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The Grave as Compass: A Quiet Gesture of Leadership

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Each year on 30 October, the Rector of Paul Roos Gymnasium walks a familiar path. Not to a podium, but to a grave. Beneath the oaks of Stellenbosch, he lays a wreath at the resting place of Paul Roos, accompanied by a representative of the Roos family. It is a quiet ritual, almost invisible to the public eye, yet deeply visible to the soul of the school.

This act is not ceremonial for ceremony's sake. It is a moment of reorientation, a reminder that leadership begins not with ambition, but with remembrance. The grave becomes a compass, pointing not to the past, but through it. It anchors the institution in values that do not age. These include humility, service and the belief that education is a moral calling.

The grave itself, and the wreath laid upon it, have become more than tradition. They are symbolic artefacts in the truest sense. They hold memory, meaning and momentum. In a time when schools are being invited to make their stories visible through crafted objects and rituals, Paul Roos Gymnasium already carries one. Not in glass or granite, but in gesture. The annual wreath-laying is a living symbol, co-created across generations and infused with the values that shape the school's identity.

The honour of continuing this tradition falls, this year, to Mr Jannie de Villiers, recently appointed Rector. In stepping into this role, he also steps into a lineage. Not only of leadership, but of stewardship. His presence at the gravesite affirms that Paul Roos Gymnasium is not merely a school with a name, but a school with a memory. And memory, when held with care, becomes direction.

Today, as the wreath is laid and the name is spoken, we are reminded that true leadership is not loud. It is quiet, consistent and deeply symbolic. It walks the path others have walked. Not to repeat it, but to understand it. And then to lead forward with clarity.

P.S. If this moment at the gravesite stirred something in you, you might enjoy reading *What if every school had a symbolic artefact that told its story?* It is a reflection on how memory, meaning and ritual can shape the soul of a school.

Read the article here:

[What if every school had a symbolic artefact that told its story?](#)