

University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well

University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well

Campus News Archive

Campus News, Newsletters, and Events

1-28-2009

"The Journey to South Africa" to air in February

University Relations

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/urel_news

Recommended Citation

University Relations, ""The Journey to South Africa" to air in February" (2009). *Campus News Archive*. 1238.

https://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/urel_news/1238

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Campus News, Newsletters, and Events at University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well. It has been accepted for inclusion in Campus News Archive by an authorized administrator of University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well. For more information, please contact skulann@morris.umn.edu.

Contact

Melissa Weber, Director of Communications
Phone: 320-589-6414, weberm@morris.umn.edu

Jenna Ray, Editor/Writer
Phone: 320-589-6068, jrray@morris.umn.edu

"The Journey to South Africa" to air in February

Summary: "The Journey to South Africa," featuring the work of UMM's Chris Butler and Pioneer Public Television's Tim Bakken, will be re-broadcast at 7 p.m. February 8 and at 3 p.m. February 15 on Pioneer Public Television.

(January 28, 2009)-by Tom Larson, *Morris Sun Tribune* -- A South African pastor visiting Minnesota met with some local farmers and asked if they would come to his country and help develop its agricultural system.

South African women work unproductive soil mostly by hand. The work is often left to older women and young children since AIDS has devastated the population of younger adult men and women in the country.

South African women work unproductive soil mostly by hand. The work is often left to older women and young children since AIDS has devastated the population of younger adult men and women in the country.

The state is well-known for its skilled and progressive ag practices, and the pastor's plea intrigued them. Several decided to go.

"He asked if they would come to South Africa so they could see first hand," said Tim Bakken, a public television production director from Appleton who chronicled the group's trip. "I don't think a lot of them knew what they were getting into. I think they thought they'd go to South Africa, show them how it's done and go home – it doesn't work that way. It doesn't happen overnight."

The group's trip is the basis for "The Journey to South Africa," a one-hour documentary written and filmed by Bakken and University of Minnesota, Morris English professor Chris Butler.

"The Journey to South Africa" will premier on Pioneer Public Television at 8 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 31. The program will be re-broadcast at 7 p.m., Feb. 8, and 3 p.m., Feb. 15.

Agriculture is just one aspect of life on the African continent that captured the attention of the visitors from Minnesota. Everything aside from the "Minnesota Nice" attitudes of the South Africans ran anathema to the Midwestern mindset.

"It's just a completely different world," Bakken said. "They don't have anything. As Americans, we think we have problems until you see how these people live. I talked to (members of the traveling group) once they got home, and almost all of them said there were so many things they didn't worry about anymore – it just doesn't matter."

Bakken is Pioneer Public TV's Production Director and Web Designer. He caught wind of the group's plans to visit South African soon after South African pastor Behki Mathe visited the state.

Mathe has connections with Southwestern Minnesota Synod pastors Linda Pedersen and Rebecca Sullivan, who met Mathe during a visit to South Africa in 2007. On his return visit, Mathe met with the farmers, artists and other synod

members and asked for help. About 25 people made the commitment, Bakken said.

“After ’94 and the end of apartheid, blacks got land back but they had no clue how to do this,” Bakken said. “They’ve got this land but no equipment, no education and no initiative because they’ve always been told what to do. The white guys told them what to do, what to plant, where to plant. So now they’ve got this land, no money and no idea what to do with it.”

And the land isn’t the rich farmland Minnesotans are used to. Bakken and the group traveled seven hours out of Johannesburg to the Kwazulu-Natal Province to what he called a rocky and rugged “God-forsaken land.”

One group traveled to an area to study the province’s arts and crafts, while other groups split off to the province’s equivalent of synod districts to get a feel for the land. They talked to South Africans, who showed them the gardens they were trying to cultivate for food.

“They physically wanted to show them: This is what we’ve got. What can we do with it,” Bakken said.

The Minnesota group was stunned. The South Africans had no money to buy fertilizer and, for the most part, the technological advances didn’t extend much beyond hoes.

“They might know a neighbor who maybe has a tractor and a two-bottom plow,” Bakken said. “The rest was hand labor.”

The South Africans had little access to water – “You didn’t even see a garden hose anywhere,” he said. Any irrigation came from fetid water towers or was carried in from some distance away.

Their efforts also were hampered by a lack of consistent power generation. It wasn’t uncommon for people to live with rolling blackouts, having their power go out, without warning, for six hours at a time, Bakken said.

“All the simple, little things we take for granted, they don’t have it,” he said.

AIDS also has decimated many communities, robbing them of able-bodied males to work the land, he said.

“From age 30 to 50, you hardly saw anybody,” Bakken said. “It was grandmothers and children. Grandmas raised the kids because their parents were dead.”

Despite the hardships, the South Africans did produce an abundance of chicken and had rice and vegetables as their diet staples. So much so that the Minnesota contingent warned relatives as they prepared to leave that poultry wouldn’t be one of their menu choices upon their return.

“A guy from Olivia told me that he talked to his wife and he told her, ‘Don’t buy chicken until I tell you to,’ ” Bakken said.

Passport problems kept Butler from joining the Minnesota group on their January 2008 visit, but he did get to the area last summer to film and visit a chicken incubation operation. Butler’s delayed travels gave “The Journey to South Africa” some perspective on what happened after the Minnesotans left.

“It ended up being kind of a great mistake,” Butler said. “It was a chance to go six months later and see what the group accomplished in real terms.”

Butler visited areas to film the projects the Minnesota group helped initiate and he interviewed the South Africans working on them.

“We were able to add their voices to the documentary,” Butler said. “It gave the documentary the context that it

needed.”

The chicken incubation project is an important one for the area. AIDS drugs are available, but the patients need a balanced diet for them to be effective, Butler said, and many didn't have enough protein in their diets.

Another project, a garden demonstration project, hopefully will produce staple crops in a central location that will make it accessible for those seeking ag education.

“They grow the staple crops we all eat,” he said. “The difficulty is the South Africans learning to farm in a commercial manner.”

Producing the finished documentary took time, and Bakken and Butler showed it during a gathering last week that included many of the people who made the trip. During the evening, Bakken talked about the trip, the hardships the group witnessed and the desperate situation that faced the people trying to make a living off the hard-scrabble land of Kwazulu-Natal Province. Then, he asked if any of them wanted to go back.

“I asked for a show of hands,” Bakken said. “I asked how many of them would like to go back some day. All the hands went up. They all want to go back.”

Photo of tribal dress courtesy of the Morris Sun Tribune.

Through personal and academic discovery, the University of Minnesota, Morris provides opportunities for students to grow intellectually, engage in community, experience environmental stewardship and celebrate diversity. A renewable and sustainable educational experience, Morris prepares graduates for careers, for advanced degrees, for lifelong learning, for work world flexibility in the future, and for global citizenship. Learn more about Morris at morris.umn.edu or call 888-866-3382.