

# CUT ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

17<sup>TH</sup> EDITION





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# Foreword



Dear CUT Alum

It is always a privilege to pause and reflect on the remarkable journey we share as a community. The heart of our university lies not only in our achievements but in the people who bring passion, curiosity, and resilience to everything they do. Every story, every conversation, every small act of dedication contributes to a tapestry far greater than any one accomplishment.

This edition is a celebration of that spirit. Within these pages, you will encounter voices, journeys, and experiences that inspire, challenge, and remind us of the resilience, creativity, and humanity at the heart of our community. It is a collection that reflects the courage, determination, and generosity that define those who are part of the CUT alumni family.

As you turn these pages, I hope you feel a sense of pride, connection, and possibility. Our community is a living testament to the fact that progress, innovation, and compassion are inseparable. Every small action ripples outward, shaping a future that is brighter because of the dedication and humanity we bring to it.

As the festive season approaches, I know this time can bring both joy and reflection. For some, it is a moment to celebrate with loved ones; for others, it can be a time when absence is deeply felt. Whatever this season holds for you, I hope it brings moments of peace, comfort, and connection - whether with family, friends, or through quiet reflection. May you feel supported and remembered as we move together into a New Year filled with hope and possibility.

Wishing you and your loved ones a safe, gentle, and restorative festive season.

Warm regards

Qondakele Sompondo  
Director: Institutional Advancement

# Editorial note



Dear Alum

As we turn the final pages of 2025, this closing edition invites you to pause, reflect and celebrate a year defined by resilience, discovery, and growth. Each story within these pages carries a heartbeat, the pulse of a community that continues to inspire through innovation, compassion, and determination.

This latest edition brings together narratives that remind us why the Central University of Technology, Free State remains a space of transformation. We meet individuals whose research turns the ordinary into the extraordinary, professionals who lead with purpose in healthcare and education, and athletes whose passion extends beyond the field into the spirit of community. We also look back on moments that brought our university together, gatherings that celebrated collaboration, achievement, and the collective strength that propels us forward.

In this edition, we highlight the remarkable journeys of alumni who have turned challenges into opportunities and dreams into reality. From scientific breakthroughs inspired by everyday materials to personal stories of perseverance and purpose, each feature reflects the determination and excellence that define the CUT spirit.

We also celebrate moments that brought our community together, from the energy of the CUT Alumni Half Marathon to the success of the Annual Fundraising Gala and Internal Stakeholder Engagement.

These events showcase how collaboration and commitment continue to shape a future of shared progress and meaningful change.

What stands out most in these stories is not only the success of our people but the courage behind each step they took to get there. Whether it's the quiet persistence of someone chasing a dream, or the bold innovation that turns a challenge into opportunity, these journeys remind us that progress is built one determined moment at a time.

As we close the year and look ahead, may this edition serve as a gentle reminder that every ending makes way for a new beginning.

With that being said, may you and your loved ones experience a joyous and peace-filled festive season. Be safe.

Warm regards

Jacqueline Pietersen  
Deputy Director: Alumni Affairs



# Dr Gloria Izu from village wisdom to global innovation

When most people look at avocado and litchi peels, they see waste, but for Dr Gloria Otito Izu, those discarded skins became the foundation for a groundbreaking scientific discovery - one that bridges traditional knowledge and modern biomedical research. Her story is not only about innovation but about identity and a lifelong commitment to healing.

Born and raised in the Southwest region of Nigeria, Dr Izu's fascination with the healing power of nature began in her childhood. One of her most treasured memories is watching her grandmother treat illnesses using herbs, roots, and plants, guided not by formal training, but by inherited wisdom. "It wasn't just about the plants," she reflects. "It was the sense of wonder, curiosity, and connection to something bigger than me."

This early spark grew into a passionate academic journey that took her across three leading institutions. She earned her Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Biology at Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), followed by a Master's in Animal Physiology from the University of Ibadan (UI), where she investigated plant-based therapies for managing diabetes. Her desire to bridge the gap between traditional healing knowledge and modern biomedical science further led her to the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT) in South Africa, where she completed her Doctor of Health Sciences in Biomedical Technology.

Her doctoral research focused on the antioxidant and antidiabetic properties of South African fruit peel extracts, specifically from avocado (*Persea americana*) and litchi (*Litchi chinensis*). By applying a range of techniques, from phytochemical analysis to in vivo testing and computational modelling, she revealed the medicinal potential of these fruit peels. Her findings not only advanced natural product drug discovery, but also highlighted the value of sustainable innovation and biowaste valorisation.

The road to success was not easy as Dr Izu's journey was shaped by limited resources, the challenges of studying abroad, and the ever-present balancing act between personal responsibilities and academic demands. "Research doesn't always go as planned," she says, noting moments of failure, self-doubt, and technical setbacks. Yet, through it all, she remained grounded in the values instilled by her upbringing, discipline, humility and purpose. "Through it all, I learned that challenges are not roadblocks, they are part of the process," she states.

Along the way, she drew strength from her family, mentors, peers, and a faith-based community she was a part of. Her father, in particular, played a pivotal role in encouraging her pursuit of science, whilst a secondary school biology teacher helped solidify her confidence in the field.

Now a biomedical scientist, health innovation strategist, and entrepreneur, Dr Izu is the founder and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Glowelite Solutions, a biotechnology consulting firm focused on transforming agricultural resources into sustainable health innovations through research, training, and digital technologies. She has her sights set on establishing a dedicated centre for natural product research, scaling up global collaborations, and influencing public health policy, especially around non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and cancer.

