West Word
Web Exclusives

Osburn finds trip to South Africa 'memorable'

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Around Town Editor

As a member of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), Principal Kaine Osburn went to visit Johannesburg and Capetown, South Africa Nov. 9-19 to learn more about the South African education system.

According to www.aera.net, AERA is an organization concerned with improving the educational process by encouraging scholarly inquiry related to education.

Osburn was invited to attend the conference because of his interest in African education.

"Since the end of apartheid, [South Africa] has been addressing a lot of the same issues American education has been addressing," Osburn said.

He enumerated the concerns.

"I was interested to see how schools [in South Africa] are addressing issues regarding the education gap between different racial groups, achievement gaps between different racial groups, achievement gaps between different socio-economic groups and a history of racial discrimination [so I can get a] sense of different perspectives on how to address these issues [at Niles West.]

Osburn added, "[The Educational issues] are more dramatic in South Africa; however, [Niles West and America both] have the same achievment gaps on a lower level."

During this trip, Osburn attended six different presentations by various university and government officials.

Osburn spoke to a professor about the Engilsh Language Learners (ELL) program at West because "I think it is very successful and a good model for what to do when you have so many students speaking so many different languages," he said

Many issues regarding South African education deal with language, Osburn said, adding that there are 11 official languages in South Africa.

A Johannesburg dwelling underscores that city's poverty.
Photo courtesy Kaine Osburn

"The problem is [South Africa] does not have enough teachers trained in all the languages," he said.

Osburn added that "[South Africa is trying to] train individuals in certain fields where there is a great need. They need more people in math and science."

This is complicated by "a weak educational background," Osburn said. "The reason for that is, historically, since the apartheid, they have deprived so much of their nation of education that when the apartheid ended, the formally oppressed were in power. Now [South Africa] needs to get many more people educated to make important decisions for the country, [which] as a whole, is working to progress education in fields of need."

Not only was Osburn able to attend presentations regarding South African education and language, he was able to experience firsthand the lifestyles of South African citizens. According to Osburn, there is a distinct difference between the lives of the rich and the poor in Johannesburg, a circumstance that spawns crime.

"We were told not to go out by ourselves and not to drive because we might get carjacked," he said.

In contrast, Osburn found Capetown much safer.

"When we went to Capetown, no one warned us about crime, and I walked around the city as freely as I wanted," he said.

As part of his experience, Osburn was able to visit Oval North Technical High School in Capetown.

The high school, according to Osburn, is one that attracts and recruits students who were interested in math, science and technology.

Oval North's principal and assistant principal really impressed him, Osburn said.

"I met the principal there who has been there for 21 years. He was amazing, with such great energy; he loved his students and he and his assistant principal clearly made a great team," Osburn said.

The visit to the high school was a "memorable event" according to Osburn.

"It is inspiring to see how much the students [at Oval North Technical High School] care about their education and how hard they work," he added.

Overall, Osburn's experience in South Africa was one he found "memorable."

"The experience was exciting enough that I would recommend a visit to South Africa, especially Capetown," Osburn said. "I am eager to go back in the future."