



Dr Phethiwe Matutu

13th SAASTEC Conference - held at ArcelorMittal Science Centre & School of Excellence in Vredenburg, Western Cape from 22-25 November.

A very successful 13th SAASTEC Conference was held in Vredenburg. With a record number of 156 delegates from 10 different countries attending, this is the largest conference to date. Delegates started gathering at SAAO early Monday morning with Ryan Bruton and Eroy Syce fetching and carrying from the airport. The buses left SAAO at around 14h00 and detoured for a visit to the ArcelorMittal plant en route to the science centre in Vredenburg for registration. Delegates enjoyed finger snacks for supper whilst tapping their feet to the sounds of the Diazville High School Choir.

Tuesday 23rd November saw the conference being held at the Military Academy in Saldanha. This was hastily organized at almost the last minute when we realized that the numbers were just too large for the ArcelorMittal auditorium to accommodate. Dr Phethiwe Matutu, Chief Director of Human Capital and Science Platforms (DST) gave the opening address. She also highlighted parts from the Kuala Lumpur Resolution (see page ? Of newsletter). Her final words were that she urged us all to create a vibrant Science Centre movement. This set the scene for a talk from Lesley Lewis (Ontario Science Centre in Canada) about the Toronto Declaration - a result of the 5SCWC held in June 2008. There will, of course, also be a follow up Cape Town resolution next year.

Walter Staveloz from the Association of Science- Technology Centres (ASTC) in Washington DC, USA followed with an interesting talk on "How global is local". He urged science centres to have community conversations and discuss what is happening in our own back yards.

This led easily into the first topic - Biodiversity. After lunch, guest speaker Professor Anusuya Chinsamy-Turan gave a very interesting talk "Life over the History of Earth". Delegates were able to touch and hold fossils over 500 million years old!

A visit to the West Coast Fossil Park was greatly enjoyed by all, despite the famous howling west coast wind! Everybody soon recovered at the evening function - a braai at the lovely Langebaan Country Estate. A few drinks and good food restored any flagging spirits.

The rest of the conference was held at the ArcelorMittal Science Centre in Vredenburg. An audio/visual feed through had been organized to accommodate the overflow of delegates. Due to the large number of talks (64 in total) there were also parallel sessions.

Wednesday 24th November kicked off with the second topic "Science across Cultures" in preparation for the 6SCWC. Again we were lucky to have 4 excellent international speakers for the plenary session - thereafter delegates had the hard task of deciding which of the two parallel sessions to attend.

After lunch, the third topic "Capacity Building" was introduced. With no less than 30 talks in this category, delegates had to choose between three parallel sessions. The long, busy day ended with dinner at the most delightfully different restaurant - Boesmanland - in Langebaan. This rustic venue is right on the beach, and delegates were treated to a most beautiful view of the sun setting into the ocean. Once Fifa, the head honcho, had explained how the "eating" was done, i.e self-serve-eat-as-much-as-you-can, another delicious meal was enjoyed by all. Disco Dean was astounded and overjoyed by the energy displayed - the dance floor simply heaved the entire time. He told me that he'd played at many corporate functions but this one took the cake. I tried to explain that this was no "corporate function" and that the science centre community is a breed apart.

Thursday 25th November - the final half day of the conference. The morning started off with the SAASTEC Annual General Meeting. This was followed by the fourth and last topic "International Year of Chemistry" in preparation for 2011. Dr Michael Booth from the Chemical and Allied Industries Association had taken the time to attend this part of the conference and tell everybody what was on offer for IYC and how the science centres could get involved.

The conference ended on a high note when Mike Bruton and Walter Staveloz gave a status update on the 6SCWC. This is going to be a seriously fantastic event and you are all urged not to miss it.

Do make sure you take advantage of the "early bird" registration. 300 odd delegates from 80 countries are expected to attend. For the Panel Discussions, 100 talks were submitted and 60 of those have been accepted. There will be over 230 speakers from 60 countries.



Nicky Engelbrecht from the West Coast Fossil Park enthralled SAASTEC delegates with tales of very old bones!



SAASTEC delegates were encouraged to submit posters before the end of March. Visit the website for more details <http://www.6scwc.org>.

There was a quick conference wrap up with a viewing of a selection of photos taken during the course of the conference by Joaquin Fargas, one of the international delegates, Director Exploratorio, Art, Science & technology Centre, Argentina and also an IPC member.

By 13h00, weary but happy delegates grabbed lunch packs and headed off for the buses or their cars.

Huge thanks go to Thami Mphokela, Tebogo Habedi and all the other ArcelorMittal staff for being such super hosts. Also to Gabbi, Ryan and Eroy from MTN Sciencentre as well as Kevin Govender (SAAO) for all their help with conference logistics.

Last but definitely not least - our very grateful thanks to the Department of Science and Technology for the financial support that makes these conferences possible.

Ginny Stone