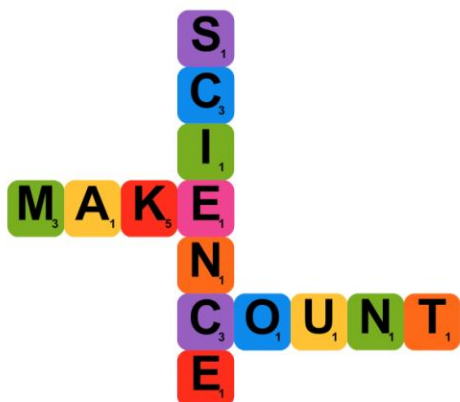


SASOL SciFest 2007



Sasol SciFest[®]



March 19th saw the start of a very productive science communication rally, where 8 FABI delegates undertook the journey to Grahamstown for the 2007 Sasol SciFest. Marked as the international year of the polar bear with many featured aspects concerning climate change, this SciFest promised to be action packed, allowing young and old the opportunity to mingle with some of the most renowned national and international scientists. Aptly themed “Make Science Count”, Sasol SciFest boasted its eleventh successful year. With some 40 000 visitors over the seven day festival, there was something for everyone. This included understanding the controversy of a long standing feud between the South Africans and the Australians, this time not on a cricket pitch. It also included understanding the dynamics behind such things as the planned Square Kilometer Array, the largest radio telescope bid; jet-fuelled rockets; and a Bone Woman.

The FABI exhibition was hosted on the first floor of the 1820 Settler’s Monument building, which is steeped in cultural history. Efficiency lay in the quick assembly of the display with minimum effort and a great output. The “forest” had taken shape and featured what was to be the talk of the Festival – “The Green Broccoli Head”. “Keeping trees Healthy” provided the draw card allowing the exhibition to have a universal appeal. The team was very eager to meet the various contributors and view the many exhibitions. The “Meet and Greet” afforded the perfect opportunity for us to network and relax after a long day. SciFest had an extremely well organized team to cater for our every need. “It’s all about the Science, baby”, read the caption of the first edition of the *SciCue*, the local publication covering SciFest. This encapsulated the start of SciFest perfectly, and it was all systems go with a stampede of enthused scholars. Our popular “Mrs. Broccoli Head” made her way into the press, featuring in that edition of *SciCue*.

The highlight of the opening day of SciFest was undoubtedly the lecture presented by Clea Koff, affectionately known as the “bone woman” for her efforts in using science against crime. Her lecture on war crimes investigations provided the audience with some shocking pictures gathered from her profession. Forensic anthropology, in her words, “requires a great deal of enthusiasm and motivation, to have an open mind and to know your personal limits”. This was truly a heartfelt and inspirational talk, moving the audience to a standing ovation.

“CSI Grahamstown” (the CTHB version of the well know CSI Miami TV show) featured not only at the workshop hosted at the Rhodes Electron microscope unit but more so at our own display, where our expert team had to convey the message of how scientists play detective in unraveling the circumstances surrounding tree and plantation deaths. There was an excellent response to the FABI display and our team interacted with diverse audiences effortlessly. We were able to communicate the importance of early identification of diseased trees and the associated pathogens that are involved. The samples of the diseased Sirex wood cookie were a great success, especially with the children. Seeing the damage that insects can cause was an eye opener to many visitors.

On a more light-hearted note, there was great audience participation and interaction with the “Mushroom Knowledge” component of the exhibition. Interest was sparked in the visitors when we educated them on the dangers that are associated with the great varieties of mushrooms. Dialogue centered on the tasty treats made from mushrooms and the amazing, if not weird, dishes that can be prepared using mushrooms.

“Do you see what I see?” was a crazy insight into the mind of an excellent physicist, Dr Gillian Arendse. He presented workshops daily as well as a featured evening lecture demonstrating the physics of music and his enthusiasm to encourage young minds to explore the theories and prove or disprove them as they wished. Carbon foot printing was a hot topic of discussion, fuelled by Dr Maggie Aderin-Pocock. Esteemed “instrumentalist”, Maggie had one questioning the lifestyle choices that we all make, leaving the audience with an unsettling message: “Tomorrow’s climate is today’s challenge! And that is everybody’s problem!”

This message was reiterated at the Official opening ceremony, where the keynote address was delivered by Professor Bruce Hewitson. This evening event, which was attended by the Deputy Minister of Science and Technology, Mr Derek Hanekom, included intense requests for the greater involvement of government in the promotion of science to the school-leaving population. It ended on a high note, with a fantastic laser show, encapsulating all senses, and thrilling the crowds. The first African Café Scientific, launched by the British Council, had people “abuzz” as its aim is to promote communication of science to the younger generations. The brainchild of Dr Shelia Ochungboju, the café’s allow for the informal meeting of young people and focus on conversations about science, technology and society as a whole. FABI was also privileged to meet the Beijing contingent and spread the word of Tree Health.

Drawing to a highly successful end, Sasol SciFest 2007 had met its goal, to “Make Science Count”. Although FABI did not win a special award, we did get a mention for our creative “Green Broccoli Head” which enticed many a visitor to stop by for a chat.

Besides working hard during the day, members of our team also enjoyed a very social nightlife. Scifest provided an excellent platform for each member of the team to communicate science and to be proud ambassadors for the CTHB and the TPCP of FABI. Sasol SciFest looks forward to welcoming us back to future SciFests - perhaps even to Germany, where celebrations of SciFest are spreading their wings and providing the inspiration for many other international science festivals to coincide with our original Grahamstown SciFest.

Well done to the FABI team for a great effort and stunning dedication!!!

Kershney Naidoo

