

Local youth to benefit as Sappi launches skills centre in Umkomaas

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Sappi invests in a skills centre that focuses on empowering the Umkomaas community with skills that will enable them to seek meaningful employment or create small enterprises that contribute to the economic growth in our country. The centre was officially opened on Thursday, 1 February, at an event attended by dignitaries from government, local Amakhosi and the community.

Sappi's vision is to develop a learning campus that enriches the lives of its local communities and Sappi employees. This is aptly summarised in the motto for the skills centre, "Sinikeza Abantu Amathuba Okuphumelela". The Sappi Skills Centre is part of Sappi's investment in its communities and is aimed at alleviating poverty and offering sustainable solutions that will empower the youth with basic technical skills. This centre will give youth the opportunity to contribute positively to society.

In her speech during the opening of the skills centre the chief director of district operations in the KwaZulu Natal Department of Education, Mrs Thembelihle Gumede, said, "The department of Basic Education works closely with the Department of Higher Education in order to place the children who pass grade 12 in universities, universities of technology, however there are children who cannot go to those institutions. They are happy that Sappi has created this skills centre in Umkomaas that will close that gap. It will allow people to start their own businesses and sustain themselves. This centre will make a difference in people's lives."

"This centre forms part of our contribution to the country in order to create shared value between Sappi Saiccor Mill and our neighbouring communities. Our goal is to have young people who will be active in the economy by starting and running their own small businesses," said Alex Thiel, the CEO of Sappi Southern Africa.

Sappi has spent close to R10 m developing the skills centre. This includes the purchase of a farm close to Sappi Saiccor Mill where the centre has been built, the purchase of special equipment and the construction of workshops needed for the training. In addition Sappi will spend just over R4m annually to train and to operate the centre.

"We are applying a three-phased approach in developing this skills centre. Phase one is part of creating shared value which includes basic skills, basic trade, business essentials and life skills; phase two is Institutional training which includes apprentices, trainee technicians, engineers in training, process and operational training; phase three is focused on improving and maintaining the skills of existing employees. New concepts and advanced engineering. We hope to contribute to the development and social upliftment for the communities surrounding our mill," said Krish Naidu, general manager at Sappi Saiccor Mill.

At the launch event held on 1 February, the first group of young people recruited at the centre in October 2017 was celebrated as they graduated from their training. "Thank you, Sappi, for giving me and my colleagues this great opportunity. We have learnt and grown over the past few months. We are better equipped to face the world," said Neliswa Mthethwa, one of the learners who was graduating from her training at the event.

Currently, the centre can take up to 20 young people for an eight-week training programme. When the centre becomes fully operational, it will offer basic handyman skills in painting, construction, electrical, plumbing and tiling. In addition the centre will train learners on business management and life skills. Sappi is in the process of developing this centre to become a state-of-the-art training facility.

Unemployed youth, in close proximity to Sappi Saiccor Mill, who want to enquire about the centre must contact their

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