

**CHANGES TO THE MRYE PROGRAMME IN 2010  
AND SUCCESSES FOR MRYE LEADERS AND THE TEAM!!**



**Some members of the MRYE team at the 2010 MRYE and CTHB Mentorship Programme lunch together with Professors Mike and Brenda Wingfield, Prof Emma Steenkamp and Jenny Hale.**

The DST/NRF Centre of Excellence in Tree Health Biotechnology (CTHB) at FABI has been involved in a number of outreach programmes involving learners at all levels of the educational chain. These include Scifest, UP with Science programme, the National Science week, visits of school children to FABI and other SAASTA initiatives. Its major outreach support programme for the last six years has been the MPEPU Rural Youth Encouragement Programme (MRYE).

This initiative, under the inspired leadership of Samukelo Vilakazi until the end of 2009 and Sithembiso Khumalo since 2010, was started by a group of very enthusiastic 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year engineering students at the University of Pretoria, all of whom came from disadvantaged rural backgrounds and were aware of the problems of poverty, poor education and deprivation facing these learners in the rural areas. We are pleased to report that students from other Faculties have joined the group and a branch of MRYE has been started at the University of Johannesburg. The group's mission statement is "*We are driven by passion and willingness of our hearts to empower the youth of South Africa so that they can make informed decisions*". They preach the message that education provides the key to enable hard-working learners to rise above their situation and open up opportunities for them to continue with tertiary education and so embark on successful careers. They provide learners with details of subjects that they need to take at school in order to train for various careers at HEI's. They discuss courses available at different tertiary institutions and make learners aware of the funding opportunities available to them.

2010 was a year of change for the MRYE group. The first change to their operating system was that MRYE had to find an official “home” at the University of Pretoria (UP). MRYE was not previously officially recognised as a community engagement project connected to one Faculty or Department, although initially in 2005 all members were from the Engineering Faculty. By the end of 2009, students from many other Faculties including Agriculture and Natural Sciences, Education, Law, Humanities, IT and Commerce had joined MRYE. At the end of 2009, the UP Executive and CTHB Board recommended that further support through the CTHB should only be approved once MRYE, as a student interest group, had been accommodated either within the SRC or the UP Client Services Centre (CSC). After much discussion we were delighted when the Division Student Recruitment and Retention at CSC signed a short-term agreement with MRYE in March 2010. It was agreed that they would assist MRYE with identification and prioritization of UP feeder schools and areas to be serviced by MRYE; provide training to the members of MRYE on the content of the 2011 Admission Requirements and General information brochure of UP, and provide recruitment material to MRYE on request. In return, MRYE would provide feedback to the Manager, Student Recruitment and Retention, on deserving and top achieving candidates at rural schools visited during the course of the year. It was also agreed that the CTHB would continue to support MRYE financially for 2010 in return for which MRYE would provide progress and financial reports to the CTHB after each trip.

The second change was that Samukelo Vilakazi, who graduated as an electronics engineer in 2010, had to hand over the leadership reins to Sithembiso (Excellent) Khumalo. Samukelo had been responsible for bringing Sithembiso both to UP and into MRYE as a result of one of the MRYE outreach visits to KwaZulu- Natal. He had also spent time in guiding and training Sithembiso to take over as leader from 2010, a task which he has done well with strong support from members of the MRYE team.



**Left to right: Sithembiso Khumalo (MRYE leader from 2010), Samukelo Vilakazi (MRYE leader from 2005 - 2009) and Prof Mike Wingfield. One of the schools visited by MRYE on their visit to North-West in July 2010.**

A third change was that the CTHB Board recommended that MRYE should operate within a specific budget from 2010 and an amount of R45000 was budgeted for this activity. The team has learnt to manage within this budget and curtailed their activities and expenditure accordingly.

The planned visit to the Eastern Cape in January 2010 could not take place, as the Agreement authorising them to operate at UP, was only signed in March. Their activities were limited to two long trips, one to Mpumalanga in April and one to North-West in July.

These were most successful and hopefully the fruits will be seen when some of the learners with whom they have engaged, will enrol at UP or their nearest tertiary institution to continue their education in the years to come. They undertook one short visit to KwaZulu-Natal early in the year. The costs for this trip were covered by the students themselves. In September, the CTHB supported their short visit to Nqutu in KwaZulu-Natal, where they tutored students at four schools for one day prior to attending the celebration of Samukelo's graduation in his home village. This celebration also represented a motivational role for learners, unemployed youth and parents of the surrounding villages. They were thus able to witness what could be achieved by poverty stricken children from rural areas who, through hard work and education, could earn the opportunity of training for a successful career. Because Samukelo's studies at UP were made possible through a bursary from the Airforce, he is moving to Cape Town where he will be working for this institution. We wish him well in his future career.

Our congratulations must also go to Sithembiso (Excellent) Khumalo, the new leader of MRYE, for his many achievements this year besides the able leadership of MRYE itself. He was chosen to be part of the group of UP students who took part in the national SIFE (Students in Free Enterprise) competition. The UP team won the national competition and went to Los Angeles in October 2010 to take part in the international SIFE competition (also known as the SIFE World Cup) competing against 39 other teams from all over the world. The UP team, representing South Africa, did extremely well to reach the semi-finals. The overall winning team was Egypt, for the second year running. According to Sithembiso, the South African team "wowed" everyone at the opening ceremony with their team members dressed in the ethnic dress of our rainbow nation, singing the SA national anthem and also blowing the vuvuzelas. At the competition, the judges spent the five minute question time congratulating UP on being the first team in the history of SIFE to have made it through the National Competition to the semi-final of the World Cup – and this in the team's first year of entering the competition. With more than 30 projects running in the 2010 programme, the team has touched the lives of thousands. They were given a wonderfully warm reception wherever they went and took the opportunity of networking and making friends with members of the teams of other countries.

A trophy named "The Oosthuizen Trophy for the Most Outstanding SIFE UP Member of 2010" was awarded to Sithembiso at the end of October to recognize his invaluable contribution to UP's SIFE team. A second award entitled "Gold Medal for The Most Outstanding Service of the year 2010" was presented to Sithembiso at the start of November when he was invited to the UP SRC and Dean's awards. He won one of only five awards, presented by Prof Cheryl de la Rey, Rector of the University, for a student at UP who has contributed most in 2010. Additionally, two certificates came Sithembiso's way for other different contributions he has made. Congratulations Sithembiso – for all of your 20 years, you have come a long way from your rural village by grasping the opportunity for further study offered to you with both hands and putting back into the community the benefits that you have gained.

The next major challenge for the MRYE group is to negotiate both with Mr Smith of the Department of Community Engagement and Mr Isaacs and Dr Clase of CSC about signing a longer-term agreement. This will be dependent on the success that MRYE members have had in investigating the involvement of relevant Faculties that will benefit mainly from this initiative. Future financial support from the CTHB for MRYE activities depends on the signing of this longer-term agreement.