

Welkom

Gold made Welkom. There was no other reason for a farming area in the northern Orange Free State to become a bustling, thriving town. In 1946 a major gold discovery was made on a farm called Welkom and in 1947 the town came into being, declared a city in 1968 after a period of rapid but planned growth. In fact, with Sir Ernest Oppenheimer and Anglo-American in charge, the town was laid out before a single brick was laid, which probably makes it unique amongst the world's towns.

A million trees were planted and traffic ordered by circles. It is the second-largest town in the Free State. Gold was discovered in the Free State in the 19th century and mined at Vrededorp, but it was not until the accidental discovery on this farm that it really became the centre of a gold rush. People flocked from all over the world to the new goldfields and to other towns such as Odendaalsrus, Kroonstad, Virginia and Hennenman.



Welkom-Gimnasium



FOUNDED: 1953

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School History

With the development of cities comes the establishment of schools. Welkom Gimnasium was founded in 1953. One of the staff members, a Mr MJ van der Vyver had proposed that the school adopt "Gimnasium" and it was unanimously agreed upon. Now it is a co-ed school with about 920 pupils and a boarding establishment that houses about 90. Boarders largely come from the farming areas of Theunissen, Hennenman and Wesselsbron. In 1996 it became a dual-medium school, offering both English and Afrikaans.





"Gerrie was unlucky not to have been selected for Craven Week in 1970 as he was an awesome eighth man and a brilliant captain. He was a quiet and respected player. I told him when he left school that he would be too small to play at eighth man and that he should move to hooker. He ended up starting for the Boks at scrumhalf in 1974, and was later moved to eighth man when he played again ten years later, in 1984. That was exactly what happened to the great Doc Craven, who also played for the Boks at either position."

— Gert Jansen (Coach 1970-96)

"Welkom Gimnasium had some very capable teachers and coaches who laid a solid rugby foundation for my future."

— Gerrie Sonnekus (1970)

Rugby History

The school's rugby falls within the provincial franchise which used to be called Northern Free State and is now called the Griffons. Numerous provincial players have gone through the school, as well as three Springboks: Gerrie Sonnekus, Christo Ferreira and Lukas van Biljon. Gert "Bok" Jansen is the school's most renowned coach. He coached at the school from 1970 to 1996, coaching the First XV for 23 of those years. He rates the 1974 side as the best of those he coached — a team in which both wingers scored 51 tries between them, and the flyhalf, Kobus Werner (later to play centre beside Naas Botha) scored 18 tries.

There have been numerous other years of good rugby at Gimmies. In 1990, the First XV won the Director's trophy in the Free State. In 2006, eight teams from the school were entered into the competitive local leagues, with both the First XV and Under-14A sides reaching the finals. A record score of 45-11 against rivals Goudveld was the highlight of that season. Welkom-Gimnasium have been runners up in the Northern

Free State league on 12 occasions since 1973. It has won the league four times — in 1981, 1982, 1990 and 1991. The school has nine rugby teams. Rugby rivals include Hoërskool Kroonstad, Afrikaanse Hoërskool in Kroonstad and Hentie Cilliers in Virginia. Gimmies' big derby is against Goudveld, also of Welkom. Since 1963, the majority of games (29) have been won and two drawn. There was an unbeaten run against their near neighbours from 1988 to 1998, and big victories in 2005 (46-14) and 2006 (45-11). The derby was televised in 2007, where once again Gimmies took home the spoils — a trophy contested between the two schools every year.

Internationals

South Africa:
Gerrie Sonnekus
Christo Ferreira
Lukas van Biljon

