by a local artist who has captured specific images to reflect Erica's life.

At the top is the Lewisham coat of arms and featured down the left hand side are the various motifs of the three Prendergast schools as well as the Leathersellers' Federation of Schools coat of arms. The scroll also has the words of the Council's recommendation that was agreed at its meeting on 26 June 2013. The scroll is leather bound to protect it.

The scroll is signed at the bottom by the Mayor and the Chief Executive and has the official Council seal.

## The casket

The presentation casket is made of perspex and silver.

Engraved on the front is a silver panel that features the Council's coat of arms with silver ends and a silver plaque is attached to the wooden base that has an inscription which reads:

"Presented to Erica Christine Pienaar by the London Borough of Lewisham on her admission as an Honorary Freewoman of the London Borough of Lewisham.

Friday 8 November 2013"



## London Borough of Lewisham

### Meeting of the Council Friday 8 November 2013, 7.30pm

#### Order of proceedings

1. Councillors (other than those in the Mayoral party) and all invited guests, will take their seats in the Council Chamber and public gallery.
2. The Mayoral party will escort Erica Pienaar and personal guests and other key people into the Council Chamber to their seats on the dais. (Guests and members are asked to stand please.)
3. The Chair of Council, Councillor Obajimi Adefiranye, will open proceedings, report any apologies for absence and make any announcements.
4. The Chair of Council will welcome members and distinguished guests, Freeman Terry Waite and Freewoman Sybil Phoenix, and announce that the Council is meeting for the sole purpose to admit Erica Pienaar as an Honorary Freewoman of the London Borough of Lewisham.
5. The admission of Erica Pienaar as an Honorary Freewoman of the Borough. The Chair of Council to report that under Section 249(5) of the Local Government Act 1972, a Borough Council can admit to the Honorary Freedom of the Borough "persons of distinction and persons who have, in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent services to the Borough".



6. The Chair of Council will call upon Barry Quirk, the Chief Executive, to read the following resolution of the Council passed unanimously at the Council meeting on 26 June 2013.

“Under Section 249(5) of the Local Government Act 1972, a Borough Council can admit to the Freedom of the Borough ‘persons who have, in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent services to the borough’. The Freedom of the Borough is the highest honour a Council has the power to bestow.

It is recommended that Erica Pienaar be admitted as an Honorary Freewoman of the London Borough of Lewisham in recognition of her outstanding contribution to the education of the young people of the borough and beyond. Her dedication and commitment has improved the life chances of our students through exceptional leadership and distinguished advisory work, particularly with schools in challenging circumstances. Her involvement in national and educational change has inspired countless educationists, teachers and students with resulting significant local and national impact. Her belief in our young people has shone through her work and has changed their futures.”

7. Erica Pienaar will then be invited to sign the Freedom Roll of Honour Book. The Mayor and the Chief Executive will counter sign as witnesses.
8. The Chair of Council, Councillor Obajimi Adefiranye, to call upon the Mayor, Sir Steve Bullock, Councillor Helen Klier Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, the Leader of the

Liberal Democrats Group, Councillor Chris Maines, and Councillor Pauline Morrison to speak to the recommendation.

The Chair of Council will then ask Commodore Jonathan Cooke OBE, Royal Navy, Chair of Governors of the Leathersellers’ Federation of Schools to speak, followed by the Master Leatherseller Martin Pebody and then Carolyn Unsted the Headteacher of Sydenham School. The final speech will be given by Shelby Millard a former pupil at Prendergast School.

9. Following the speeches the Mayor will formally present the casket containing the Council’s recommendation to Erica Pienaar with a specially inscribed scroll sealed by the Council.
10. Erica Pienaar will then thank the Council for the honour of the Freedom of the Borough that has been accorded to her.
11. The formal proceedings having ended, the Mayoral party will leave the Council Chamber. (You are asked to stand at this point.)
12. All Members and invited guests are cordially invited to a civic reception in the Civic Suite Foyer, giving everyone the opportunity to congratulate Erica Pienaar in a convivial atmosphere.

During the reception the Prendergast Singers will perform. The singers are drawn from the three Prendergast colleges and have joined forces especially for tonight’s performance. They will perform an excerpt from The Journey by Pete Churchill under the direction of Richard Lake, the Director of Music of the Leathersellers’ Federation.