

Seniors protect South Africa's cannon heritage

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Some people decide to take up fishing when they retire and some opt to spend their twilight years restoring and firing long-standing canons.

A group of these like-minded men formed the Cannon Association of South Africa (CAOSA) which has been instrumental in "rescuing" close to 50 cannons and returning them to their final resting places at old gun batteries, museums, historical sites and public spaces.

Welgedacht resident Jurg Zimmermann, treasurer of the CAOSA, said the association was founded by 12 like-minded men in August 2005.

"We have 110 members nationally and we have regional offices in Kwa-zulu Natal, Eastern Cape, Free State and Gauteng."

Gerry de Vries, founder member of the CAOSA, past chairman and current primary researcher, said the historical significance of

CAOSA is linked to the historical significance of the countless muzzle loading cannons scattered across South Africa.

"There are cannons from Sweden, Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, France, Indonesia, India, England and several other countries, which all have significant ties to historical events in South Africa."

Mr Zimmermann said he "accidentally" got involved in restoring a six-pounder cannon at the Tygerberg Nature Reserve.

"After retiring in 2004, I was elected the chairperson of the Friends of the Tygerberg Hills and because I live next to the nature reserve, I noticed a cannon falling into disrepair.

"I was told the cannon was donated to the nature reserve by the South African Navy in the early 1990s. I later convinced the manager to approach the City of Cape Town to have the cannon restored," he said.

Mr De Vries said in most European countries the majority of their



■ Gerry de Vries protects his ears while a young boy fires a canon.

old cannons were melted down during WWI and WWII to manufacture new weapons.

"South Africa is therefore actually the primary custodian of the cannon heritage of other countries; a responsibility that has been ignored for decades. Many cannons were sold as scrap metal never to be seen by future generations."

Mr Zimmermann told the Northern News the association once rescued two cannons which were being sold by a woman in District Six.

According to him, the association has 1 016 cannons recorded in what is known as The Durr Record of Cannon in South Africa. He further explained that the name

"Durr" came from their original, and only, sponsorship.

"We also have five fully restored cannons at the Bloemendal Cannon Station," he added.

Mr Zimmermann said the group is passionate about preserving the cannons as it forms part of South Africa's history.

"Not everything done during those days was the right thing but history is history. We are a small group in Cape Town but we are getting more support.

"A few selected cannons have been refurbished to firing condition and these now perform civic duties as firings at sports, historical or cultural events.

"These firings are performed by a handful of CAOSA gunners who have been trained, examined, tested and are monitored by CAOSA to very strict standards as prescribed by the Firearms Control Act, 60 of 2000," Mr De Vries added.

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