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Laerskool Kempton Park scoops top project award

GAUTENG, SOUTH AFRICA (27 February 2020): Laerskool Kempton Park (LKP), a full-service primary school in Kempton Park in Ekurhuleni, has just been awarded the Tanzanite Award in the 2019 GDE Service Excellence Awards - sub-category: Best Project - for their innovative INMED Aquaponics™ system and sensory garden.

Adoree Louw, Project Manager at the school says she is over the moon that the project has received this prestigious recognition. “Our school serves a community characterised by challenging socio-economic circumstances. Two years ago we realised we needed to find a better, more sustainable solution to feed our learners.” LKP is a full-service school incorporating learners with special educational needs into mainstream education. “Many of our learners rely on the school for their only hot nutritious meal of the day,” Louw adds. “Our learners simply did not have the funds for this and neither did the school qualify for Departmental funding for the feeding programme.”

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Ingenuity and out-of-the-box thinking were required. Louw says it was at that point they spoke to Air Products, which had already sponsored a small play area for LKP learners. “They introduced us to the INMED South Africa team, who showed us how aquaponics could work in the school environment,” says Louw. “The synergy was good for LKP, as the school was also keen to introduce aquaponics as a technical subject for learners expanding on adaptive agriculture.”

Aquaponics is an innovative food production technique that combines aquaculture (fish farming) with hydroponics (soilless crop production in water) in a closed symbiotic system. It produces at least 10 times more harvests year-round than traditional farming in the same space, uses 90% less water, requires no chemical fertilizers or pesticides and is attractive to youth who face staggering unemployment rates and have become disillusioned with farming. INMED has developed a simplified, modular system that can be tailored to any space constraints and adapted to the needs of individuals with disabilities.

“This outstanding project at Kempton Park is a prime example of how aquaponics can address the intertwined issues of food security, malnutrition, climate-change adaptation and skills development for sustainable incomes,” notes Dr. Linda Pfeiffer, founder and CEO of INMED Partnerships for Children, an international NGO that has pioneered the use of school-based aquaponics to improve the nutrition and food security of children in disadvantaged communities in South Africa for more than 10 years. “We are so grateful to Air Products, which has championed INMED Aquaponics in South Africa from the very beginning.”

Laerskool Kempton Park is the third school where INMED South Africa and Air Products have implemented aquaponics programmes. Launched in 2017, the LKP project includes teacher and cafeteria worker training, classroom education and technical assistance. The system at LKP is a custom size tailored to the school grounds consisting of three fish tanks and five grow beds. The grow beds were designed with special flooring to allow wheelchair-dependent students to easily participate in the planting and harvesting activities, as well as the care and feeding of the fish. A special addition to the project was the sensory garden—featuring a barefoot walking path of various textures, water and sound walls, fragrant fruit trees and vines, brightly coloured plants and garden toys. It has become a particularly effective teaching tool and therapeutic resource for students with disabilities. INMED South Africa was responsible for the construction and establishment of the infrastructure and Air Products provided much-needed capital.

Louw says over the last two years they have managed to produce vegetables all year, and the project is operated with the assistance of learners from the school. A new addition to the project is the introduction of catfish (barbel) into the system. The fish are currently being

harvested for the school's feeding scheme with excess donated to families in need. The school also is selling fish and vegetables to the local community.

"This is such a positive way to give the learners invaluable practical experience in the production of food, as well as how it can generate income and help the community. It is a truly win-win situation," says Louw. The full-service learners also benefit from activities involving the aquaponics system to explain curriculum outcomes on a practical level, while the sensory garden provides sensory stimulation for the sensory-deprived learners.

"We are so proud that the school has also got to a point where it can manage and run the programme independently, which is really our ultimate aim." Says Janet Ogilvie, Operations Manager for INMED South Africa. "We have introduced a system to grow food which is quick, energy efficient, environmentally friendly and chemical free. It has also planted the seeds in the minds of this community and these learners showing them how this same system can be adapted and replicated on a small scale at home."

Ends

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EDITORS NOTE

About INMED:

INMED Partnerships for Children is a nonprofit international development organization that has worked in more than 100 countries to build pathways for vulnerable children, families and communities to achieve well-being and self-reliance. Through multi-sector partnerships, INMED builds effective systems that deliver innovative and sustainable approaches to break complex cycles of poverty and generate opportunities for success. INMED's programmes in adaptive agriculture/aquaponics, maternal and child health and sustainable income generation have made a sustainable impact on the lives of millions of children and their families since 1986.

About INMED South Africa:

Since 2006, INMED South Africa has implemented a variety of aquaponics and adaptive agriculture projects for schools, farming cooperatives and public/private initiatives. INMED's success has been its ability to work in collaboration with a wide range of corporate, foundation and government partners to improve the health, lives and opportunities of tens of thousands of South Africa's most vulnerable children. INMED South Africa is incorporated under Section 21

and is a registered non-profit organization (NPC/PBO) recognized by the Department of Social Development.

About Air Products South Africa:

Air Products South Africa (Pty) Limited manufactures, supplies and distributes a diverse portfolio of atmospheric gases, specialty gases, performance materials, equipment and services to the Southern African region. Air Products touches the lives of consumers in positive ways every day, and serves customers across a wide range of industries from food and beverage, mining and petrochemicals, primary metal and steel manufacturers, chemical applications, welding and cutting applications to laboratory applications. Founded in 1969, Air Products South Africa has built a reputation for its innovative culture, operational excellence and commitment to safety, quality and the environment. In addition, the company aims to continue its growth and market leadership position in the Southern African region. For more information, please contact Lizette Stokes at stokesl@airproducts.co.za