

# Friends hand over gift

Ciska Verster

After three years of blood, sweat and more than a couple of tears, the Friends of Rietvlei Nature Reserve was finally able to hand over their beautiful hand-made bird hide to the city last Friday.

Situated on the far eastern shore of Riet-vlei Dam, the wooden structure with its sturdy walkways and heavy log cabin blends in seamlessly with the surroundings.

"It is hidden enough to put the birds at ease but strong enough to protect visitors from the Rietvlei crocodile," one of the members half-joked as she beamed with pride over the structure her family helped build.

"Much of our love went into this building and we want to hand it over with a bit of fanfare," Ben Burger, outgoing chairperson of the conservancy, said during the hand-over ceremony on the shores of the Rietvlei Dam.

"From the children who helped saw the planks, to the men who nearly impaled themselves



Ben Burger and Adriaan Gronum of the Friends of Rietvlei officially hand over their 'baby' to Ernts Wolk... manager of conservancy and recreation for the city and Riaan Marais, manager of the Rietvlei Nature Reserve

with sharp objects, to the women who served hot soup on cold mornings, this structure is a part of us all. We now place it in the hands of Pretoria and the community to care for."

If people understood how much the conservancy loves the nature reserve, Ben explained they might think twice

before leaving their trash lying around, or even start contributing to the cause themselves.

"With initiatives like this we hope to attract more people to Rietvlei and raise its profile as a nature reserve even more. If we succeed Rietvlei will no longer be threatened by unsuitable development

proposals because it will be unthinkable to even suggest it."

That is really their reason for being, says Ben.

The group was formed to oppose a hotel development in the reserve.

"Our latest battle is against a sewer pipeline for Mamelodi that

the department of public works wants to build through the reserve. We hope to stop these proposals altogether one day."

Larger aims aside, the Tshwane metro expressed its genuine appreciation for the bird hide too.

"It is the third structure the friends of Riet-

vlei have built for us.

"With all conservancy budgets being cut more each year and the red-tape we have to wade through to start a project, the work they are doing here is invaluable," says Rietvlei's manager Riaan Marais.