

## **Robotics labs equip a next generation with future-fit education**

As NASA retires *Ingenuity*, the little robot helicopter that completed 72 flights on Mars, a next generation of Grade 8 and 9 South African learners is beginning its robotics journey.

A R1,6 million investment in robotics infrastructure, equipment, course work and teaching is speeding their mission, with the Shoprite Foundation facilitating two fully equipped robotics laboratories at Mountview and Verulam High Schools in Kwa-Zulu Natal.

The initiative is the first phase of technology support for various schools around the country.

Speaking at the opening of the Mountview Robotics Laboratory, Maude Modise, the managing trustee of the Shoprite Foundation, explained the two schools were selected to launch the robotics initiative as the Department of Education is piloting coding and robotics as a subject.

“The groundwork was in place and importantly there was interest and enthusiasm, so we saw an opportunity to help by providing training and equipment and adapting the existing computer rooms into fully functional robotics laboratories.”

To deliver the laboratories, the Shoprite Foundation commissioned SIFISO Edtech, a South African company, which specialises in delivering turnkey robotics hubs, providing everything from infrastructure, robotics kits, teaching material and training.

The kits come with over 10 models each and include everything the learners and teachers need, from microcontrollers and actuators to gyroscopes. They are modular, allowing learners to create their own builds. Face-to-face and online training for teachers and lesson plans, presentations and worksheets are also provided. As well as funding the laboratory set up, kits and teaching aids, the Shoprite Foundation donated laptop computers and tablets.

“AI is already part of our everyday lives. At the Shoprite Group, we’re using AI to get the freshest products on the shelves and reduce food waste. By investing in future-fit education we aim to ensure that these learners leave school able to participate and contribute in a modern economy,” explains Modise.

While robotics may currently be the cutting edge of maths and science education, she says that the Group’s efforts to unlock educational opportunities and encourage entrepreneurship among young South Africans extend substantially beyond this.

At Mountview, it has also provided a bespoke consumer-studies laboratory – funded by the Shoprite Foundation, to encourage entrepreneurial endeavour amongst learners. This facility was formally opened at the same event as the robotics laboratory, with a former learner telling guests how consumer studies had led him to start his own catering company.

As part of its annual *Class Of* initiative the Group supports one learner in each province to the value of R100 000 in school fees, benefiting both the individual and the school they attend.

This is in addition to its [bursary programme](#) for students studying accounting, criminology, IT, logistics and supply chain and retail business management, allowing them to complete their studies as well as receiving placement to gain work experience.

“Enabling people to achieve their potential is a powerful thing. It’s not beyond the realms of possibility that someday soon there could be a South African-designed rover on Mars.”

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