In her work, she is particularly passionate about empowering the next generation of scientists, especially women and researchers from under-represented communities. "Science should serve people," she says, "and knowledge, when applied wisely, can transform health outcomes across communities."

For Dr Izu, earning her doctorate was not just an academic milestone; it was a personal victory and a symbol of what is possible when purpose meets perseverance. It reaffirmed her belief in science as a tool for healing, empowerment, and transformation. Reflecting on her journey, she offers this advice to aspiring students: "Stay curious, stay committed, and trust the journey. Let your passion for impact drive your choices and never forget that rest and relationships are part of success, not separate from it."

When asked to summarise her path in one sentence, Dr Izu responded by saying: "My journey has been a testament to resilience, purpose, and passion, rising from humble beginnings to becoming a voice in science and innovation, driven by a deep desire to heal, empower, and transform lives through knowledge."





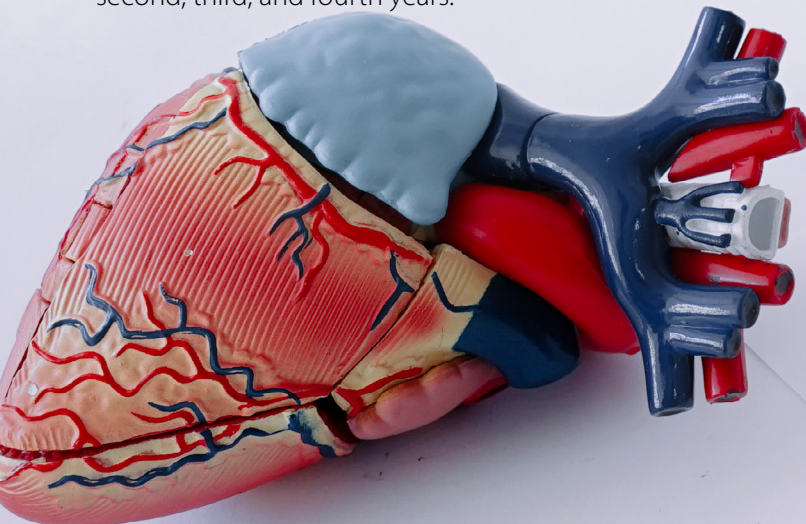
# Hendre van Rensburg - Shaping the future of Cardiology through Clinical Technology

**H**endre van Rensburg, born and raised in the small Southern Free State town of Bethulie, has achieved great success in clinical technology, earning a master's degree and a meaningful career. Now a resident of Bethlehem, he works in a private practice at Hoogland Mediclinic, Bethlehem, as a cardiac technologist. Hendre's educational journey began at Jim Fouché High School in Bloemfontein. While he initially aimed to study medicine, a former classmate introduced him to clinical technology, a field he quickly realised was his calling.

"For few couple of weeks, I knew that this is for me. Learning the human body and functioning part of it, how we are going to use different machines and tests to make diagnoses to treat patients," he says. He pursued his studies at the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT), completing a diploma and then furthering his education to obtain a Master's degree in Clinical Technology in the Faculty of Health and Management Sciences.

During his third and fourth years, Hendre completed his Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) at Universitas Academic Hospital in Bloemfontein. He graduated with a national diploma in Clinical Technology in 2017 and a bachelor's degree in 2018, both with distinctions, and his master's degree in 2025. He gives credit to his supervisors and promoters at CUT as idols, feeling privileged to have worked with them.

Hendre describes himself as loyal, dedicated, and hard working. His achievements during his time of study at the institution includes being a peer mentor for first-year Clinical Technology students in his second year and serving as a class representative for a specific module. He also received the Vice-Chancellor's award during his second, third, and fourth years.



Now, Hendre is giving back to the academic community as a part-time lecturer for third and fourth-year Clinical Technology students at CUT, an experience he finds "wonderful" and a privilege. His unforgettable moments from the university include meeting diverse students who shared a passion for their chosen career. His successful WIL at Universitas Hospital, where his supervisor was also a part-time lecturer, ultimately led him to become part of the team there.

When facing challenges, Hendre's approach is to put in more effort and time, believing that hard work leads to positive outcomes, a lesson instilled by his parents. The support and motivation from his friends and family have also been crucial. "Them just being there for me and their motivations were enough," he shares warmly.

Obtaining his master's degree has ignited a desire for further research, and he plans to pursue a PhD in Clinical Technology, collaborating with CUT on heart failure research. He is also involved with the US Education-based program, a platform for writing articles on heart sonar education for a global audience, alongside two other founders.

In his current role at Hoogland Medi-clinic, Hendre specialises in Cardiology, performing heart tests, heart sonars, and ECGs to provide diagnostic information to doctors about patients' well-being. Reflecting on his university experience, Hendre shares a valuable lesson: "Life is short, if you study, study hard and if you party, party hard. Enjoy every moment of it". He also notes a personal transformation from an introvert in his first year to an extrovert who is no longer shy to ask questions.

For students aspiring to pursue a master's degree in clinical technology, Hendre advises having a clear research picture, knowing exactly what you are researching, and prioritising pre-planning. He emphasises dedication: "don't do it tomorrow, do it today, if you work on it every day, it's going to be a wonderful experience".

