



Rosendal: Hot spot for transformation

BY ALANI JANEKE

The beauty of the Sesotho municipal district, which includes Senekal, Rosendal, Marquard, Clocolan and Ficksburg, is evident not only in the beauty of the sandstone hills. It can also be seen in the generosity of the local and farming communities. This district, Free State Agriculture's region 3, has been described as a "transformation hot spot" by Martin Detering, regional representative for the organisation.

Detering says that several projects are underway to support the communities in this region, and 250 farmers and 12 farmers' associations are involved. One of these is called Glokids, which forms part of a bigger project to assist the Global Gate Community Church Group in the township of Rosendal.

The church has plans underway to build its own school on the land it has acquired for its grounds, but financing is a challenge.

Detering and his wife Maretha have made their hostel in town available for pre-primary learners for two years while the school is being built.

At this stage, the school has two teachers, Thabisang Kantine and Dixie Mphanya, who teach 15 children between the ages of two and six from the township. They work for little remuneration, as parents' fees contribute towards some of the food that the children receive daily at school as well as funds for the new building. Food is also sponsored.

The school is the only English medium pre-school in the area. Maretha finds it amazing how fast the children pick up languages.

"The parents have told us they are impressed and they've seen changes in their children," she says.

FARMERS HELP LOCAL CHURCH

The farming community was instrumental in helping the community with the erection of its own church building in the Mautse township. A church was launched for the Mautse

community in 1998 as part of Christian Ministries. It started with the church hiring space from the local high school, but the congregation ultimately had to move out of here.

A piece of land was bought in 2013. To erect the building, Pastor John Mathuhle approached some farmers in the community. He says they are very grateful to the farmers who opened their hearts. A stock auction was held and the money raised was used to buy the material needed to build the church.

Detering says the community and farmers worked together to erect the building in a matter of weeks. According to Mathuhle, they struggled to host a congregation of 50 each Sunday at the school. But since the church has moved closer to the community, they have about 150 congregants every Sunday.

"Some days they have to stand outside, but they still come," he says.

The church also hosts an after-school programme for primary school children three times a week, where they are



fed, assisted with homework, taught English and also taught music by the wife of a farmer once a week. Meals, which include meat, vegetables and maize meal, are sponsored by the local community.

Stixie Mphone, one of the after-school programme helpers, says they also teach the children soccer. Between 65 and 70 children attend this programme.

FUTURE PLANS AND CHALLENGES

The planned school will consist of four classrooms which will house 50 children.

Mathuhle says that even though they are experiencing challenges with the building of the school, they receive a great deal of help from the

LEFT: Rosendal's striking sandstone hills.

LEFT, BELOW: Farmers helped to build this church in Mautse.

RIGHT, FROM TOP:

- From left are: Martin Detering (Free State Agriculture representative), John Mathuhle (pastor) and Stixie Mphone (after-school programme helper).

- The Glokids learners with (from left): Thabisang Kantine, Alice Ntlangoe, and Maretha and Martin Detering.

PHOTOS BY: ALANI JANEKE

community and are grateful to the farmers for their help.

"We're even seeing a difference in the parents through the children's programme," she says.

"The project has been so positive that a church is being planned for Senekal. It's inspiring to see how a whole community can care for one another!"



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ABOVE: Preschooling is provided to 15 children at Naledi Village. The Naledi Development Trust has plans to build a preprimary and primary school on the premises.

BELOW: Restoration of the farm's facilities began in May last year and EarthRise Mountain Lodge officially opened in May this year.
PHOTOS: ALANI JANEKE

A phoenix rising FROM THE ASHES

BY ALANI JANEKE

Rustler's Valley farm, a gem of the eastern Free State, is rising from the ashes and making history at the same time. This is thanks to the EarthRise Trust, the brainchild of Jay Naidoo, previous general secretary of Cosatu. Naidoo, old Cosatu colleague Gino Govender, and Kumi Naidoo, head of Greenpeace International, are the trustees.

Frik Grobbelaar bought the farm in the 1980s, naming it Rustler's Valley, and, in 1992, the first Rustler's Valley music festival was held, an annual event which soon became famous. But in 2007, a veld fire devastated the farm's resort facilities and other areas.

The EarthRise Trust bought the farm in February 2013. Its acquisition was no ordinary land sales transaction. The trust views the farm's Naledi Village, where about 100 community members and workers live, as its biggest asset, and their contract includes a clause stipulating that 40ha of the 273ha farm is allocated to the Naledi Development Trust (NDT).

Restoration of the facilities on the farm, to be used as conference and vacation facilities, started in May last year, and the official opening of the EarthRise Mountain Lodge took place on 1 May this year.

Anton Chaka, chairperson of NDT, explains that both the farm and lodge are run by the Naledi Village community. The community's future plans include unique eastern Free State hospitality, a music festival, and providing vegetables to the lodge. Chaka says that members of the Naledi community had previously produced and sold vegetables within the community and some was donated to clinics in the Ficksburg area.

In addition to Rustler's Valley, EarthRise Trust bought another guest farm in the area, Franshoek, at the same time. The community will also provide vegetables for this guest farm, as well as target retail markets and national supermarkets.

The trust wants the community to become the official owners of the land allocated to them.



"The model that we will follow here is to bring value back to the people," says Govender.

The NDT applied to the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform for legal, technical and financial assistance to complete the demarcation and transfer of ownership. This means the residents of the village and their immediate descendants will have lifetime rights to their homes, as well as a share in the profits from cooperative farming on their land.

In addition, the trust has started a school on the grounds. Presently, preschooling is provided to 15 children at a venue set up for community

training. Plans are afoot for a preprimary and primary school. The school's governing body comprises three women from the village.

"We are living proudly, knowing that we are working on our own future. Owning something is such a big thing!" Chaka says. He adds that a change is evident in the lives of community members.

EarthRise Trust envisions a vibrant, food-driven rural economy that, with a little help and using indigenous knowledge, can achieve much. The trust hopes to follow a model of transformation which will have a tangible effect on people's lives.