

Launch of ArcelorMittal Science Centre in Saldanha

On 5 December 2008, ArcelorMittal South Africa launched its Science Centre in the Vredenburg/Saldanha Bay region of the Western Cape and signed a memorandum of understanding with the Western Cape department of education to develop the project.

Donna Fata

This Centre is the second of its kind initiated by ArcelorMittal South Africa.

The ArcelorMittal South Africa Science Centres are flagship projects aimed at improving maths and science performance at schools in the communities surrounding the company's operations. The centres expose students to science and technology by providing them with classrooms, science laboratories, interactive science exhibitions and curriculum-linked science and maths instruction.

ArcelorMittal South Africa also involves educators by providing teacher training to enhance overall teaching ability.

Poor science and maths performance at the secondary education level and the unpopularity of science as a career path are critical challenges facing South Africa. This has a direct effect on the country's growth and future competitiveness. ArcelorMittal South Africa's investment into an additional Science Centre promotes its position as a key contributor to the Saldanha community and its future economic growth.

ArcelorMittal South Africa's core business relies heavily on being able to access skilled people in the scientific, engineering and technological fields. Improving maths and science performance at schools in the communities around the company's areas of operation provides a sustainable resource for ArcelorMittal South Africa and works towards alleviating the national skills crisis.

ArcelorMittal South Africa CEO Nku Nyembezi-Heita, says that the company's social development goals are aligned with government's ASGISA and JIPSA programmes. The pillar of the policy is to align tertiary education and other institutional

training with the actual skills required by both the public and private sectors. Companies support Jipsa by implementing human resource practices that either attract the right skills sets or upskill existing staff.

"ArcelorMittal South Africa plays a leading role in Jipsa and has been recognised as one of the companies heading skills development and training. By focusing on maths and science education and technical skills training, we play an important role in bringing millions of South Africans into the mainstream economy," says Nku.

Nku says, "ArcelorMittal South Africa is a major component of economic life in the communities around Saldanha. We would like to see more engineering and technical candidates from the areas where we operate. We are sure that the Saldanha Science Centre will soon produce similar results to the hugely successful Sebokeng Science Centre. We recognise that our position in Southern Africa and in the global steel industry brings unique responsibilities."

Representing the Western Cape Department of Education was Ron Swartz, Head of Education in the Western Cape. In his speech, he said, "We have many things to celebrate as we contemplate the significance of the day. Firstly we are celebrating an agreement that will help transform education in science, technology, engineering and maths on the West Coast. By transforming the premises, you are helping education in this region, by providing access to the world of science and technology, especially for learners from our poorest communities.

"We celebrate the partnership that has made this possible. Our friends and partners at ArcelorMittal South Africa have shown great foresight in seeing that your future in this corner of Africa depends on people to make things happen", he added.

He went on to say, "We celebrate because this project is about hope. ArcelorMittal South Africa is bringing hope to the people of the West Coast region, by providing opportunities and the education need to take advantage of these opportunities". In closing he quoted George Peppard who played the role of Colonel John "Hannibal" Smith in the A-team TV series when at the end of an action-packed episode he would say "I love it when a plan comes together". He said the A-team had certainly been involved in the project and as the Western Cape Education Department they thanked ArcelorMittal South Africa for this.

Among the guests was Saldanha Bay Municipality Mayor Mrs Johanna Stoffels who pledged the Saldanha Bay Municipality's commitment and support to this project. She acknowledged the significant role that ArcelorMittal South Africa will play in establishing a much needed science culture in disadvantaged communities.

All delegates were taken on a tour of the facility to see what the science centre has to offer and thereafter the Diazville High School choir provided some entertainment.

Doing the vote of thanks a proud and visibly excited Nomsa Skweyiza, the Project Co-ordinator (who was earlier singing and dancing with the Diazville High School choir) explained how she, when she was still involved in maths and science education, was invited to attend a science expo at the University of Cape Town where learners from various schools were exhibiting their projects. She noticed that the whole exhibition was dominated by learners from white schools. She and a colleague, Khailpha Ramathlakane, made a decision to start a similar project in the black areas. They led the initiative and launched KHANYAGULA (Khayelitsha,

Nyanga, Gugulethu and Langa). With the help of Telkom they managed to do their first exhibition in Khayelitsha in 1990.

"We were over the moon in 1991 when our first learners qualified to go and exhibit in the international expo in America. One of the things we noticed was that even under performing learners, performance changed when they were participating in the EXPO. They really took pride of the projects, worked till late without complaining. They were highly motivated.

"I went to further my studies at University of Cape Town majoring in science education. One of the lecturers used to show some sympathy to us as black science students, he used to comment and say "It is difficult to mark black learners because one cannot understand their style of writing, it would be better if they were marked by black lecturers". After that comment we gave him and his friend nick names

"Verwoerd 1 and 2" and decided to make them happy for a short time by getting border line marks, after that we went full force and got top marks. He was very angry with the rest of the students for getting lower marks than us but as the year went by we kept on getting good marks, all he could say was "You must be proud of yourselves". He could not believe it. The science centre is like a dream coming through for me and other people who would like to see the playing field levelled in this country.

Thank you to ArcelorMittal South Africa and the Department of Education for your contribution in levelling the playing fields in this country. Never again will black learners be exposed to comments like the one we had, that would make them feel like their second class citizens" said Nomsa.

ArcelorMittal South Africa's first Science Centre was opened in 2006 in Sebokeng, Vanderbijlpark, in partnership with the Triangle Department of Education. It provides learners in the Voal Triangle region with access to classrooms, science laboratories, a state-of-the-art computer centre and interactive science exhibitions. A measurable success of the Sebokeng Science Centre is that four of its current grade 12 pupils (the first to matriculate) will pursue engineering studies in 2009. These students are four of the 20 candidates who qualified as ArcelorMittal South Africa's engineering bursars. This Science Centre provides learner support to 43 schools and about 1 600 pupils per annum. To date, 30 teachers have also improved their overall knowledge and teaching methods at the centre.



Mrs Johanna Stoffels, Mayor of Saldanha Bay Municipality.

Science Centre Project Manager, Albert van Dyk

Heinrich Kriel, Nomsa Skweyiza, Ron Swartz and Nku Nyembezi-Heita at the launch of the ArcelorMittal South Africa Science Centre in Saldanha