

HERE'S a feel-good story that moves from Worcester to Hoedspruit and back. It starts in the Limpopo bushveld where a remarkable woman and local councillor set up a project called Hlokomela eight years ago.

Focusing on HIV prevention and care, it expanded to 69 operational sites with wellness centres offering medical and health care along with gardening, sewing and recycled glass skills programmes.

The service reaches thousands of workers on farms and lodges in the Hoedspruit region in its goal of changing, enriching and saving lives. Christine du Preez's efforts have been recognised here and abroad and the annual fundraiser, Hlokomela Herb Banquet, sees locals turn out in force, while lodge chefs vie to produce the best buffet fare, flavoured with Hlokomela herbs. Cape wine played an inaugural role in this year's event, which was voted the best yet.

When Gerhard van der Wath of Overhex heard that the organisers were looking for sponsored wines, he simply asked how much do they need? A couple of weeks later, eight 12-bottle cases of red, white, rosé and sparkling wines were couriered from this Worcester cellar to Hoedspruit, where guests were greeted with flutes of bubbles.

Not only has next year's donation been confirmed, but this international operation seeks neither publicity nor acknowledgement for their cross-country gesture. This inspired me to find out more about it, with some impressive results.

In the same year that Hlokomela was founded, the Overhex co-op outside Worcester was transformed into a private cellar supplied by 30 wine grape growers from Cape regions. Now they are among our biggest exporters, with 12 million litres shipped annually to Finland, Switzerland and UK, among others, with the US market growing nicely.

Veteran fundi Jean Daneel from Napier acts as consultant to the winemaking and viticultural team.

At the cellar, I met Natalie van Rooyen-Malan, a former winemaker whose title of operations director embraces a multi-faceted job along with marriage to cellar-master Willie Malan.

She poured from the winemakers' selection of Balance wines, starting with the maiden vintage of pinot grigio, lightweight refreshment from Malmesbury grapes followed by the 2014 chenin, low-alcohol, spritely, with good fruit and a grassy sauvignon blanc, a combo of Worcester and Elim grapes. The lightly wooded chardonnay is among the best of the whites, the pinotage shines among the reds and the 2013 shiraz has potential.



FRESH AND WELL BALANCED: The smoked salmon stack from The Bistro at Overhex Wines with a glass of Balance

Overhex co-op's overseas success

The operation just outside Worcester is now among SA's biggest wine exporters

The maiden pinot noir makes a good light summer red. The whites cost R40, the reds R45. The Best Blend range wines sell for R30 – the cab/merlot and sauvignon blanc/semillon are among the best buys.

The Balance Bistro has been spruced up and the kitchen, headed by chef P-J Lombard, offers diners consistent quality with a varied menu. It has a la carte items like smoked salmon trout stack with avo, feta, rocket and wasabi mayo (R75) and an innovative chicken Wellington (R125), while superior steaks from their Angus cattle are in demand. Alternatives include all-day breakfast and brunch, pizzas, wraps, several platters, toasted sandwiches and a children's menu.

Overhex is open daily for wine tastings, and the Bistro is open from Wednesday to Sunday. See www.overhex.com



OPERATION OVERHEX: Managing director Gerhard van der Wath, operations director Natalie van Rooyen-Malan and winemaker Ben Snyman.