

Pioneer Foods commits R8.5 million for youth centre in Mbekweni

Pioneer Foods has committed to an R8.5 million development in the Mbekweni township outside Paarl. The Mbekweni Youth Centre (MYC) opened its doors on 22 July and promises to provide a secure and enriching environment for young people to empower themselves with the necessary life skills and educational support to ensure there are no limits imposed on the dreams and opportunities for their future.



(L-R) Prof Mohammad Kaaran, Phil Roux, Lean Cronje, Mayor Gesie Van Deventer, Prof Etile Links cutting the ribbon.

Selwyn Paterson, MYC Manager, commented, "We are proud of the social transformation potential that MYC offers to the community. Housed in what was once a municipal beer hall, which was a divisive element that only served to break families apart, the modern youth centre will empower the community to take control and create their own future. This building has been given a new purpose and is likely to leave a legacy that we can all be proud of."

Providing modern education facilities for youths and an atmosphere conducive to learning, the centre boasts state-of-the-art computer rooms with internet access, printing and studying facilities, career guidance and a variety of courses in personal development, health, wellness and fitness. MYC is designed to be flexible in its purpose with a variety of multi-functional spaces where youths can socialise and spend time in a secure and supportive environment.

According to Paterson, the use of the centre will not be limited to office hours. "As the centre becomes established, Friday evenings will see youths gather at the boma in the courtyard, socialise and enjoy food, before moving to the dance hall for a movie. The centre must provide an alternative for youths to make the right choices, acquire educational and life skills and promote a healthy lifestyle. Schools in Mbekweni lack adequate ICT infrastructure for the volume of young people residing within the community. The centre offers students an opportunity to make use of supplementary state-of-the-art computer and internet facilities to further their education."

Anchor funder



Youth from the community standing proudly outside their new Mbekweni Youth Centre

Pioneer Foods Education and Community Trust (PFECT) will be the anchor funder for the operational costs of an estimated R2 million per year and will seek to partner other institutions for funding in the future.

"Pioneer Foods is privileged to make a difference in the lives of the communities we serve," said Pioneer Foods CEO, Phil

Roux. "We are grateful to other sponsors who have helped make this vision a reality. A special mention goes to Business Connexion Group (BCX), our IT consulting and outsourcing partner, which didn't hesitate to commit R800,000 to see the centre operational."

A community forum for the centre was established, representing leaders in the Mbekweni community, that will serve as a soundboard to the management to ensure community-specific issues and relevant needs are addressed by MYC. A separate non-profit company was also registered with a Board of Directors that will ensure proper governance in the running of MYC. Funding partners will be represented on the board.

The centre will offer young people in the area the following:

- A computer lab for general use by members and for targeted training;
- A study area equipped with computers and study desks;
- Internet access, MS Office suite and school subject tutorial software;
- A lecture hall and a boardroom for use by youth centre partners for training;
- A recreation/dance hall for healthy lifestyle and fitness activities;
- A kitchen for catering during training events;
- The kitchen is also equipped to provide basic training in cooking skills;
- Offices for management of the centre; and
- Studying and printing facilities for members.

The centre is targeted at high school pupils aged 16 and older and unemployed and out-of-school youths in the community. Schools in the area will also be able to use the facility as a secure and modern venue for meetings with parents and educational sessions with pupils. An existing crèche on the site, catering for more than 30 kids, was also upgraded as part of the project.

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