

# Contracting and consulting engineering industry full of possibilities

The 3<sup>rd</sup> annual CESA/SAFCEC Conference recently held at Fancourt in the Eastern Cape was once again a resounding success attended by prominent decision makers in the contracting and consulting engineering industry.



Graham Pirie CEO of Consulting Engineers South Africa (CESA) and Henk Langenhoven CEO of South African Federation of Civil Engineering Contractors (SAFCEC) commented in a joint statement, "The success of the conference lay in both the calibre of the speakers as well as the attendees from both organisations".

Delegates were welcomed by Felix Fongoqa, President of CESA who commented that the conference was a wonderful opportunity for consultants and contractors to voice their opinions and share experiences as they are part of an industry that is 'full of possibilities'. The first speaker Xolela Mangcu a political analyst and newspaper columnist, gave the conference a fascinating and insightful presentation. In his presentation he gave his opinion on three issues, the first being whether changes in politics will translate into policy changes; secondly our political leadership; and thirdly whether we will see the formation of a new political party and what that might bring about.

### Macro economics

Jeff Gable, head of Research at ABSA Capital commented that we are currently in an 'interesting and fraught time' with banks both in Europe and the United States going bankrupt on the back of the US sub-prime crisis. He states that we are in for a

significant global economic slowdown. The impact of local interest rates rising five basis points in a short period together with the introduction of the National Credit Act and triggered by the Eskom crisis earlier this year has resulted in a rapid decline in business confidence. Although he predicts that 2009 will see interest rates falling, wages rising with more affordable housing leading to a recovery in the economy and an improvement in consumer sentiment towards the end of 2009. Although he warns that the electricity crisis is a problem forgotten, but not solved, and that a stable electricity supply is crucial for a growing economy.

### China's involvement in infrastructure in southern Africa

Dr Martyn Davies, CEO of Frontier Advisory, Executive Director of the Centre for Chinese Studies at Stellenbosch University and Director of the Asian Business Centre at the Gordon Institute of Business gave a fascinating presentation on the 'Africa and China coupling'. He presented the scenario that currently the Eastern economy is booming while the Western economy is collapsing with this year marking the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of China/SA ties. He states that it is imperative that we minimise the disconnect between Government and Business to better engage with the Chinese in order to operate as a co-ordinated single entity to better manage and control the process. He states that China views Africa as a key emerging market and that they are pursuing it primarily for energy security as China's long-term growth depends on securing an energy supply as well as commodity supply chains. China is currently South Africa's second largest trading partner after the USA.

### The value of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) in the workplace

An interesting presentation was given by Pero James of AECl about the 'Value of Occupational Health and Safety in the Workplace' in which he

stated that it was short sighted to ignore legislation as the risk involved is too costly. He also strongly believes that it is important that safety is part of the culture of an organisation and should not merely be seen as a programme. It's all about leadership and successful OHS starts at the top of an organisation.

### Sustainable construction and the role of the Green Building Council of South Africa

Bruce Kerswill, Chairman of the newly created Green Building Council of South Africa states in his presentation that the construction industry could provide the greatest saving in the least amount of time at the lowest cost as 40% of the world's energy is consumed by buildings. It can also be proved that green buildings increase productivity, lower operating costs resulting in higher profits thus 'future-proofing your building'. The Green Building Council of South Africa follows the Australian Green Star (SANS204) rating system that has been customised for South African conditions. Projects can be rated at either the design stage or on completion of construction. In addition to this the Council is offering a Green Star accredited professional course enabling the attendee to give advice to developers on how to achieve the level of rating required. Graham Pirie, CEO of CESA is also a Director on the Council and believes that green buildings are compelling from a moral as well as business case aimed at transforming markets globally.

After a motivational talk entitled 'Living Your Dream' presented by Tim Biggs, Glenville Cullum, President of SAFCEC closed the conference by thanking the speakers, participants, sponsors and exhibitors for their contribution to a very successful and thought-provoking conference.

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