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Mies van der Roast unveiled at Global Grounds

By Karl Rybaltowski
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Walking around campus, it's easy to see the physical impact some IPROs have had on the surroundings. Whether it's the Green Line tube above the MTCC or the statue displaying steel structural connections outside the Engineering 1 building, some IPRO groups have made a lasting mark on IIT. Now IPRO 333 (Building Sustainable Communities through Coffee), in conjunction with Crop to Cup and Global Grounds, has made its own contribution to this tradition. With Mies van der Roast, an exclusive coffee blend from Crop to Cup, IPRO 333 will do much more than bring more varied coffee options to IIT - they're helping fund future work for the IPRO and the Ugandan farmers it works with.

The IPRO team has been busy - they're fresh off of a trip to the village of Gibuzaale in southwestern Uganda, undertaken to survey the site of a proposed community coffee storage facility (called a banda) that will be built using locally available materials so as to minimize the cost while ensuring quality. The team will be returning to Uganda in June to help with the actual construction process, and that's part of the reason they came out in force on Thursday afternoon, unveiling a new coffee blend called Mies van der Roast.

The coffee is more than just a new option at Global Grounds - it's also the culmination of the core philosophy of Crop to Cup, the sponsor of IPRO 333. "We import coffee, but our

fundamental belief is that people respond well to humanity; with the coffee we really drive that home," says Jakob Elster, co-founder of Crop to Cup and one of the IPRO's advisors. "On each of our bags, we put the origin of the coffee - there's a map of the region it comes from, some background on the farmer, and all the other aspects that go into the coffee - even how many tattoos they have." The complexities involved in organizing not just the distribution of the coffee at IIT, but also the construction project in Gibuzaale, seemed a natural fit for the IPRO program, and Elster was quick to take advantage. "[The project] became much more interdisciplinary and cross-cultural - certainly, dealing with all the issues has been less straightforward than it initially seemed. The IPRO's given us all that depth thanks to the students' work."

Arranging the sale of Mies van der Roast at Global Grounds proved to be a formidable task. IIT has agreements and contracts with Sodexo, Global Grounds, and a number of vendors, and negotiating these in a manner that gave Crop to Cup the opportunity to sell a coffee blend without upsetting existing agreements required a great deal of time and effort. Asked about the groundwork that culminated in this unveiling, Elster said "It took a lot of time just to get enough interest from everyone, and have that interest culminate and get communicated between the different actors. You can imagine it was a pretty complex situation." He acknowledged that Jennifer Keplinger, Director of Academic Services, was instrumental

in moving the process along, including facilitating much of the communication between all involved. "She has been an amazing advocate in making sure that the meetings happened and the people had all the facts."

Every bag of coffee bought provides direct support to the Ugandan farmers whose product students enjoy - the coffee is bought from the farmers directly to ensure this. In addition, part of the proceeds will benefit the IPRO directly in preparing for a return trip to Uganda when they'll be helping make the coffee banda a reality for the people of Gibuzaale. In short, every purchase not only gives a bond between consumer and producer by proudly displaying where (and who) it came from; it also helps further the cause of one of the more ambitious and far-reaching IPROs in the entire program.

Mies van der Roast is available at Global Grounds. The coffee blend is brewed fresh at Global Grounds. For those who wish to make it at home, the coffee can be purchased milled in two sizes, priced at \$9 or \$19. For every pound of coffee sold, IPRO 333 receives \$2 toward the travel costs for their trip. In addition, the farmers who supply the coffee receive a 20% premium on all coffee Crop to Cup purchases, as well as receiving 10% of all profits made from final coffee sales in addition to other reinvestment initiatives by the company.

(Photos by Jean-Emmanuel Guebey)

