

Eskom Expo for Young Scientists held at the University of Pretoria

Last year, some of South Africa's smartest young minds once again gathered at the University of Pretoria to compete in the most popular science competition for schools in South Africa.

On 2 and 3 October 2009, selected winners of the regional expo events showcased their projects at the national finals of the Eskom Expo for Young Scientists.

The Eskom Expo for Young Scientists annually draws entries from approximately 30 000 pupils representing hundreds of schools across the country. They can enter in the age groups Grade 5 to 7, Grade 8 and 9, and Grade 10 to 12. Projects can be entered in 25 categories, ranging from physics and chemistry to earth sciences, computer sciences, animal and veterinary sciences, health care, as well as food sciences and food technology.

Participants first have to enter in their regions, and the best regional projects are selected for the national event. The Northern Gauteng expo also took place at the University of Pretoria, and 591 pupils from 55 schools participated last year.

At 2009's finals, 801 pupils from from various schools displayed innovative ideas to solve the world's most pressing problems. Of them, 96 received gold medals, 220 silver and 204 bronze medals. The overall

winner of the expo was Lucky Matjeke of Settlers Agricultural High School in the Bushveld region, who won a visit to the world-class SciTech Discovery Centre in Perth, Australia.

Impressive projects from other participants included a low-cost house built with recycled two-litre plastic bottles filled with sand, instead of bricks, by Mohammed Zubair Ahmed and Leticia Sewsanker of Ladysmith Secondary School in KwaZulu-Natal, and a solar geyser built with recycled material picked up at a dumpsite, by Ryan Ross and Luciano Agostinetto from St David's High School in Johannesburg.

Dr Steve Lennon, the managing director of Eskom's corporate services and the event's champion, said: "Once again South African children of all ages have demonstrated an interest in science that has transcended the artificial boundaries of cities and rural areas to compete as equals in this year's Eskom Expo for Young Scientists.

"Many overcame serious disadvantages, including the lack of research, library and laboratory facilities to produce projects that



→ Johannes Rubero, a Grade 12 pupil from Ithuteng High School, with his invention, an energy circulator and sand switch.



are meaningful not only for this event, but for their communities. “They have demonstrated that imagination and determination are key ingredients when it comes to scientific endeavour.”

He was excited about the projects at the expo: “We want to inspire you and make maths and science real for you. We are excited about the number of energy projects that we have seen here at the expo because these will create solutions for the future.

“We are also encouraged by the number of girls that are participating in the expo because science is for everyone and you can see that by the top women scientists that we have in the country.”



→ *One of the learners explains his project to Ms Naledi Pandor, Minister of Science and Technology.*

Ms Naledi Pandor, Minister of Science and Technology, delivered an address at the event, and stated that, “South Africa desperately needs innovators. Innovation is not a foreign or frightening concept. Innovation starts at home in our daily lives.”

She further appealed to all the young scientists to follow careers in science, engineering or technology. South Africa needs workable scientific and technical solutions to specific challenges facing the country. 📍