

News

The 5th South African Young Geotechnical Engineers Conference

The 5th Young Geotechnical Engineers Conference (YGEC) to take place in South Africa was hosted at the Camelot Conference Centre in Hillcrest, Durban from 20 to 22 August 2008. The conference continues a proud tradition of Young Geotechnical Engineers Conferences organised every three or four years by the Geotechnical Division of the South African Institution of Civil Engineers. The conference was the seventh YGEC ever to take place on the African continent and was preceded by the Second African Young Geotechnical Engineers Conference which took place in Tunisia in 2007.

The YGE conferences in South Africa follow the model of the British conferences, the first of which was hosted at City University, London, in 1982 which was initiated and organised by Prof John Atkinson. The aim is to provide a less formal environment for young and first-time authors to publish and present technical papers in a conference environment. The conferences are open to engineers and engineering geologists of 35 years and younger at the time of submitting their abstracts.

South Africa is currently preparing to host of the 2010 Soccer World Cup Final which led to the theme of the conference being “2010 and Beyond”. With undoubtedly the largest ever number of mega-projects currently under construction in South African history, the current boom in the civil engineering and construction industries contributed to the high standard of the papers received. All papers were peer reviewed by young engineers serving on the organising committee and returned to the authors for corrections (if required) before publication in the conference proceedings. Papers were limited to the length of 10 A4 pages printed double spaced. The South African Civil Engineering and Construction Industries contributed generous sponsorship to subsidise the conference registration cost. The platinum sponsor was ESOR (Pty) Ltd, a leading South African Geotechnical Engineering construction company. The gold sponsors were Steffanuti & Bressan (Pty) Ltd and Sanyati Piling (Pty) Ltd. Several generous sponsorships were also received from International companies currently active in South Africa, e.g. Bauer, Naue and others.

In the tradition of the British conferences, a “godfather” figure, i.e. an imminent senior geotechnical engineer, was invited to preside over the conference in terms of presenting an opening and closing address and to give feedback to presenters in terms of the quality of presentations and aspects related thereto. The “godfather” for this conference was Mr Bernie Krone, Managing Director of ESOR (Pty) Ltd. With his informal and practical engineering approach, Bernie made an enormous contribution to the success of the conference. The conference was hosted at the Camelot Conference Centre in Hillcrest Durban. The Camelot Centre is located on a golf estate situated between rolling hills and is constructed around the theme and in the style of King Arthur’s castle. With all the houses on the estate constructed in Tudor style between large shady trees, the venue resembles England of old.

The formal proceedings of the conference comprised a total of 9 technical sessions, all chaired by Young Engineers. Each presenter had 15 minutes in which to deliver his/her presentation, followed by 5 minutes for questions. The high standard papers and presentation attracted many questions and lively discussion. The conference dinner comprised a medieval banquet in Camelot Castle and was undoubtedly one of the highlights of the conference. Bernie Krone presided as a very convincing and unforbearing king, with chairman of organising committee, Michelle Theron, as his lovely queen at his side. Every lord and lady attending the banquet was attired in a medieval costume and was issued with a bib to keep it in pristine condition! (Apparently the fork had not yet been invented at the time of Camelot and guests had to eat with knives and their hands!) The feast was hosted by the baron of the castle who explained the rules and etiquette, all of which were strictly enforced! He also led many a merry song in which every lord and lady merrily joined in. Rows of servants carrying all sorts of delectable dishes constantly entered the dining hall under trumpet fanfare. Several lord and ladies, including his grace, the lord Bishop, were caught out not adhering to every rule and whim of his majesty, King Bernie, and had to do complicated medieval dances as punishment to the satisfaction of the king! One of the highlights of the conference was the site visit to the impressive Moses Mabida stadium currently under construction in Durban for the 2010 Soccer World Cup competition. The stadium will have a seating capacity of nearly 90 000. The most prominent feature of this stadium is undoubtedly the arch spanning the entire length of the stadium, i.e. approximately 380m. The arch is supported by a single foundation abutment in the north and splits into two above the stadium, thus requiring two foundation abutments in the south. The horizontal thrust exerted onto the northern foundation is an impressive 100 000kN which posed significant challenges to the geotechnical engineers.

It has become tradition that the author of the best paper and the presenter of the best presentation, as judged by the organising committee, are sponsored by the Geotechnical Division of the South African Institution of Civil Engineers to attend the next International Young Geotechnical Engineers Conference. The next such conference will take place in parallel with the 2009 ISSMGE International Conferences to be hosted in Alexandria, Egypt. The winner for best paper was Richard Puchner of Jones & Wagener Consulting Engineers and the winner for best presentation was Trevor Green of Verdicon Consulting. Runners up were Jacobus Breyll of Jones & Wagener and Shelley Hoeben from Geosure. The conference was a great success and many attendees enquired why it is only presented every three years! We are already very much looking forward to the next Young Geotechnical Engineers Conference.

Reported by Dr SW Jacobsz Pr Eng, Chairman of SAICE Geotechnical Division