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Larry Cramer reflects on the key role of education and learning

Larry Arthur Cramer

I believe the Institute has an important part to play assisting young students to complete their studies and become productive members of the industry.

I had the honour of being President of the Institute from August 2000 until July 2001. It is a year that I often remember quite fondly. When I reflect upon the Institute and its mission as well as the challenges facing South Africa now and in the coming years, I keep coming back to the important role of education and learning. Indeed, the thread that runs through the many SAIMM key functions is one of educating the professional in the mining and metallurgical industries of South Africa. The networking that one achieves through participating in the many activities of the SAIMM contributes to the sharing of talents, experience and ideas; after all, if you don't know the answer or how to approach a problem then perhaps you know someone who does. The many conferences, symposia, and technical papers presented and organized by the SAIMM Council make a huge contribution to the database of knowledge available to those active in the industry; there is a wealth of knowledge in past SAIMM Journals and the papers presented at SAIMM technical conferences. Many a new idea has grown into a commercial success from the small seeds shared at such SAIMM-organized events. In addition, the revenue raised by the SAIMM through technical conferences continues to fund the bulk of its activities and as such these are critical to it and its core function of educating the professionals in the industry.

The mining and metallurgical industry has contributed greatly to the wealth of Southern Africa and to the living standards of its people. It has provided incomes for hundreds of thousands of men and women for more than 100 years. The capital created from these industries has been reinvested in manufacturing and many others areas of the economy. Through the taxes the industry has paid there have been many schools, clinics, universities, and hospitals built to serve the population. Unfortunately, the commodities business is often cyclical, which leads to difficult lean years and only occasionally to very profitable years. This is difficult to manage but long-term success lies in good capital management and technical innovation to drive down production costs. This needed technical innovation only comes from well-educated professionals in the minerals field. Thus, a great deal of

the success of the industry relies upon the education, experience, and professionalism of its technical people; the SAIMM is intimately involved in producing such people and thus has a significant role to play in the success of South and Southern Africa.

I believe that an important part of that role is to assist young students to complete their studies and hence become productive members of the industry. To that I end I was pleased to be able to establish the SAIMM Scholarship Trust Fund during my term as President. The fund is a registered non-profit trust that enables the various university and technikon professors to provide key funding for students who need assistance in the years when it is difficult to obtain company bursaries. The funds remit is to focus on bridging the gap that many good students experience between their private funding and landing a bursary in their 3rd or 4th years. I still believe that this is a worthwhile cause and contributes to the success of many students that would otherwise be forced to drop out and seek less meaningful work. In the past 14 years of operation, the Fund has disbursed some R4.07 million to worthy students; this is not insignificant but there is the need for much more funding each year.

Sadly, the bulk of this funding over the years has come from the operating budget of the SAIMM. I am thankful for the Council's support in this worthwhile endeavour. I am, however, rather disappointed in the support received from professionals in the industry and individual members of the SAIMM. We could more than double our annual distributions to students in need if each member of the SAIMM was to give only R200 per year to the Fund. Given that this contribution is also tax deductible, that is surely not too much to ask of the Institute's members.

When one considers the importance of education and the minerals industry to the success of Southern Africa, I believe every member should be motivated to do their part and support the SAIMM Scholarship Fund every year. Our members are successful and employed in well-paid jobs in the industry; they should be helping the next generation of students to become contributing members of society as well. *