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Project manager celebrates completion of 13 schools

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Professional project and construction management company Profica recently celebrated the completion of 13 secondary schools in Gauteng province.

The company has been appointed as the principal agent and project manager to oversee the overall construction of 16 secondary schools.

In 2006, consulting engineering group Stewart Scott International (SSI) and its black economic-empowerment partner, Mafuri Project Management Agents, won the R370-million turnkey tender from the Department of Education to build 16 schools, each with between 24 and 28 classrooms, to deal with the schools shortage issue in the province.

Profica was appointed to oversee the SSI Mafuri joint venture on behalf of the Gauteng Department of Education. The project's success has translated into over 12 000 learners being accommodated at the start of this year.

Each school comprises an administration block, a science laboratory, a needlework room, a library, a computer centre, four head of department offices and four ablution blocks. Other elements were added to enhance teaching and the environment of the facility to be in line with suburban counterparts.

These included fully landscaped courtyards with irrigation, a water harvesting system, both as a cost cutting measure and as a sustainability learning tool, water pressure boosting systems where necessary, and community vegetable gardens for community participation in the school system. There are two more schools scheduled for completion by July this year.

In line with the Expanded Public Works Programme principles, locally available emerging contractors with local labour were targeted for this contract. This resulted in skills development and increased the contractor's experience at a competitive level in the industry, while simultaneously reducing the impact of poverty through employment, the company reports.

"For us, this project was an achievement and it was a great feeling to be involved in the process of addressing the shortage of schools and making a difference in the community," says Profica MD **Tim White**.

"Project success in terms of project management is often achieved based on the completion of a project [within budget, on time and to the required quality standards]. Other constant factors such as suitably experienced contractors, skilled workers, the readiness of sites and stable environments also contribute to successful projects," says White.

However, he says, this roll-out project tested the entire team owing to factors like emerging contractors requiring practical training, sites not being ready on agreed dates and forced work stoppages by communities, which resulted in other critical success factors being incorporated into the project.

"In such situations, it requires that the project manager goes beyond appointment boundaries and takes possession of the project. This is what Profica did when brought on board for this project," says White.

He explains that Profica's project managers were faced with many challenges but, despite this, the project was a success in many aspects. "We were faced with many challenging circumstances, primarily related to the various school sites, such as the discovery of graves on some sites during the bulk earthworks exercise, some sites being underlain by dolomite rocks and the lack of bulk infrastructure to the sites initially."

White says that the project not only provides decent learning facilities, but also assists local emerging contractors to develop their skills to compete favourably in the industry, in addition to providing short-term employment to the surrounding communities. He adds that it was an enormous learning curve for the entire team but it is rewarding to see that all schools are in operation and filled to capacity.
