

Andrew Muir Honored with 2008 Rolex Award for Umzi Wethu

18 November 2008

The Rolex Awards honor those who “demonstrate a spirit of enterprise and address pressing needs around the world.” The Wilderness Network has long supported and produced the Umzi Wethu project because it addresses one of the most pressing needs of our time - AID/HIV – with a unique and successful model integrating job training, mentoring and the healing power of wilderness.



On 18 November in Dubai, Andrew Muir (Executive Director, Wilderness Foundation Africa and leader of the collaborative Umzi Wethu program) was honored for his innovative vision and outstanding leadership in harnessing the healing power of nature in the multi-faceted Umzi Wethu program. In addition to the great honor of receiving this award, and the international attention generated for the program, a significant monetary award (USD100,000) was presented to allow for expansion of the program.

“The healing capacity of nature is tremendous and unparalleled,” explains Muir. “The wilderness can sustain the human psyche and is a wonderful tool to facilitate social change. We know that, given the right opportunities and the right help, today’s highly vulnerable youths can be developed into the leaders of tomorrow. Umzi Wethu aims to produce graduates whose achievements and influence will extend well beyond their year at the academy.”

Umzi Wethu [“our home” in Xhosa] will now be able to expand its reach – empowering youth from families broken by HIV/AIDS, providing practical work experience, counseling services and wilderness trail experiences. Now with two academies, one in Port Elizabeth and one in Somerset West, the program has an 85% job-placement rate for graduates. Expansion of the program means more youth are able to participate in this life-changing program, more hope is given to situations that appear hopeless, and the conservation sector has more, well-trained and qualified workers to carry on the legacy of the spirit of wilderness.

Nine others were also honored with a 2008 Rolex Award. Joining Andrew as a Rolex Laureate are: Talal Akasheh (Jordan); Tim Bauer (USA); Andrew McGonigle (UK); Elsa Zaldivar (Paraguay). Associate Laureates are: Alexis Belonio (Phillippines); Arturo González (Mexico); Rodrigo Medellín (Mexico); Moji Riba (India); Romulus Whitaker (India).



For more information on Umzi Wethu: www.wild.org/fp/South_Africa/UMZI.htm

More about Andrew Muir and the Wilderness Foundation, Africa: www.wildernessfoundation.org.za

For more information on the Rolex Awards: rolexawards.com