***IJCHM* 32,1 2020 Editorial tribute to Dr Mathilda Van Niekerk**

Dr Mathilda van Niekerk, the Managing Editor of *IJCHM*, passed away on August 23, 2019 after losing her six-year battle with cancer. She served *IJCHM* as the Assistant Editor from 2013 to 2015, the Senior Associate Editor from 2015 to 2017 and the Managing Editor from 2017 to 2019. She played a tremendous role in *IJCHM*'s growth and success. She often jokingly noted that after she started working on *IJCHM*, it became one of the best, if not the best, journals in the field in terms of submissions, downloads, citations, and the Impact Factor figures. She was most certainly

the backbone of *IJCHM*. She made sure that the ScholarOne system was always current, all submitted papers were scanned properly, comments from each reviewer for every submission were evaluated, our authors received timely and detailed feedback from the reviewers, and all emails from our authors and reviewers were answered in a timely manner. Even when she was under treatment, she had her laptop with her and was working on the journal from her hospital bed.

Reflecting her passion for teaching and the industry and her belief that we should be able to use our research in the classroom, she frequently emphasized that in addition to offering clear theoretical contributions, each paper should present specific practical implications. She was very supportive of our authors, especially junior researchers and PhD students. She had a soft spot in her heart for authors from Africa and other developing countries/regions. After her passing, we received many messages from our authors and editorial board members around the world stating that even they never met Mathilda in person; she was always nice, friendly, supportive and professional in her emails. Mathilda and I attended many international conferences and visited universities in different countries to promote *IJCHM* and deliver workshops together. It was always amazing to see how she presented, impressed people and easily connected with everyone.

With her detailed analysis, we updated *IJCHM* editorial board annually by selecting the best and most deserving board members based on their reviews and research performance. She made sure that all the editorial board members, assistant editors, associate editors and regional editors supported and contributed to *IJCHM*. There were even times that she gave me clear instructions and warnings that I was late in my decisions and should devote more time to the journal! Mathilda and I had regular strategy meetings where we discussed new ideas and initiatives, how our initiatives were progressing, and what the results were. We organized many memorable meetings and celebrations at Rosen College and at conferences globally to share and celebrate *IJCHM*'s accomplishments including the Impact Factor figures, rankings, downloads and submissions. She truly enjoyed organizing such fun and

successful meetings and celebrations. She also managed *IJCHM*'s newsletters, New Year messages and social media posts. In short, Mathilda was ready to take over *IJCHM* as the next Editor-in-Chief.

At the University of Central Florida's Rosen College of Hospitality Management, Mathilda was our lioness from South Africa with the highest courage, attention to detail, determination, positive energy, and professionalism. Anything she worked on, she did with a style, smile and perfection. She was an outstanding and prolific researcher. She was proud of her research articles and her recent book on event stakeholders. She was certainly one of the best faculty members teaching event management courses at Rosen College. Many of our faculty members currently use her syllabi and online teaching templates. In a 2018 interview, Mathilda stated, "For me, teaching is an opportunity to create a legacy and change students' lives. There's nothing as nice as seeing students complete the program and go on to be successful and happy in their lives." She served on many university, college and department committees. She was a faculty senator representing the Rosen College for eight years. She was a strong advocate for all faculty, staff and students, and represented the Rosen College well.

For all those who knew her, Mathilda was more than a good colleague – she was a great friend that cared and supported us all. Recognizing that there were hardships for faculty in that many of us live away from our families, Mathilda initiated the "*We Care*" Rosen College campaign – a hospitable supportive network for faculty, staff, and students. Her "*We Care*" campaign at Rosen College continues to stimulate an environment where faculty and staff members embrace each other as friends and family.

On a personal level, Mathilda was my best friend, co-author, co-presenter, managing editor, co-editor, co-driver, lunch buddy, instructional designer, mentor, event organizer and the best travel agent. She was our close family friend, our daughters' godmother and their favorite shopping companion. She and her husband Derik organized incredible birthday, Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's parties at their house for us and their friends.

In memory of Mathilda, we have created a scholarship to support students studying at the University of Central Florida's Rosen College of Hospitality Management. We invite our authors, readers, and editorial board members to contribute to this scholarship at: www.ucffoundation.org/vanniekerk. In addition, to pay tribute to Mathilda's contribution, we will soon announce a special issue on event management to be published in *IJCHM*.

As an angel, Mathilda should now be busy in heaven organizing mega events. She will always be remembered for her contribution, legacy, resilience, spirit, smiling face and positive attitude. Rest in peace my dear and best friend Mathilda. You are dearly missed!

Fevzi Okumus
Editor-in-Chief

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