

Kilmarnock College

Ngiyabonga Ekurhuleni East!

Kilmarnock College have forged an exciting educational partnership with Ekurhuleni East College for Further Education and Training, near Johannesburg.

In late July a group of five students from Kilmarnock College set off for South Africa. Each had been nominated by their respective Faculty as being the top performer in their particular vocational area. Accompanied by Linda van Heerden, Head of Faculty for Arts and Social Science, and Margo MacMillan, Employability Officer, the intrepid trailblazers flew first to Dubai, and then to Johannesburg for a trip of a lifetime.

Ekurhuleni East College for Further Education and Training was founded in 2002 following a merger between five Colleges in the Gauteng Province in South Africa. It has a staff complement of 491. Ekurhuleni East College for FET serves a population of nearly 1.5 million over a geographical area of 5 000 square kilometres. It has a current learner population of 6 300 across its 5 campuses. Its core business involves clothing and textiles, construction, cultural industries, energy, engineering, hospitality, information and communications technology, manufacturing, services and tourism. Ekurhuleni East for FET strives to deliver world-class further education, training and development relevant to local, national, regional and international user requirements.

Following discussion with the British Council in South Africa a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Kilmarnock and Ekurhuleni East Colleges earlier this year. The aim of the partnership is twofold. It is to enhance the student experience in both colleges, and to encourage staff to have a cross-cultural outlook in the dissemination of good practice. According to Kilmarnock College Principal Mick Roebuck 'If as a college we are committed to help our students become more employable it is important we look beyond our college and country. Our global citizenship initiative is an ongoing dialogue between our two communities.'

The group had prepared extensively in the months prior to their visit. They agreed a Full Value Contract, went on Team Building events, attended cultural orientation sessions, developed personal safety skills, and even learnt some Afrikaans and Zulu! Carly Mulholland, an SVQ Level 3 Professional Cookery student thought this most worthwhile in that 'Without the hard work we all put in before the visit I don't think we would have got as much out of it.'

Departing Scotland on 23 July 2006 for two weeks, the group attended lectures, classes and various meetings at the five campuses of Ekurhuleni East College. Each day saw a Briefing and Debriefing on the day's events. The Scottish students also completed a course in leadership, and received certificates from the Chairperson of the Ekurhuleni East College Council, Mr. B.F. Moabi.

Cultural activities included a visit to Soweto, the famous Black Township near Johannesburg and home of Nobel Prize winners Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu. The Hector Pietersen Museum and Memorial, and the Apartheid Museum were also visited.

The students immersed themselves in the multi-culturalism of the Rainbow Nation. They experienced its eleven official languages; they ate traditional food, and took part in the everyday life of a township. A fantastic visit was complete; when on visiting the Pilanesberg Game Reserve they saw a lioness!

The hospitality shown by their Ekurhuleni East College hosts was outstanding. This allowed the Kilmarnock College students to gain in self-confidence. Horizons have been broadened, and all are more aware of cultural differences and similarities between the two countries. The highlight of the trip for Carly Mulholland was visiting a South African Primary School. Carly says 'In Scotland children are concerned with looking good, and having the latest trainers. In South Africa many children don't even have one decent pair of shoes, but their enthusiasm for school and what it can offer is awesome.'

Employability Officer Margo MacMillan believes that 'The experience has seen our students grow as individuals. They are all that much better equipped to enter the competitive job market, and to deal with what life brings their way in the future.' Group leader Linda van Heerden adds 'The thing that amazed me was the way our students grew in confidence. They adapted with ease to any cultural differences they came across, and were a credit to themselves, Kilmarnock College and Scotland. They were superb ambassadors.'

Back home the five are not resting on their laurels. All are working on a magnificent collage to represent their experience. They are also preparing a presentation for the Kilmarnock College Board of Management, who enthusiastically backed the venture. At least one student is hoping to go back to South Africa once qualified in order to pass on her skills, knowledge and expertise.

Ekurhuleni East College are to send a reciprocal delegation to Kilmarnock College in February 2007. In the meantime Kilmarnock College Principal Mick Roebuck hopes to establish video conferencing links to enhance learning and teaching between the two Colleges.

So 'Ngiyabonga' or thank you Ekurhuleni East College!

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