



# Opportunity of a lifetime

**Left; Heidi Roberts of US Friends of HESC, seen here handing over a cheque for \$100 000 to Lente Roode, founder of HESC. Below: Akani Mthethwa, Hlanhla Ndlovu and Innocent Sibuyi who are the lucky candidates to benefit from the US Friends of HESC donation.**

**HOEDSPRUIT** - Two learners from the Shobiyana Secondary School in Acornhoek received the opportunity of a lifetime on Monday, March 8 when they were each awarded an internship in conservation at the Hoedspruit Endangered Species Centre (HESC). This was made possible by the US Friends of HESC, under leadership of Heidi and Allen Roberts.

Initially, Heidi and Allen only intended for one deserving youngster to receive an internship. After interviewing the hopeful candidates however, they were so impressed by Akani Mthethwa and Innocent Sibuyi that they had no choice but to take both of them. Akani and Innocent were chosen for the internship based on merit. School marks were taken into account, but their evident passion for nature and willingness to work hard were the deciding factors. Akani is a Gr.11 learner and Innocent is in Matric. US Friends of HESC is providing the centre with \$3000 per learner for the year to use for uniforms, the fees for completing FGASA Level 1 field guide's training and other costs associated with the internship. Akani and Innocent will also receive a small amount of pocket money every week. They will be spending weekends and holidays at the centre to learn about conservation from the competent staff at HESC and in this time they will complete FGASA Level 1.

The good influence of the US Friends of HESC did however not stop at the two chosen candidates. A third learner, Hlanhla Ndlovu, has been given the opportunity to work in the coffee shop at HESC to learn from Elise Geldenhuys how to run a successful coffee shop



and how to make great food. The extremely challenging circumstances Hlanhla faces at home softened the Roberts' hearts even further and they decided together with Lente Roode to give her a job at the centre, so that she may support her large family.

For the past three years the US Friends of HESC have been able to provide the centre with a larger sum of money every year. Heidi and Allen and the other members of the charity work tirelessly to promote HESC in New York. Every dollar raised at the dinner parties they host, go directly to the centre. In this manner the couple have been able to hand a cheque to Lente Roode every

year since the inception of the charity. On Monday, Heidi's birthday, she handed over a cheque for \$100 000 to Lente. This money goes towards the upkeep of the centre, the care of the animals and research projects. In return for the donation, Heidi and Allen were treated to some quality time with Tristan, their adopted cheetah at the centre.

When Heidi welcomed Akani and Innocent to the centre, she said to them: 'You are the pioneers [of the internship] and must show us that you can work hard. You must be examples to your community and create awareness of the centre. I expect you to do a great job and have fun while doing it!'