Through his experiences, Hendre van Rensburg shows the power of perseverance and lifelong learning, reminding us that "hard work will be rewarded", and that sometimes, the unexpected path is precisely where one finds their truest calling and greatest fulfilment. His current pursuit of a PhD and involvement in global heart sonar education further underscore his unwavering commitment to advancing his field and contributing to a healthier world.



# Fighting against all odds: the rise of Sizeka Adoons

From the heart of Bloemfontein, the City of Roses, emerges a shining star whose story is as powerful as her presence on the field. Sizeka Adoons is not just an athlete; she is a force of resilience, passion and purpose.

A gifted sportswoman, Sizeka has made her mark in both soccer and netball, representing her institution, the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT), and her province, the Free State, in South Africa's prestigious national netball league. As the only daughter amongst three siblings, she grew up in a home where love and support were abundant, thanks to parents who worked tirelessly to provide the best for their children. Her journey began in some of Bloemfontein's top schools, where her talent and determination first took root.

Her greatest inspirations? Her cousin and her mother, women who taught her the value of family and faith. "No one will love and back you like your family," she says with conviction.

After completing matric at St. Bernard High School, Sizeka spent a year at Motheo Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) College, before enrolling at CUT for a Diploma in Language Practice and Media Studies. Although it was not her first choice, her sister's encouragement led her to discover a new passion, one that would shape her future. She completed her Diploma in Language Practice and Media Studies and her Advanced Diploma in Media Studies and is currently pursuing a Postgraduate Diploma in Entrepreneurial Management.

But her path was not without obstacles. A financial exclusion due to academic setbacks could have ended her journey. Instead, it became her turning point. Refusing to return home defeated, she came back stronger, determined to rewrite her story. "Even after everything I went through, I still managed to push through, and for that, I am super proud of myself."

Sizeka's excellence spans both academics and athletics. In high school, she earned awards and represented her district and province. At CUT, she graduated twice, and received a merit award in her first year.

Her dream? To inspire children in her community to believe that no matter where they come from, greatness is within reach.

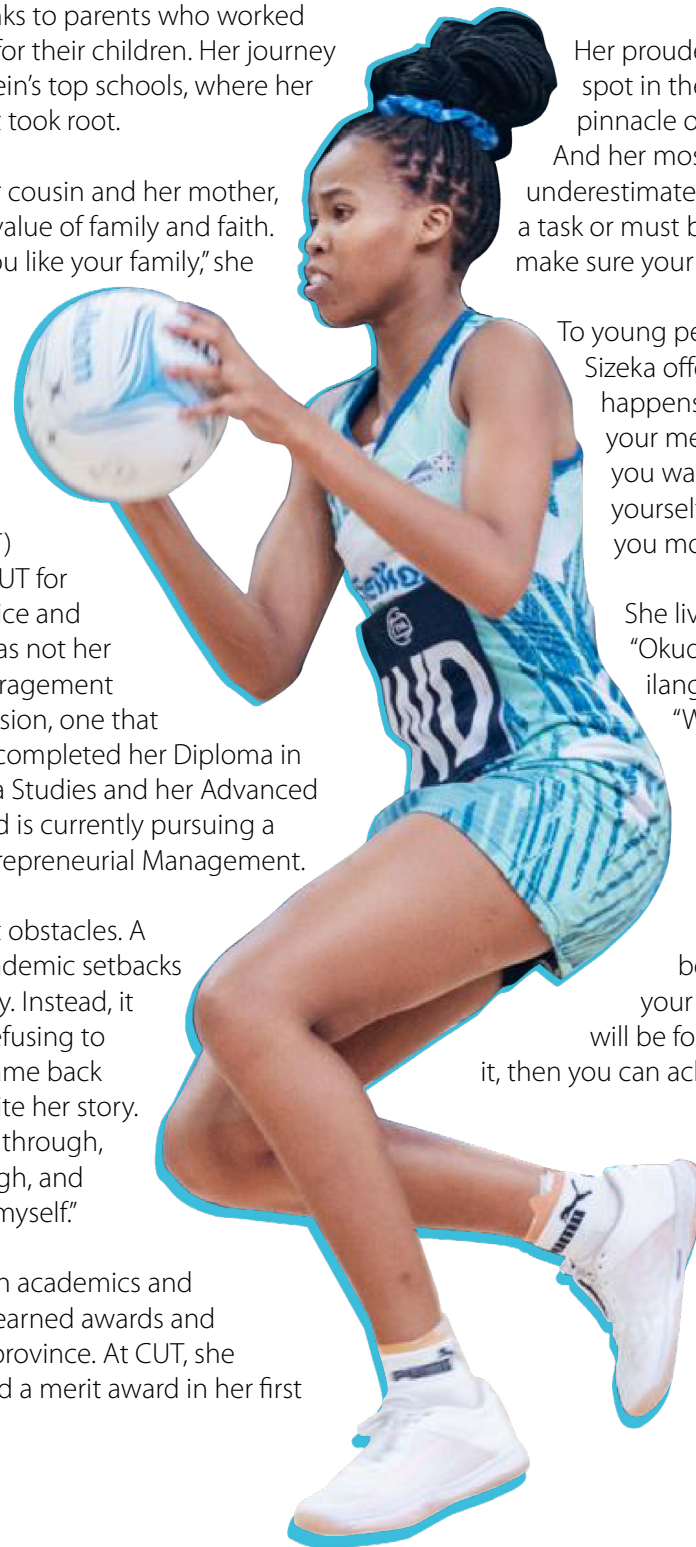
Sports have shaped her character and discipline. She recalls her coach's wisdom: "Education builds character, but sports instil discipline." She lives by that mantra, crediting her father for introducing her to the world of sports. "When you're in sport, you discipline yourself, what you eat, what you do, and when you do it. You must get things done and always show up."

