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TRAINING FORCE

Eureka for our own Einstein

Seabela Maila- Seabelam@herald.co.za

Ntsako Nyathi was the toast of the town last week, when he jetted off to Cape Town to represent the Ndlovu node at the annual SAEON (South African Environmental Observation Network) symposium.

The grade eleven learner at Barankuna Secondary School in Lulekani outside Phalaborwa, says that the symposium was an eye opener, which has encouraged him to look at the use of science as a means of solving problems affecting his disadvantaged community. SAEON is an NRF (National Research Foundation) research facility funded by the Department of Science and Technology. Each year learners from various schools in Phalaborwa are selected to participate in the SAEON science engagement camps.

The selection of learners is done through consultations with grade 9 teachers, and Nyathi was chosen in 2015 by his grade 9 Natural Sciences teacher, Regina Lebeya.

Learners' academic performance and interviews on environmental related topical issues are used as a criterion for selecting learners.

According to SAEON Ndlovu node Science Engagement Officer, Joe Sibiya, SAEON's popular Science Engagement Camps aim to expose prospective scientists to hands-on science activities as well as opportunities to interact

with scientists and researchers.



“This serves to strengthen their scientific skills and knowledge and gives them a more realistic perception of science-related careers.

“The career trajectories of participating learners are tracked and monitored even after they've matriculated,” emphasised Sibiya.

The symposium was hosted by Egagasini node in Cape Town, where Ntsako is said to have demonstrated in-depth understanding of scientific concepts for their study project.

His group researched about ‘The Relationship between vegetation and soil at Timbavati Protected Land and Timbavati Communal Land’. Ntsako says his three year journey with SAEON was nothing short of exciting, educational and enriching.

“The education tour to the Marine Research Vessel and Two Oceans Aquarium was the crown of my learning experience with SAEON and presenting at the symposium improved my presentation skills and boosted my confidence.” “Flying, let alone connecting flights in one day, was a far fetched dream considering my disadvantaged background, I am truly grateful to SAEON for affording me such an unforgettable and immense experience of a life time,” a teary Nyathi said. He also thanked his supportive parents, whom he says have been supportive from the onset.