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Leadership Begins Long Before the Title: Celebrating Women Who Are Shaping the Future of the Accountancy Profession

As South Africa celebrates Women's Month, it is also an opportunity to recognise the women who are quietly but confidently shaping the future of the accountancy profession through service, leadership and purpose.

For SAIPA Mastery Circle Award recipient Diva Ugbobuaku, leadership has never been about seniority. It is about making a meaningful contribution from the very beginning of one's professional journey.

Recognised as the Emerging Catalyst at the SAIPA Mastery Circle Awards, Diva views the honour as more than a personal milestone. She sees it as affirmation that young professionals can create lasting impact long before they reach the peak of their careers.

"Leadership is not determined by how long you've been in the profession, but by the impact you're willing to make from day one," she says.

Her journey reflects that belief. Alongside building her own career as a Professional Accountant (SA), Diva has invested her time in mentoring University of Pretoria students, creating educational content, founding initiatives such as *The Women's Ledger* and *Accounting Ascent*, and advocating for stronger support structures for trainees and young professionals. For her, success is measured not only by professional achievements, but by the number of people encouraged to grow along the way.

That philosophy aligns closely with SAIPA's commitment to developing ethical, capable and inclusive leaders. Through these initiatives, mentorship opportunities, leadership development programmes and platforms that recognise excellence across every stage of a professional career, the Institute continues to create an environment where women are empowered to lead with confidence, contribute meaningfully and inspire the next generation.

As a profession that is evolving rapidly, accountancy requires more than technical expertise. It calls for professionals who are adaptable, innovative, empathetic and committed to serving others. Diva believes these qualities will define the leaders of tomorrow and that every professional has a responsibility to leave the profession stronger than they found it.

Receiving the award has only strengthened her commitment to giving back. She hopes to contribute to initiatives that create greater opportunities for trainees, students and young professionals through mentorship, collaboration, innovation and leadership development, ensuring that future professionals feel supported from the moment they begin their careers.

For young women entering the profession, her message is simple but powerful: do not wait until you qualify or hold a leadership title before making a difference. Every voice matters, and meaningful contribution starts wherever you are.

"My hope is that my journey reminds young professionals that they don't need decades of experience to make a meaningful impact. By choosing to learn continuously, serve others and embrace every opportunity for growth, they already have something valuable to offer."

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Media Enquiries

Ofentse Letswalo

PR & Communications Coordinator

0769102208 / oletswalo@saipa.co.za