Her proudest achievement is earning a spot in the national netball league – the pinnacle of competition in South Africa. And her most important lesson? Never underestimate anyone. "Whenever you have a task or must be somewhere, show up and make sure your presence is felt."

To young people battling self-doubt, Sizeka offers this heartfelt advice: "It happens to everyone. But it's about your mental strength and what you want. If you set something for yourself, that goal is what will keep you motivated."

She lives by the Zulu proverb "Okudalelwe mina kuyofika ngisho ilanga selishonile", translated as: "What is meant for me will come, even if the sun has set".

Self-motivated, determined, and driven by purpose, Sizeka Adoons leaves us with a message that echoes far beyond the sports field: "Stay in your path. What's meant for you, will be for you. If you can dream about it, then you can achieve it."





# Zuko Hlanjwa - Building a career on integrity

Born in the quiet town of Sterkspruit in the Eastern Cape and raised in Virginia, Zuko Hlanjwa has walked a path defined by a tenacious drive and family responsibility. The eldest of three brothers, he credits much of his drive to his youngest sibling, who inspired him through life's most testing moments.

Initially passionate about rugby, Hlanjwa considered pursuing business management, before a conversation with his father's colleague changed the course of his life. After learning about labour law and its impact on employees, he decided to pursue human resources (HR) management at the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT). "I didn't want to do HR just for HR's sake," he explains. "I wanted to understand people fully, so that when it came to applying labour law and discipline, I could do it fairly and effectively."

His years at CUT remain amongst his fondest memories. Staying at Eendrag Residence, he formed lasting brotherhoods, and found his footing both personally and academically. "That's where this Zuko you see today was shaped," he says with pride. His involvement in residence leadership, and later as a Supplemental Instruction (SI) Leader and part-time lecturer, added to his holistic student experience.

Hlanjwa's career began humbly, volunteering during recess at PMI Technical in Welkom, where he gained exposure to HR administration and training in the mining industry. He later joined Harmony Gold as an HR intern/assistant, where he honed his expertise in industrial relations, handling cases that took him as far as the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation, and Arbitration (CCMA).

His big break came at PepsiCo, where he entered as an HR graduate responsible for overseeing five sites across the inland region. This baptism by fire, as he calls it, demanded accountability, independence and resilience. In July 2024, after completing the graduate programme, he secured a permanent role as an HR Business Partner – a milestone he considers his proudest achievement.

At PepsiCo and beyond, Hlanjwa has built a reputation for excellence in industrial relations, maintaining an undefeated record at the CCMA. His preparation is meticulous: "If you take the smaller battles seriously, the final battle takes care of itself," he says, underscoring his discipline and structured approach.

Although naturally reserved, Hlanjwa had to adapt quickly to the demands of corporate life, where engagement and presence in meetings are non-negotiable. "I had to learn to listen actively and add value in discussions," he reflects. Over time, he conquered these challenges, developing into a confident and people-centric leader.

Ambitious and forward thinking, Hlanjwa envisions himself transitioning into a specialised industrial relations role within three years. His long-term goal is to establish his own industrial relations firm by his mid-forties, one that provides services to both individuals and companies in need of outsourced expertise.

For all his ambition, balance remains key. "I work hard, I play hard," he says. Outside of work, he values time with family and friends, whether at home in Virginia or in the Eastern Cape. Weekends are dedicated to personal time, ensuring that his corporate career does not overshadow his personal well-being.

Hlanjwa lives by the principles of openness, honesty, and being people-centric. He believes in transparency, not only in the workplace, but also in personal relationships. "Our history will always come out one way or another, so I prefer to be open," he explains. His people-first mindset, cultivated through HR practice, guides his decisions both at work and in life.

To current CUT students, Hlanjwa stresses the importance of relevance and networking beyond academics: "Your studies alone won't create a name for you. You need to get out there, be known, and stay connected." He also calls on alumni to maintain strong ties with CUT, noting the value of initiatives such as the HR Summit in fostering collaboration and creating opportunities for current students.

If he could give his younger self advice, it would be to embrace patience and trust the journey. "Things happen for a reason. When one door closes, another opens. PepsiCo has been the best company I've worked for, and I wouldn't be here without the lessons from my setbacks."

Zuko Hlanjwa's journey is a reminder that success is not only about ambition, but also about integrity, resilience, and the relationships we build along the way.





# Bernadine Van Wyk - there's a light at the end of the tunnel



Hailing from Bronville in Welkom, Bernadine Van Wyk shares her inspiring story of a young and brave woman driven by purpose and a deep passion for growth, learning and serving others. Bernadine began her educational journey at Bronville Primary School where she studied from 2009 to 2015. Her academic journey continued at Welkom Secondary School where she completed her matric in 2020. With her clear understanding of future goals, she registered at the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT), at the Welkom campus pursuing a Diploma in Human Resources Management in the Faculty of Management Sciences. Her commitment culminated in her graduating with a diploma in 2023 and, impressively, earning her an Advanced Diploma cum laude in 2025.

