

Oprah's dream school opens

Media personality Oprah Winfrey opened her Leadership Academy for Girls - South Africa near Johannesburg on Tuesday, 2 January 2007 in the presence of former President Nelson Mandela, local dignitaries and international stars.



The Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls, which is located in Henley-on-Klip in Gauteng, is a private learning and residential environment for grades 7-12 that engenders high standards of academic achievement and service leadership for girls who show outstanding promise despite their social circumstances.

Vision



As part of the opening welcoming events, Oprah Winfrey raised the Leadership Academy's flag along with the first 152 learners—from grades 7 and 8, who represent all nine South African provinces—followed by a ceremonial program in the campus' theatre. It is her vision that the Leadership Academy will help develop the future women leaders of South Africa.

"I know that this Academy will change the trajectory of these girls' lives," said Winfrey.

"They will excel and pass their excellence on to their families, their nation, and our world."

Flying in from Maputo for the day, Mandela was full of praise for Winfrey: "This school will provide opportunities to some of our young people they could never imagine, had it not been for Oprah. The key to any country's future is in educating its youth. Oprah is therefore not only investing in a few young individuals but in the future of our country. We are indebted to her for her selfless efforts. This is a lady that has, despite her own disadvantaged background, become one of the benefactors of the disadvantaged throughout the world and we should congratulate her for that."

International stars such as Tina Turner, Mariah Carey, Sidney Poitier, Chris Tucker, Spike Lee and other high powered friends of the talk show media mogul were also present in South Africa to watch Winfrey's dream materialise this new year.

Breaking ground



In December 2000, during a visit with Nelson Mandela, Oprah Winfrey pledged US\$10 million to build a school for girls in South Africa, for which she broke ground on 6 December 2002. As that commitment broadened, she established The Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy Foundation, to which she has contributed more than US\$40 million toward the creation of the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls - South Africa. Initially a public-private partnership with the Gauteng Department of Education, the Leadership

Academy was signed over to become an independent school on 20 August 2006.

Among its 28-building campus, the Leadership Academy includes state-of-the-art classrooms, computer and science laboratories, a library, a theatre, a gymnasium, sports fields, a wellness centre, modern dormitory facilities and a dining hall. The curriculum will include math, natural science and technology; arts and culture; social, economic and management sciences; life orientation and leadership; and languages. All of the teachers are South African.