

We get to know charming entrepreneur Jessica Nhleko, who has made her home in the Upper Highway

First met Jessica on a Friday afternoon, and when she sent a message reading, "Please order me livers on toast, I'm starving", I knew we were going to get on.

Jessica has lived in the Hillcrest area since 2009 with her husband, Siyabonga, and their two children, aged five and eight. "We had heard fabulous reviews about the lifestyle and the good schools, so we just had to find a suitable home in this area," she says. They found a well-priced house in need of tender loving care and are working to achieve the vision they have for their home. As Jessica shares this vision, I get the

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sense that she is a grounded woman who takes things in her stride, not easily swayed by "what the Khumalos are up to".

After nearly five years in the area, she believes that they could not have chosen a better suburb. Their children attend Waterfall Pre-Primary and Forest View, and Jessica confesses that she loves the sense of community that both schools create.

"Having grown up in KwaMashu, we believed that suburbia was very different and that it was common to live in a house for years without ever getting to know the people around you. Our neighbours, the



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TAKING ROOTS

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Drennans, have shown us that *ubuntu* is alive and well in suburbia, no matter the circumstances.”

Jessica loves the country lifestyle of the Hillcrest area, especially the open spaces that are perfect for outdoor activities for the whole family. As a hopeless shoe-lover, she admits, "My favourite shop is Via Uno at the Hillcrest Corner Mall, where I often pick up more than one pair during the sales.”

Jessica is Managing Director and co-founder of African Insignia Hotels, a company providing specialised marketing and sales services to hotels. Her passion for this relatively young business is clear. African Insignia Hotels has grown remarkably since its inception in 2012, with clients including Ghost Mountain Inn, Champagne Resort and The Windmills in Nottingham Road.

"Our vision for the business in the medium- to long-term is to cater to exclusive boutique hotels." She admits that she and her business partner, Lerina McCall, share common characteristics of being workaholics and perfectionists. Despite the growth of their business, they are very clear that they want to maintain a small team. "We have come to learn that our clients have faith in African Insignia Hotels based on the personal

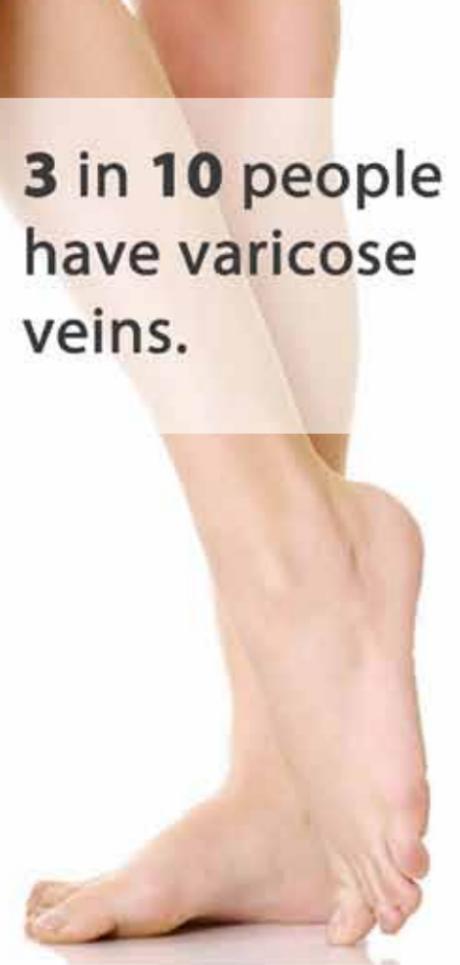
experiences they have had with us.”

To celebrate her birthday in December, Jessica planned a golden affair at Harvey's Restaurant, Umhlanga with the theme "Journey into 30-Something – Life is Golden". The party started on December 19 so that when the clock struck midnight, she would be surrounded by all the people dear to her.

The guest list ranged from childhood friends to clients and business associates, all of whom agreed with friend and MC Lynette Ntuli's opening line, "There is no one who meets Jessica, who is not bowled over by her." All speakers mentioned her laughter and good cheer, her genuine love and care for people, love for beautiful things and attention to detail, and her love for music. The most touching message was from her business partner Lerina, who described herself as a gogo to Jessica's children, and a mother and business partner to Jessica, of whom she said, "I have never met such a young woman with such substance.”

Once the formalities were through, the birthday girl was the first to hit the dance floor in her short gold evening dress and dancing shoes; and I'm quite certain she was the last person to leave. *

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GOLDEN GIRL

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