Apprentice Training in South Africa

Trade Association Contributes Labor for Children’s Home While Teaching On The Job Skills

As a boisterous, rowdy and dusty mining camp, Johannesburg of the late 1800s was a city of contrasts. Vagabonds and adventurers from all over the world descended on the Highveld plains like vultures, eager for the rich pickings of gold that lay beneath the ground.

Wealthy and respectable businessmen, too, made their way to Johannesburg and set up gracious homes in the invigorating and healthy climate of Parktown Ridge, Observatory, Braamfontein and Houghton.

But amid all the growth, fervour and freneticism of the growing mining community, there was tragedy too. For a scant six years after George Harrison accidentally discovered the gold-bearing lode, the Johannesburg Children’s Home was opened, offering refuge and protection to youngsters living in the hostile and wild environs of the mining camp.

While Johannesburg has remained the financial hub of Southern Africa, many of its children have been forgotten or cast away by the cynical and harsh community in which they are bred. Even today, in 1986, the abandoned “twilight children” live in densely populated suburbs of Hillbrow and Yeoville, seeking shelter in doorways or crusts of bread from charitable citizens.

Johannesburg — as this city of contrasts — does fortunately have its socially-conscious citizens who are keen to assist many of the underprivileged sectors of the community.

One such person is Eddy Magid, former mayor of the city. Several years ago, before taking mayoral office, Eddy and his wife Ann decided to make the Johannesburg Children’s
A completed cottage at the Johannesburg Children’s Home. The cottage will give abused kids a secure environment to grow up in.

Workers in the BIFSA training program are housed in comfortable dormitories convenient to the college.

Home “their” mayoral project for 1985 and after a meeting with the management committee of the home, set out to raise funds needed to build eight cottages on the grounds for children in its care.

Magid needed to raise R1.5 million to construct these cottages at an estimated cost of R180,000 each and as soon as he took office as Mayor of the city, set about seeking donations from the many wealthy businessmen and women in Johannesburg.

Pledging Their Support . . .

He asked many people to sponsor a cottage at a cost of R100,000 and gradually willing people pledged their support: Niven Cottage from Mr. and Mrs. David Niven; Macsteel Cottage donated by Eric Sampson and Leib Copans; Eddy and Ann Magid Cottage from the City Council; Barlow House from Derek Dyer; Americosa Cottage donated by the chairman’s funds of De Beers and Anglo American; Sela, the Barclay’s Cottage from Chris Ball; Liberty Life Cottage from Donny Gordon and Michael Rapp; and finally Trust Bank Cottage donated by Dr. Chris van Wyk.

Although considerable amounts of money had been pledged to the venture, Magid still didn’t have enough cash to put the building work out to tender. However, in an effort to raise more money, he discussed the matter

The BIFSA college also maintains a large “shop” for training purposes. From left to right are Bill Bell, John Addis (BIFSA), Dick Martin, Frank Morsilli, Joe Baker, Jimmie Crane, and Steve Watkins.

Workers receive classroom instruction before heading out to the job site. Most workers enter the program illiterate.
“Without the work undertaken by BIFSA and its trainees, the eight completed cottages would have remained artists’ impressions drawn on fine paper.”

A contingent of AWCI visitors inspect the BIFSA training college: (L-R) Bill Bell, Jimmie Crane, Joe Baker, Steve Watkins, and Dick Martin.

with Piet Badenhorst of the UBS and Badenhorst suggested that he should tap the employer organizations such as the Building Industries Federation for further assistance.

So Magid called Lou Davis of the Federation and suggested that they take tea together in the mayoral parlour. A date was arranged and after the customary and cordial greetings, Magid asked Davis for a donation to the project.

“If you’re asking for money, then forget it,” said Davis rather bluntly after Magid had outlined details of the project.

He recalls that he was shocked by Davis’ outright refusal and looked at him blankly. After a silence that lasted several seconds, Davis continued: “But if you supply the materials, we’ll build the cottages for you for nothing.”

Magid, naturally, was overjoyed.

Immediately Davis explained the Leerling Bouwplaatz principle of putting apprentices to work on a “real” building project so that they could benefit from building something that would last and yet still undergo on-the-job skills training.

And so the apprentices from Springs training college were put to work.

Within 18 months all eight cottages had been completed and Magid, now an Alderman having completed his year in office, was asked to officially open the new centre.

In his address to the many guests who attended this function, Magid paid special tribute to the people who had committed themselves to the project. He recalled that donations to the Johannesburg Children’s Home had come from many different sources: one woman, living in Ramsgate, had heard about the project and had sent an R5 postal order to the fund. As a pensioner, she said, she simply could not afford to give them any more towards the project.

Magid pointed out that without the cash, the cottages would have remained an elusive dream.
Moreover, he said, without the building work undertaken by the Federation and its trainees, the eight completed cottages would have remained artists' impressions drawn on fine paper.

Quoting from BIFSA's confirmatory letter to the Mayor's Office, Magid said that this work was being undertaken as "an expression of community co-operation and good-will."

That letter has been framed and will remain on permanent exhibition at the Children's Home.

And, a special plaque commemorating the assistance given by Lou Davis, John Addis and Basil Coombes has been erected at the site.

Note: Reprinted with permission from *South African Builder* August, 1986 by the Building Industries Federation of South Africa.

Formerly unemployable apprentice plasterers at work building BIFSA's new headquarters building outside Johannesburg.

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**AWCI-SABISA Convention Report**

Last August, a group of AWCI contractors and suppliers visited Sun City, Bophutatswana to participate in the first ever conference arranged by AWCI's sister association in South Africa, SABISA (South African Building and Interior Systems Association). The convention was a part of a 17 day visit to Southern Africa that included the BIFSA training college, Inter-Bou '86 (the largest construction exposition in the Southern Hemisphere), and several meetings of AWCI's Continuing Study Council in Botswana.

Sun City, consisting primarily of three resort properties owned by Sun International in the middle of the African bush, served as a superb site for the conference. It is similar to Las Vegas with its casino gambling and spectacular nightclub shows.

The three day conference was marked by several excellent educational sessions and social functions. A small table-top exposition was offered in the conference area of the headquarters hotel.

Following remarks by SABISA President Lee Lombard and AWCI President Jimmie U. Crane, the educational program began with Frank Mor-silli, President of Dryvit Systems, Inc., who lectured on the market success of exterior insulation finish systems, a product new to the South Africans in attendance. Following Frank Mor-silli, William Kroll, an acoustical engineer from Minneapolis led a short session on sound control. AWCI members Jimmie U. Crane and William A. Bell then led a discussion on in-house labor training in the US.

That afternoon, a panel of three successful AWCI contractor members (Steve Watkins, Carmen Paterniti and Dick Martin) led a very well-received session on loss control, which examined areas ranging from minimizing material waste and damage to preventing job-site theft.

Later that day, Sully Rammala, a