

Sunshine Tour finds Amathole a place of opportunities

The inaugural Africa Open, held at the Fish River Sun in the Amathole District Municipality in the Eastern Cape in February, proved to be a huge success, according to Executive Mayor, Alderman Sakhumzi Somyo.

The Amathole district is increasingly playing host to a number of different national sporting codes, including the South African Tennis Open, but this was the first time in a decade that the Sunshine Tour graced the Sunshine Coasts' shores.

"We were keen to co-sponsor the tournament as the district had identified sports tourism as a niche market for the area and it also provided the district with a magnificent platform to market itself, not only in South Africa but around the globe on television," said Somyo. "Our district is blessed with a natural and unspoilt environment, a temperate climate, and offers a range of accommodation establishments to suit every pocket.

"Combining sporting events such as the Africa Open with tourism facilities offers us a unique opportunity to showcase to the world the natural splendour on our doorstep, and paves the way for job creation, whilst also engaging youth in sporting activities and supporting the games and their stars.

The pre-tournament Pro-Am proved hugely successful for the 15 amateur players from the Amathole district, given an opportunity to play with professional players.

"The Eastern Cape is traditionally known as the nursery of emerging sports stars, so there were many reasons why we chose to support this prestigious event," said Somyo. Other key sponsors included Emirates Airlines, Nestlife, and Buffalo City Municipality. "We are inspired to promote golf in our area and look forward to an even bigger Africa Open Golf Challenge event in our district next year," said Somyo, who also expressed an interest in running a charity golf day, challenging other mayors.

The event, boasting a purse of R1,2 million, attracted a strong field of 144 golfers from around the world, including Eastern Cape starts Titch Moore from Port Elizabeth, Ulrich van den Berg from East London and Queenstown's James Kamte.

The blustery conditions that prevailed for most of the tournament proved to be a challenge for most and tested their mettle, but in the end, it was Shaun Norris who triumphed with his first Sunshine Tour win.

His winning total of 13-under-par was six shots better than Nic Henning in second place and he finished seven ahead of Grant Muller, Jean Hugo and Zimbabwe's Marc Cayeux, who tied for third.

Norris, who credited his father for his wind-game, took home a cheque in the amount of R190,200.

The new champion praised the green-staff at the Fish River Sun and complimented the pristine greens, which he said rolled true and fast.

"We have been welcomed by all and sundry here in the Eastern Cape," said Norris in his post-tournament interview. "All the players have commented how much they have enjoyed the course, the hospitality, the weather and the beautiful views.

"I for one will certainly be back to defend my title come next year."