Raised by a strong, independent, single mother who played both parental roles with grace and courage, Bernadine was shaped by her mother's strength to be the kind of woman she is today. Tragically, she lost her mother in 2015 and that moment shifted the course of her and her sisters' lives. "Since then, it has been just the four of us - my sisters and I - supporting one another through life's challenges and milestones. Growing up without our mother taught us how to be independent, grounded, and resilient," she voices. She and her sisters share a bond that is not only rooted in blood but also in the journey they have walked together since their mother's passing. It made her passionate about education and determined to build a better life, not just for herself, but to honour the sacrifices that her mother made and the love she gave so freely to them. "Everything I do today is rooted in the values she instilled in me and the support I continue to draw from my sisters," she says.

Despite the environment or unpleasant situation around her, Bernadine remained focused on her goals and committed to using education as a tool to create a better future for herself and those around her. "My background has motivated me to rise above my circumstances and strive to make a meaningful impact wherever I go," she emphasises. Bernadine recently received two prestigious awards, which was a "Best Essay" in the Faculty of Management Sciences and "Best Essay in Afrikaans" from the CUT Writing Centre. "The moment was truly unforgettable. I felt an overwhelming sense of pride and gratitude, not only because my work was recognised, but because it affirmed the importance of preserving and celebrating the Afrikaans language within academic and professional spaces," she shared.

Life is full of unexpected twists and turns, but it is how we respond to challenges that truly define our journey. Imagine if you can transform every obstacle into a steppingstone, driving you into your goals and dreams.

However, she shares that her academic experience was notably impacted by the recurring campus strikes, which created substantial uncertainty and disrupted the academic calendar.

That experience taught her resilience and how to stay grounded even when things are out of control. "Looking back, I value the journey for both the academic knowledge I gained and the life lessons that came with it," she elaborates.

Her biggest highlights at CUT are when she graduated for her diploma for the first time last year and obtaining her degree with distinctions in the current year. Her family and friends played a crucial role in helping her overcome obstacles by giving her the strength she would have never had on her own. Their unwavering support, constant encouragement and belief in her whenever she felt like giving up, always reminded her that she was not alone. Just hearing them say, "I am proud of you," meant everything to me," she shares warmly. Her friends, especially those who walked the same academic journey, became a source of comfort and motivation. Sharing study tips, learning together, and confiding in each other about their struggles made every challenge feel lighter and more bearable.

To students who are embarking on their academic journeys, Bernadine offers this heartfelt advice: "Stay curious and seek understanding, not just good grades. Embrace your own pace, there is no need to rush. Challenges will come but meet them with resilience and a willingness to grow. Stay true to yourself and let your unique voice lead the way. Get involved, explore opportunities, and plant seeds that will blossom in time. Most importantly, do not just chase success - pursue purpose and meaning, because a fulfilled heart will always shine brighter," she advises. Most importantly, she shares this message to her fellow graduates: "Be bold in your dreams, kind in your impact, and unshakable in your purpose."

The world does not just need graduates, it needs courageous thinkers, empathetic leaders, and fearless changemakers! So go out there, take up space, and live a life that echoes far beyond this moment. We did not come this far to stop here; this is just our beginning. And remember, we are doing this till that gown turns red!"

Bernadine Van Wyk's journey reminds us that even in our darkest moments, hope persists. Her courage in the face of hardship shows that every struggle shapes us into someone stronger and wiser. Let her story be a guiding light - no matter how long the road, there truly is light at the end of the tunnel.





# Investing in the future: Central University of Technology, Free State inaugural Annual Fundraising Gala marks vision and purpose



Prof. Pamela Dube, CUT Vice-Chancellor and Principal

The Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT) hosted its inaugural Annual Fundraising Gala on Thursday evening, 30 October 2025, at the CUT Hotel School in Bloemfontein. Held under the inspiring theme “Investing in the Future”, the event brought together alumni, business leaders, corporate partners, and friends of the university to celebrate CUT’s growth and strengthen collective efforts towards student success.

The gala served as a celebration of community, collaboration and commitment, highlighting what can be achieved when people unite behind a shared vision. The evening blended elegance and purpose, as guests enjoyed fine dining, live music and inspiring messages, all in support of initiatives that will directly impact CUT students’ lives.

Delivering the keynote address, Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Prof. Pamela Dube, reflected on the university’s journey and the partnerships that have shaped its success. “Our mission has been clear and constant: to be a leading African university of technology, shaping the future through innovation, entrepreneurship and social responsibility,” said Prof. Dube. “However, we all know that it takes more than erecting buildings and laboratories to build a university. A university is built by people with a shared purpose, anchored on strong partnerships.

Meaning, it takes a community to build a university, a community of builders, working together with a shared purpose.”

The fundraising initiative focused on three key projects that form part of CUT’s strategic priorities to enhance student life and learning: student financial aid, to support academically deserving students facing financial challenges, student well-being, investing in programmes that promote mental health, holistic wellness, and overall student development, and digital infrastructure, ensuring that CUT remains technologically advanced and accessible to all students in a digital-driven world.



Mr Setumo Llaie, CUT Executive Director: Resources and Operations (left) and Mr Pappie Floyd Lapie from Mookodi Resources and Security

Prof. Dube described these initiatives as the cornerstone of the university’s commitment to inclusivity and excellence. “Together, these three projects form the foundation upon which our vision for the future stands,” she emphasised. “Addressing them is not optional, it is imperative. Tonight, as we gather under the theme ‘Investing in the Future’, we affirm our shared responsibility to build a university where every student has the opportunity, the support and the tools they need to succeed.”

