

Syngenta-sponsored Digital Doorway installed on the Western Highveld

A Digital Doorway sponsored by Syngenta South Africa (Pty) Limited and hosted by John and Jenny Mathews at Mooifontein Central Primary Agricultural Co-op in Mpumalanga, was installed on 29 October 2008.

The initiative is the outcome of a public-private partnership between Syngenta South Africa (Pty) Limited, John Mathews Milling, the Department of Science and Technology (which funds the Digital Doorway initiative) and the Meraka Institute of the CSIR (which manages the Digital Doorway project). The goal is to create a digital platform to provide a virtual information resource and to raise the image of the agricultural sector to both the government and South African citizen. To date, Syngenta has sponsored five single seater DDs.



Sannie Mokwena learning how to 'drive' the new computer. Mokwena works at John Mathews Milling and is available to guide new users where mother tongue help is needed - and when time allows!

The Digital Doorway has brought with it the promise of acquiring computer and information literacy. Jenny Mathews comments, "We are very excited about the possibilities and hope to see many people using the unit in time to come," she confirms. "As a teacher, I am very excited by the experience offered through this Digital Doorway and I believe there is enormous potential for individuals of all ages to develop at their own pace according to their levels of education and interest."

She explains that the Digital Doorway is installed at the Central Primary Agricultural Co-op in the heart of the community at Mooifontein Village. "There is much activity here, bringing new life to what was once a buzzing centre of the district."

Mathews provides more details about potential beneficiaries of the Digital Doorway, "The R A Kobue High School is about 1 km away. The headmaster visited the site and is eager to spend time getting to know his way around the system. He will then bring his learners in small groups to experience the Digital Doorway in the new year. We have also shown some other teachers in the district the system and they are all excited to expose their learners to the computer and the programmes!"

A busy little trading store has started next door to the milling business run by John and Jenny Mathews, which means a steady increase in the number of people who are finding out about the Digital Doorway. "A few members of the community have trickled in on their own and I hope this is going to increase as they realise this is a free opportunity for all!" she confirms.

The location of the Western Highveld Digital Doorway is in the heart of a number of small villages. Apart from Mooifontein, Lombaardslaagte, Enselsrust, Brooksby, Uitkyk and Deelpan, the villages are all close-by with easy bus access to the co-op where the milling business is conducted. Mathews explains how this collocation has ensured a 'captive audience' for the Digital Doorway. "The mill is a gristing business that receives grain grown locally by the farmers and mills it to give them their own home-grown maize meal. We have very steady traffic from the local communities. The Digital Doorway is housed in the room from which the weigh bridge is operated."

Mathews hopes to put up sign boards announcing the project more 'loudly' as well as telling the community that this was a generous donation from Syngenta. "And I have hopes to make it a bit of a library/reading room in the new year."

The installation was undertaken by Louis Bapela of Ingwapela, a local SMME contracted by the Meraka Institute.