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HISTORIC SCHOOL ON REVIVAL TRAIL

Naledi High Heritage School, the site of the vibrations of the momentous anti-Bantu Education student uprisings were first felt, turns 50 years on June 8 2013.

Victor Mecoamere

On this day, 8th June 1976, security police arrived at the school and attempted to arrest Enos Ngutshane, who was the leader of the local branch of the SA Students Movement after he had written a protest letter against the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction.

Angered by Bantu Administration and Education Minister MC Botha's gall of choosing to arrest their leader - instead of addressing their grievances - the pupils stoned the police officers and burned their car, a Volkswagen Beetle.

Exactly eight days later, Morris Isaacson High School pupil Tsietsi Mashinini and several other SASM leaders headed the peaceful protest that was to famously become the June 16 uprising, which is commemorated annually as Youth Day.

Naledi High's community contribute towards the activities, facilities and equipment that seek to help revive the institution's glory as an academic, cultural and sporting powerhouse.

"To this end, the children have beaten us to the post," said project publicist Eunice Rakhale Molefe, announcing that the pupil representative council had led the pupils in staging several fundraising events at the school and had met their target.

"We have already compiled a commemorative book that retells the real stories about the special place the school occupies in South Africa's socio-political history," she said.

Remarking about the significance of the book, titled Naledi High - 50 Years - Commemorative Dialogue, which was coincidentally authored by Rakhale Molefe, the school's principal, Kenneth Mavatulana, has said, in part:

"If our children can learn the best from who we are, then we can secure ourselves the best future."

Rakhale Molefe confirmed that - at an advocacy function held in Booysens, Johannesburg, in March, one of the school's best recognised alumni, Zanele Mthembu - who is the Gauteng department of education's chief director - had challenged the pupils, parents, teachers, Mavatulana and her fellow alumni to set an example of self-reliance by contributing towards the funding required for the school's ambitious revival campaign - before seeking sponsorship.

The other popular Naledi High School alumni include former presidency director-general Frank Chikane, former North West premier Popo Molefe, diplomat Dan Mofokeng, human relations guru Wire Khoali, former SABC acting chief operations officer Mike Siluma.

Some of the items on the envisaged revival's "register of needs" are a museum, a monument whose dominant feature would be the Volkswagen Beetle that was torched on June 8 1976; an assembly area, a health and nutrition centre, school hall, community vegetable garden, and a sports complex.

Naledi High School is also one of Soweto's Heritage Schools, referring to schools forming the route that retraces the fateful events of June 16 1976 and the social, economic, political, cultural and sporting bedrock of the era.

The other Heritage Schools are Morris Isaacson High, Meadowlands High, Orlando West High, Orlando High and Musi High School in Pimville - all of them in Soweto. - victorm@sowetan.co.za
Sowetan May 27 2013