She further highlighted CUT’s belief that education must remain a bridge to opportunity rather than a barrier. “At CUT, we believe that no student should be denied the opportunity to learn, grow, or build a future because of financial constraints. Through events like the Annual Fundraising Gala, the university continues to strengthen partnerships that turn this belief into action, investing not only in facilities and innovation, but in the lives and dreams of our students,” she concluded.



Mr Konstable Selebedi, CUT Convocation President (left) and Ms Michelle Khabele from Maliepo Construction

The atmosphere throughout the evening was both elegant and lively. Guests were entertained by a live band, adding a vibrant ambiance to the night’s celebrations. A raffle draw and live auction brought excitement and friendly competition, as attendees enthusiastically participated to raise additional funds for the student-focused projects.

CUT expressed deep appreciation to all partners and sponsors who contributed to the success of the event, including Maliepo Construction, Repair Holdings, XL Astra Travel, the Private Student Accommodation Committee, FNB, ABSA, Standard Bank, Nedbank, MTN, Telkom, Vodacom, Mercedes Benz, Glenlivet, Virginia Crafts, and Pro Fans Auctioneers.

As the night ended, one message resonated throughout the room: building the future requires shared investment. Through generosity, collaboration, and a collective spirit of hope, CUT and its partners are shaping not only a stronger university, but a brighter, more inclusive future for generations of students to come.



Mr Tshepo Mokoena, Artist from Virginia Crafts, showcasing his art pieces



Prof. Pamela Dube, CUT Vice-Chancellor and Principal (left) with Mrs Rajshree Pillay, Director: XL Astra Travel



MTN Representatives from left to right: Ms Zani Mzamo, Mr Brian Nel and Ms Moey Mohapi



Mr Josy Sehloho, Regional Director: Public Sector Banking, First National Bank (left) and Mr Fredrick Matongo, Director: Innovation/Technology Transfer, CUT



# Pioneering progress - Hlumela's career in medical technology



From her academic achievements to her professional successes, Hlumela's story is a powerful reminder of the importance of patience and mentorship. With ten years of dedication to healthcare, Hlumela Ntlabati's journey as a medical technologist is an inspiration to all, especially to other women out there.

Born in Lady Frere and raised in Queenstown, Ntlabati attended Thembelihle Public Primary School, KwaKomani Comprehensive School, and Hexagon High School, where she completed her matric. She graduated with a National Diploma and a BTech in Biomedical Technology from the Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences (FHES) at the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT). Her passion for life sciences and physical sciences in high school initially led her to aspire to be a medical doctor.

However, an introduction to medical technology in Grade 11 ignited a new passion. She realised the vital and fulfilling role of working behind the scenes in healthcare, supporting diagnosis and treatment, which she finds incredibly meaningful.

Hlumela's choice to study at CUT was deeply influenced by her late neighbour, Anele Spelman. Anele, a cum laude graduate from CUT, spoke passionately about her experiences, and her enthusiasm was inspiring. Motivated by Anele's journey, Hlumela researched CUT, and was drawn to its strong reputation in health sciences and its practical, hands-on approach to learning. "Anele's journey lit the path for mine, and although she is no longer with us, her legacy continues to inspire me every day," she shares.

Describing herself in three words – smart, resilient, and dedicated – Hlumela admits that her academic journey was challenging. Biomedical technology demands focus, discipline and commitment, but she found it doable with the right mindset. Whilst she was not actively involved in student organisations during her studies, fearing it would derail her, she now realises the tremendous value extracurricular activities add to student life.

Among her most memorable moments at CUT was her time at Huis Technikon Residence, where she formed lifelong friendships, and her first laboratory experience, which, despite a humorous start involving her eyelashes, marked the beginning of her hands-on learning. Hlumela praised the outstanding academic support she received, noting that lecturers and mentors were always available to guide students through challenging modules.

Her experience as a medical technologist in a clinical laboratory has been an "incredible learning experience," fast paced and challenging, yet fulfilling due to its contribution to patient care. She is currently employed as a Laboratory Manager at the National Health Laboratory Service, an experience she describes as "eye opening", and one that has deepened her appreciation for the critical role laboratories play in healthcare. "This is definitely where I was destined to be," she states.

Hlumela faced various academic and personal challenges during her studies, but was fortunate to have a strong support system, especially from her parents. Her mother's guidance and encouragement were instrumental in helping her regain focus and confidence. Her motivation during difficult times was setting goals and a clear vision for her life, as "mediocrity has never been an option".

Her academic success was built on effective habits and strategies, including studying before lectures, preparing notes in advance, creating a structured study schedule, and consistently using past examination papers. Her proudest achievement at university was graduating with both her national diploma and BTech in record time. This academic journey has made her more disciplined, resilient and confident, revealing her capacity for more than she initially thought.

The most valuable lessons she learned at university revolved around the importance of time management and balance. Looking back, she wishes she had joined more student organisations and leveraged networking opportunities earlier.

In the next five years, Hlumela sees herself potentially managing an academic laboratory, driven by her passion for teaching. She believes in career changing and staying open to new opportunities, anticipating a clearer answer to her future once she completes her Master of Business Administration (MBA) programme. She sees the MBA as a significant career pivot that will deepen her understanding of business strategy, leadership and management, equipping her to drive meaningful change within organisations.

