

SOS support fund for René Pennington



In October 2018, the SOS Charity fund took hands with the entertainment industry in Durban, to raise funds for a fallen soldier who had an enormous hospital bill when his leg was amputated after being diagnosed with sugar diabetes.

René Pennington comes from the Durban Jazz music scene where he began his career in the live sound reinforcement industry. Having worked for three and a half years in the managing and hire department of a Durban based rental company, he was prompted to become a freelancer in 1997 with the arrival of larger international production companies setting up shop in South Africa's major cities. With 25 years in the industry, René has developed his skill as a front of house live mix audio engineer, has designed various audio systems for churches and local productions and is respected in the music industry.

Belinda Saville, an events and projects manager, has fond memories of René who has always been part of the Durban Audio Scene, from mixing bands to doing installs. "He is somewhat of a character to say the least," smiles Belinda. "I first met him when I was at Gearhouse in 1997. I was all new and shiny, when in walked René doing an impersonation of someone (can't remember who) and I thought, 'this guys is stark raving mad!' – That was the beginning of a good friendship."

René is a good audio engineer and continually has something to contribute. “In our industry he is always putting other people in front of himself, helping techies get jobs, training youngsters and is forever on hand to help when anyone is in trouble,” said Belinda. “He has mixed many merging bands in Durban – mostly for free. He is just an all-round good guy. When we heard that he was in hospital, we all went to see him. We realised that a simple infection was diabetes and he had had an amputation. Everyone was in shock, because as with every freelance technician that I know, income is from the last job and hardly anyone has savings or medical aid.”

That afternoon, Belinda, Roy and Kerry Wood from Rigology, Donna and Colin Peddie and Luke Brookes had a quick meeting and decided that the only way forward was to form a group called “*Friends of René*” and ask people in the industry to help out.

And they did. “People and companies alike have all contributed to his recovery, which is not over yet as he has a long way to go,” said Belinda. “But suffice to say, a quick call to SOS, even when Duncan Riley of DWR and the SOS Charity Fund was in the midst of dealing with his own personal tragedy, stepped in to help. To say that an organisation like the SOS is sorely needed and appreciated, is an understatement. And I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart.”

The “*Friends of René*” group collected R100 000, of which R25 000 was contributed by the SOS Charity Fund. There is also a back a buddy page for René and anyone is welcome to contribute as he still has a long way to go.



“We need to find a way of making it a rule that freelancers have a basic medical aid, as they do in the UK,” said Belinda. “I’m all for us, as a collective, to approach a medical insurance company and ask to have medical cover that is designed and tailored to suit our profession, because unfortunately accidents happen and as technicians, we always seem to put the job before our own personal needs. Just a thought.”

René is resting and recovering at home and is extremely grateful to the generous friends and colleagues who have helped him.