

**THOKOZANI NDHLOVU**

**S**IMPHIWE GIVEN HLOPHE, a student from the Sibanesetfu Campus of Gert Sibande TVET

College in Mpumalanga, has achieved the extraordinary academic feat of obtaining 20 distinctions out of a possible 21 in the National Certificate (Vocational) programme, Electrical Engineering.

This is a new record for Gert Sibande TVET College and possibly the whole country. Simphiwe obtained 7 distinctions in his first year, 7 distinctions in his second year and 6 distinctions and a B in his final year.

His average percentage per subject over three years stands at a remarkable 87%. In his second year he obtained 100% for Mathematics, which was another record for the college.

Expanding the footprint of Gert Sibande TVET College to the rural areas of the province has been a strategic priority for the college. Sibanesetfu Campus was opened in 2005 with a few classrooms and 22 students.

Today, with the support of all three tiers of Government, the campus has close to 1100 NCV and 500 Report 191 students, with a staff complement of 95.

Infrastructure development was prioritised and the campus now boasts state-of-the-art facilities.

The performance of students at Sibanesetfu Campus has always been very good.

However, this latest achievement by Simphiwe is the greatest achievement to date.

Simphiwe is 25 years old and was raised by a single parent. He is one of four children. He completed his matric in 2009.

His dream was to study Chemical Engineering at University after matric, but due to financial problems and his poor matric results, he could not further his studies.

As a result, he was forced to seek employment so that he could provide for his mother, who is wheelchair bound, and his siblings.

# STAR PERFORMER:

## Student sets a new record with 20 distinctions



'Incredible academic achievement': Student Simphiwe Given Hlophe (left) and Nick Balkrishen, Principal of Gert Sibande TVET College.

"I sometimes went to bed on an empty stomach and at some point I went for many days without food," said Simphiwe.

While working at a local butchery, he realised that if he wanted to improve his career prospects he needed to further his

studies. In January 2013, he enrolled for Electrical Infrastructure Construction at the Sibanesetfu Campus of Gert Sibande TVET College.

This opportunity was made possible by the Department of

Higher Education and Training (DHET) bursary that he received. It covered his class fees and accommodation.

"I surprised myself with my results because I did not expect to get so many distinctions," he said with a smile.

His family background and adverse situation motivated him to persevere — even though at times he felt like giving up.

"I wanted to better my family's situation and that was the only thing that kept me going. It is said that before dawn it gets darker," he said.

Simphiwe's secret to academic excellence is "do what you love and enjoy".

His future plans include studying further and to own and manage his own company that will specialise in electronics.

When discussing his achievement with the College Principal, Nick Balkrishen, Simphiwe remained humble.

He thanked the college for opening up a campus in such a remote, rural area.

He indicated that his success was linked to the tremendous support that students at Gert Sibande TVET College receive and especially the emphasis the college places on student academic performance.

He also expressed his gratitude to the Government for creating opportunities for rural students from financially poor homes.

"I would not have been able to achieve these results without the DHET bursary and the amazing support that I received from the college, especially my lecturers," he said.

Principal Balkrishen said: "On behalf of Sibanesetfu Campus students, staff and management, it is a privilege and pleasure to congratulate Simphiwe, who is one of our best performing students for such an incredible academic achievement.

Having secured 20 distinctions out of 21 subjects is a new record for the college.

"This will go a long way to instilling a sense of confidence in our students to believe in themselves.

"It will inspire them to work against the odds, such as financially poor backgrounds, lack of family support systems, and other socio-economic conditions."

*Mr T Ndhlovu is a Communication Officer at Gert Sibande TVET College*

**"I wanted to better my family's situation and that was the only thing that kept me going. It is said that before dawn it gets darker," said Simphiwe of his huge success.**

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