She hopes to use her qualifications to improve diagnostic services, mentor young professionals, and contribute to better healthcare outcomes in her community. Her advice to current and aspiring students is: "Stay focused, stay disciplined, don't be afraid to ask for help but don't forget to live your life." She emphasises having a life outside of school, pursuing hobbies, and embracing challenges as opportunities for growth.

Hlumela encourages the university community and fellow graduates to continue to strive for excellence, embrace challenges as opportunities for growth, and support one another in all aspects of our lives. "Together, we have the power to make a positive impact in our communities".



# Alumni Affairs Office hosts Internal Stakeholders Engagement Breakfast to strengthen collaboration and foster engagement



Prof. Pamela Dube, CUT Vice-Chancellor and Principal

The Alumni Affairs Office at the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT) hosted its annual Internal Stakeholders Engagement Breakfast on Friday, 7 November 2025 in the ZR Mahabane Reception Hall, Bloemfontein Campus. The event brought together internal stakeholders to reflect on achievements, strengthen collaboration, and align efforts towards the university's Strategic Plan 2026 to 2030. Through presentations, dialogue and networking, the gathering aimed to celebrate teamwork, recognise contributions, and reinforce CUT's culture of inclusivity and engagement.



Ms Jacqueline Pietersen, Deputy Director: Alumni Affairs

The Deputy Director: Alumni Affairs, Ms Jacqueline Pietersen, opened the event by warmly welcoming attendees and expressing gratitude for their support throughout the year. "This event is also to celebrate you," she said. "Without the collective support throughout this

year, we would not have been able to tell our success stories." She encouraged colleagues to connect, share experiences and successes, and make the most of the engagement as a platform to strengthen relationships and collaborate within the university community.

CUT Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Prof. Pamela Dube, addressed attendees, and reaffirmed the executives' commitment to collaborative engagement. "These sessions are very important," she said. "They give us an opportunity to reflect and think beyond, together. You do matter here; your opinions are useful and highly regarded." Prof. Dube highlighted that such engagements are essential in shaping CUT's vision and advancing the Strategic Plan 2026 to 2030, ensuring that all voices contribute to the university's collective growth.



Dr Choice Makhetha, Executive Director: Office of the Vice-Chancellor and Principal

Dr Choice Makhetha, Executive Director: Office of the Vice-Chancellor and Principal, expanded on the importance of internal alumni and active participation. "Internal alumni are critical, because, unlike external alumni, you have power; you have power to influence change internally," she said. "If we are serious about making CUT the best among the best universities, we must start by changing our own attitudes and how we treat one another." Dr Makhetha called on colleagues to build a culture of responsiveness and mutual respect, noting that transformation begins within the institution.

Reflecting on the year's successes, Mr Qondakele Sompondo, Director: Institutional Advancement, thanked staff for their contributions to a productive year. "You are here to be thanked for your support in helping us," he said. "When we look back as the Alumni Office, we realise this was a very good year, one made possible by all of you." He highlighted key achievements, including the CUT Alumni Marathon; Golf Day; and the alumni engagement in Kathu in the Northern Cape which showcased the strength of CUT's alumni network.



Mr Sompondo Qondakele, Director: Institutional Advancement in the Office of the Vice-Chancellor and Principal

Concluding the formal programme, Mr Mohau Manyarela, Deputy Director: Disability Unit, delivered an inspiring presentation on inclusivity and transformation. "The Disability Unit serves as an agent of transformation within the university," he said. "We seek to promote inclusivity and equal opportunities through effective support and collaboration. At CUT, we have punched beyond our weight." He commended the university's progress in accessibility and student support, emphasising that every effort to support a student contributes meaningfully to transformative change.

In her vote of thanks, Deputy Director: Alumni Affairs, Ms Jacqueline Pietersen, expressed heartfelt appreciation to everyone who contributed to the event's success and to the broader CUT community. "Colleagues, thank you from the very bottom of our hearts for your ongoing support," she said. "We all experienced an extremely busy year, and through it all, everyone continued to shine. So,

afford yourself moments to celebrate your achievements because you have all made an impact and that is what matters most."

The engagement concluded with a networking breakfast and lively informal conversations.



Mr Mohau Manyarela, Deputy Director: Disability Unit



From left to right: Mr Mojalefa Titisi, Part Time Lecturer: Business Management, Mr Sekoele "Stone" Ramajoe, Manager: International Student Recruitment, Communications and Internationalisation, Mr Sylvester Kodisang, Marketing & Administrative Assistant: Faculty of Management Sciences and Mr Shawn Seseane, Manager: Strategic Projects



Mr David Sofonia, Deputy Director: Protection Services (left) and Mr Relibile Mofokeng, the newly appointed Director: Protection Services



# Boitumelo Setlhaku rises beyond limits with the power of determination



Boitumelo Setlhaku’s story reminds us that where you are right now doesn’t have to define where you’ll end up. It’s a journey shaped by resilience, quiet strength, and an unwavering determination to keep moving forward, no matter the starting point. Born and raised in Bloemfontein, Boitumelo’s story is one of twists and turns.

