



Commissioner Spotlight

Meet Commissioner Kobie Pretorius.

October 2019

Many years before being appointed a Commissioner to the Metro Human Relations Commission, Kobie Pretorius, a visionary with a heart for creating community, has been helping Nashville become and “feel like” home to hundreds of South Africans who relocated to the Music City. The following are Kobie’s reflections for this edition of the

MHRC Commissioner Spotlight.

Where did you grow up? I grew up in a town called Ermelo in the Mpumalanga Province of South Africa, near the Swaziland border. During the Anglo-Boer War this town was burned to the ground, with only one house remaining. It is in the heart of corn and sheep farming country.

What are the formative experiences that influenced who you’ve become?

I grew up in Apartheid South Africa, lived through the fall of Apartheid and the release of Nelson Mandela from prison and the daily challenges of post-Apartheid South Africa dealing with many issues concerning race, poverty and crime.

After immigrating to Nashville I became immersed in the immigrant community and the various facets of immigrant struggles and challenges — the good, the bad and the ugly.



Comm. Kobie Pretorius

Kobie is a familiar South African name that, as she describes, is not to be confused with the popular Japanese beef delicacy. *“In South Africa you will find boys and girls named Kobie. It comes from Jakob or the female version, Jakoba. It’s pronounced Quiby, and not Kobe like the steakhouse!”*



Kobie’s Tweetable Tweet:

Travel. The journey, not the not the arrival, matters.

Kobie highlights that “becoming a mother” ranks as one of the most valuable experiences in her life.

What is your current job and what does an average day look like?

I’m the president-elect for the University School of Nashville’s parent association, so I’m gearing up for two busy

years of learning and organizing.

In addition I organize the activities for our growing South African community in town — we get together on a monthly basis for social events and we also like to give back to the Nashville community through our bi-annual stream clean of a Rich-

land Creek tributary. (This community, called the Friends of South Africa, or FoSA, supports South African immigrants to navigate the stages and emotions of expat life.)

On a more personal note, Kobie reflects that “I love working in my garden along with my dog, tending my chickens, pulling

weeds, helping my husband with our bee-hives and honey harvest and feeding two hungry teenagers.

What do you enjoy most about your work? I love being connected to my community.

What is the most challenging aspect of your work? Reminding myself that you cannot always please everyone, and that is OK.

What habits or leadership principles do you admire? I'm a good cheerleader and love celebrating the successes of others.

What is the biggest personal risk you've taken? Moving to Nashville from South Africa with two suitcases.

If you could give advice to your 15 year old self, what would it be? To this response Kobie was succinct and wise: "1. Travel. The journey, not the arrival, matters. 2. Call your mother."

What's an accomplishment about which you are very proud? I loved graduating from

the My City Academy through the Mayor's Office for New Americans in 2015.

What is it about this accomplishment that has made such an impact on you? It gave me a lot of insight into the unique challenges faced by refugees and immigrants to the Nashville area. I also got to really appreciate how Metro Nashville functions and the enormous tasks of keeping

our water clean, our city safe, our neighborhoods

beautiful, our children educated and our citizens healthy.

Have you ever experienced a professional setback or disappointment? If yes, what did you learn from that experience?

Yes. I worked in South Africa as a Speech Therapist, but could not continue that work in the USA because of the differences in training and qualifications. It

forced me to find new career paths.

What guiding principle or quote inspires you? "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness." Mark Twain

How were you introduced to the MHRC? Through Mayor David Briley.

What causes or issues invigorate you? Affordable and Fair Housing, equity and inclusion, law enforcement/policing.

What message would you like to share with Davidson County residents? While appreciating the good old days when Nashville traffic was moving along, downtown was free of bachelorettes and Paddle Taverns, renting an apartment in Bellevue was affordable- let's embrace the challenges of a rapidly changing new Nashville, one that is more colorful and diverse, more tolerant and kind while still holding true to our Bless Your Hearts and a serving of hot chicken on a waffle.



Comm. Pretorius at Nashville PRIDE, June 2019

What advice would you give to yourself at 15-years old?

“Don't give up. Keep persevering. You are on the right track.”



Kobie as "local ambassador" for Friends of South Africa

