

Mike Hill - Man of honour

Written by Nicolene Smalman - Monday, 01 June 2009 16:26



NELSPRUIT - The body of the managing director of Forest Fire Association Group (FFA), was discovered several hours after his vehicle had plummeted off a cliff on the Nelspruit/Sabie Road on Saturday evening. Mr Mike Hill died two days after his 48th birthday.

Only on Sunday, did a pedestrian notice the wreckage of his Honda Jazz, 15 metres below and alerted the police and paramedics who retrieved it at about 13:00.

According to Ms Sue Adams, who spoke on behalf of the family yesterday, Hill was at the Vodacom Uplands Festival where he had participated in the Ready Steady Cook cook-off, which he won. He left for his home in Eden Private Game Reserve which is situated 25 kilometres from Nelspruit, at about 20:00. According to a family friend, Mr Tim de Wet, the wreckage suggested that Hill had hit a huge rock on the side of the road before his vehicle left it, about 500 metres beyond the gate of Emaweni Country Lodge, where there was a slight bend in the road.

A resident of Brondal who frequently uses the road, Mr James Richardson, said there were no markings on the road for about 15 kilometres as it had recently been resurfaced. "In addition, it can be very misleading at night and barriers should be erected on the side of the road," he added.

Hill's wife, Ann, a physiotherapist, was in Gauteng at the time of the accident and was only notified of his death on her return on Sunday. Their children, Lauren and Graeme, students at Witwatersrand and Stellenbosch universities, returned home yesterday.

Adams described Hill (48) as "a fantastic community man." He had been a member of the Penryn Parents' Association and of the Penryn Council. Principal Mr Greg Theron, yesterday told Lowvelder that the loss of Hill was felt acutely by all in the school's family. "He was highly involved in all facets of college life as a father, counsellor and supporter, and was much loved in all these roles. His energy and enthusiasm for the college and its pupils - past and present - was humbling. A cornerstone of our community has been lost."

Hill was appointed chairman of the FFA Group Board of Directors in November 2007, which is also the implementing agent of the Working on Fire (WoF) programme. He was appointed managing director in December last year. Mr Johan Heine, managing director of FFA Aviation, said Hill had earned the respect of all employees through his managerial approach to problem solving and his empathy towards them. "He was dedicated to ensuring the ongoing success of the WoF programme and FFA. His tragic death is a great loss. We send our condolences to his family, friends and business colleagues. He will be sorely missed by all at FFA and WoF."

Spokesman for Nelspruit police, Insp Dawie Pretorius, confirmed the incident and added that a case of culpable homicide was being investigated.