After completing high school and studying at the University of the Free State (UFS), life took an unexpected turn, and she entered the workforce. But the spark for education never left her. In 2019, she enrolled at the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT), pursuing a Diploma in Public Management. She continued to an advanced diploma; postgraduate diploma, graduating cum laude; and is now pursuing her master’s degree in the same field. “I’ve always wanted to graduate cum laude. I chased that dream, and it’s the highlight of my academic career,” she reflects with pride.

Boitumelo’s journey has not been without personal and physical challenges. She suffers from generalised anxiety disorder (GAD), bipolar disorder, epilepsy, and writer’s cramp - a condition that affects the use of her hands. “Sometimes I could only use one hand. When the pain got worse, I had to stop and rely on others,” she explains. Despite these hurdles, she remained focused, drawing strength from her faith, family, and an unshakable belief

in God’s timing. Her mother, who pursued her own studies at Motheo College, was a constant source of encouragement. “She showed me that no matter your age or situation, you can still succeed if you put your mind to it.”

Boitumelo is also a devoted mother, raising her son while studying and working full time. “It wasn’t easy, but I always reminded myself why I started. I wanted to build a better future not just for me, but for my child, too.” Her time at CUT was transformative. Through the university’s Disability Unit, she accessed academic and emotional support. “The lecturers and support staff were so understanding. They never treated me differently, but they listened, and that made all the difference,” she says. She is especially grateful to Mr Manyarela from the Disability Unit, whom she describes as a pillar. Additionally, she would like to thank her lecturers, namely Mr Sydney Magagula and Mr Tlhosiso Taaibosch for their unwavering support.

One of the most powerful lessons she has learned, is that not all disabilities are visible. “People might not see what you’re going through, but that doesn’t make it any less real,” she says. Boitumelo believes inclusivity should be embedded in the design of education, workplaces, and public services.

Her personal experiences have ignited a passion for improving service delivery, especially in underserved communities. “We can’t have one doctor serving thousands of people. Public services should reflect the lived realities of our people,” she insists.

An ambivert who prefers solitude, Boitumelo dreams of working in the public management sector, to advocate for better systems and more empathetic leadership. She also wants to challenge self-defeating thoughts and internalised doubt. “We are our own worst enemies. If we change how we think, a lot of things can change,” she advises. “Everything starts with you. If you think you can’t do something, you won’t.”

Her message to others, especially students living with a disability, is clear and heartfelt: “Believe in yourself, ask for help when you need it, and never give up. The journey is hard, but it’s worth it.”

Boitumelo Setlhaku’s story is more than one of academic achievement. It is a powerful reminder that courage, support and determination can illuminate even the darkest paths, and that sometimes, the strongest victories are the ones the world does not see.

# From student to award-winning educator: Themba Siyoko



He appreciates his family, basketball coach, and mentors for helping him overcome obstacles and challenges he came across during his time of study at the institution. He also acknowledges the positive influence of his team, which he says is as close as a “loveLife centre”, where activities like life skills sessions shaped him. Giving up was never an option for him. “The word ‘giving up’ has never crossed my mind, and it’s not even on my cards,” he states.

Beyond his studies, Themba is a professional basketball player for the Free State in the Basketball National League, an experience he describes as “getting paid for eating your favourite dessert”. He has been playing since 2023. A memorable moment at CUT for him was representing the institution in the University Sports South Africa (USSA) basketball tournaments, where the CUT team qualified four years in a row. He also participates in the Winter Research School in Welkom, a programme for postgraduate students to network and collaborate.

Themba is currently an educator at a Special Needs School for learners with intellectual disabilities. He won a district award for Excellence in Special Needs Teaching at the National Teacher’s Awards, where he was representing Mangaung Metropolitan. He is now the Provincial winner and he is set to represent the Free State province in the national competition. Looking to the future, he hopes to become a lecturer within five years and to use his qualifications to influence and amend educational policies. His advice to aspiring students is to “stick to your lane and be honest about your capabilities”.

Themba Siyoko’s story is one of self-awareness, persistence, and the desire to serve his community. His commitment to making a difference, whether in the classroom, on the basketball court, or by shaping future policies, serves as a reminder that by being determined and having a clear sense of purpose, one can truly become a “human resource centre” for those around you.

Themba’s decision to pursue higher qualifications was inspired by his experience of teaching learners with intellectual disabilities while not being formally qualified to do so. He felt a need to equip himself to be a human resource to the school and the learners. He chose to study at CUT because it was close to home and provided the specific opportunities he was seeking. “I love reaching the destination, but I don’t like the traveling in between,” he shares. He describes himself as a “multi-talented human resource centre” who can adapt to any situation.

Academically, Themba’s journey was “smooth sailing”, with his motivation being to make his mother proud. This personal drive made things easier for him. During difficult times, he was motivated by the desire to make his mother proud by getting the degree to achieve that goal. “It was never about finding a job, but it was all about getting my degree and making my mother proud,” he said.



# Alumni One-Stop Service

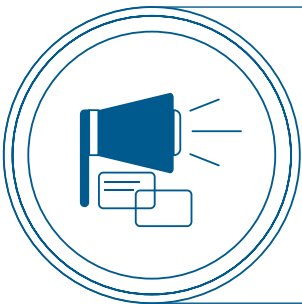
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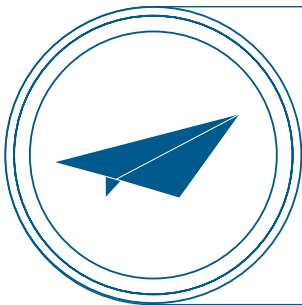
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