

Teacher training centre planned for South Coast

FOR the past seven years Yunus Peer has returned to the South Coast with a group of volunteer teachers from the United States of America to assist local teachers.

Yunus is on a year-long sabbatical from Punahou School, Hawaii where he lectures in history and world religions. As his so-called 'night job', he directs Teachers Without Borders' (TWB) projects in South Africa and China.

He recruits experienced maths, science and technology teachers in the US to conduct skills and content development workshops for teachers primarily from rural schools in South Africa and China.

All TWB teams, including Yunus, are unpaid volunteers. Over the past seven years, more than 2 000 local teachers have attended these workshops held during the June-July holidays.

The Herald asked Yunus a few questions this week:

What is unique about TWBSA?

We are all volunteers, and the project is entirely 'grass-roots'. We work with local education departments in three provinces with teachers attending from four provinces (Gauteng, Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Free State). We have excellent cooperation from local departments since we are here to help their departments develop teachers, who are the keys to our country's successful future. TWB serves to further local goals and serve local needs. TWB has been following the National Curriculum Standards (NCS) since they were published. Workshops are designed for teachers who deal with a high number of pupils and with little or no science equipment. TWB teams consist of 'teachers', not 'experts' who have a sense of everyday issues and challenges facing all teachers. The project is funded by family and friends and communities in Hawaii, and South Africa; Rotary Clubs, small foundations, local businesses, and the TWB team pay for most of their own expenses. I am indebted to my employers, Punahou School and most of all, to my mother, Ameena Peer, who has supported our efforts in so many ways.

This project is also a continuation of my late father's legacy of improving educational opportunities for disadvantaged people.

The project has also spawned many smaller projects. Together with providing basic supplies, science and maths equipment to rural schools, TWBSA has set up seven computer labs. Six of the

Yunus Peer was born in Port Shepstone, the second child of Cassim and Ameena Peer. He was educated at Port Shepstone Indian Primary, Port Shepstone Secondary and from 1971 to 1973 he attended Waterford Kamhlaba School, in Swaziland. He went on to study at the University of Hawaii (BA – Psychology, BEd – Education, PD – Education), University of New Hampshire (Masters

After 27 consecutive years of teaching Yunus Peer is on a year-long sabbatical.

computer labs are at rural schools in three provinces and the seventh is at a correctional facility in Pretoria where teenagers are working their way through school while incarcerated. These labs are being used by 4 000 students. In 2007, TWBSA helped send a South African teacher and two pupils to a Global Youth Summit in Croatia. The trio has returned to inspire leadership and growth in their school and community.

During the 2008 winter holidays, TWBSA will host its biggest workshops yet. More than 400 teachers and administrators will attend maths, science and leadership workshops.

June 23 -26 : Vaal University of Technology.

July 1- 3 : Trinset, Mthatha.

July 7-10 : Port Shepstone High School. TWBSA will focus on the senior phase – grades 8 to 9.

What drives you?

A deep sense of social responsibility derived from the blessings I have in my life. I have role models in my parents who believed that to be a moral person, one must improve the lives of others who are less fortunate. We all have different ways of contributing in our own capacity, and by way of our own abilities. To those who have been given the gift of an education, it is incumbent on us to share it, or else of what good is it? I remember the occasion I received my Masters in Public Administration in New Hampshire some years ago. I was anticipating my dad's praises. Instead he said, "My boy, you can get all the degrees and acquire all the wealth you want for yourself, but at the end of the day, you will be judged not by what you accomplished for yourself, but by what you did for others".

What are your plans for the future?

I believe things will improve for the vast majority of our people who live in rural areas in South Africa and all of us have a role to play in that effort. My contribution continues to be in education. In a couple of years TWBSA will have been working with teachers in South Africa for a decade. Our plans are to open a unique TWB School on the South Coast by 2012. The school will be a Teacher

in Public Administration).

His teaching career started at Maryknoll High School, Honolulu, Hawaii from 1980 to 1985, teacher and administrator at Proctor Academy, Andover, New Hampshire from 1985 to 1997 and he has been at Punahou School, Honolulu, Hawaii from 1998. He is a director of Teachers Without Borders (TWB) South Africa, and TWB-China.

Training Institute as well as an Adult Literacy Centre offering ABET (adult basic education and training) classes. In time, we are looking to open an early childhood programme. The centre will be staffed by experienced foreign and local volunteer teachers, many of whom will be on sabbaticals from their schools and universities. We are currently negotiating with a company in Scottburgh for the land to be donated to the TWB School. As an administrator, I am a deliberate incrementalist. Having the land for the TWB School donated is the first step and a major incentive for our international sponsors to become involved.

By the end of this year, we hope to begin a two year capital campaign involving national and international sponsors to build and maintain the school. I believe the TWB School can serve as a role model in terms of its eco-friendly, low energy consumption design, and as a community-based institution which reaches out globally with its high-tech, high-touch, high-teach approach.

TWB currently serves teachers in 119 countries worldwide with its elearning platform (sponsored by Cisco Systems).

I see South Africa as a TWB hub and teaching resource clearing house for the African continent. Of course, this dream requires participation and partnerships with the government and private sector. The teacher crisis we face in this country needs continuing attention and I see TWB as part of a larger effort.

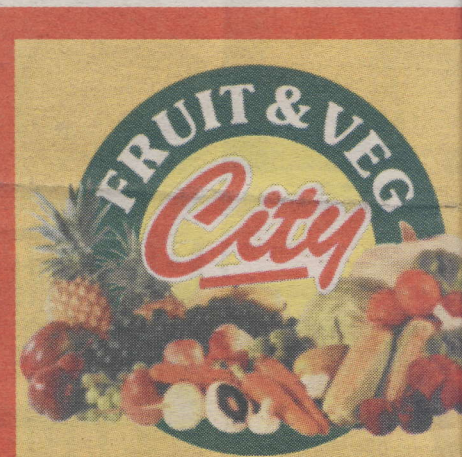
Does this mean you will be returning to South Africa permanently?

Yes, it does.

For more information on TWBSA :
<http://www.twbglobal.org>



Yunus Peer



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