

Software City - PE rising

Port Elizabeth is rapidly turning into a software development hub, writes Heather Dugmore

PORT Elizabeth is rapidly rising as a software development city. Companies with headquarters in other South African and international cities are opening offices or expanding their base here for a number of reasons, including the lower cost of property and rentals; the quality of life and the pipeline of graduates who are skilled in software development – a massive global market.

"We develop software for our international partners in the automotive industry, mainly in Germany and Belgium, and there is a massive and growing demand," said Nico Claassen, the software development manager for S4, a Port Elizabeth-based industrial automation company whose clients include Volkswagen, Porsche and Bentley, as well as electric vehicle manufacturers such as Faraday Future and Karma.

The company employs 40 software developers, almost all of them from Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU),



"It will make a huge difference to the economy and intellectual capital of Nelson Mandela Bay Metro and the Eastern Cape"
CHRIS WENTWORTH

predominantly computer science and electrical engineering graduates.

Claassen himself is an electrical engineering graduate from NMMU. Cape town-based Korbitec, a member of the LexisNexis Group, is one of the international companies that opened a software development office in Port Elizabeth this year.

"Port Elizabeth is a really good prospect for us because we are in the business of product development, not outsourcing. NMMU and Rhodes University are our main recruitment areas and have been for the past 11 years," Korbitec's software development and operations general manager Peter Raine said. Also engaging with NMMU, is a

Johannesburg-based company called Yellow Professional Services (YPS) – the technology arm of the international Business Doctor Investments (BDI).

It is negotiating an on-campus joint venture company called UniYellow that will offer students the opportunity to earn money while working on applied knowledge software development, and an opportunity to join the company.

"Software development is a global language that is not confined to a geographical space, and with the scarcity of skilled graduates in this sector, companies are actively engaging with us," said Professor Jean Greyling from NMMU's computing sciences department.

"Our department promotes computer science in schools throughout the province and in George where NMMU has a campus," Prof Greyling added.

This month, one of NMMU's information and communications technology (ICT) graduates, Justin Drennan, was selected as one of the top 31 entrepreneurs under 40 making waves in South Africa with multimedia digital publisher Burn Media's ventureburn.com.

His startup, ParcelNinja, is an e-commerce warehouse whereby companies drop off their stock at smart-warehouse locations, and customers then order via ParcelNinja's admin systems and delivery network.

To build and support innovative new businesses, NMMU established a city-based business incubator called Propella.

The university offers Propella's



FORWARD-THINKING: One of Korbitec's software development teams in action

expertise and research, as well as innovative projects, and its partnership with the Telkom Future Makers programme supports the development of software development and ICT entrepreneurs.

"A big advantage of being part of Propella is that start-ups are groomed and linked with industry partners," Propella's business support manager Ellen Fischat said.

The Seda Mandela Bay ICT Incubator (SNID) is also addressing the growing need for software development in our city, including 24 ICT startups.

According to SNID's executive manager Phumza Mfenyana, they have identified role players in the local economy who can benefit from innovative ICT solutions.

"The software development landscape in PE has really started

to change into a product development hub," NMMU masters graduate Direschin Pather said.

Pather is the CEO of AppN Tech, a Port Elizabeth-based software development company that specialises in native mobile app development for a range of clients.

Third-year NMMU computer science student Cornelius Greyling opened a software house in Port Elizabeth called Avocado Chocolate in January this year, together with three NMMU graduates and a colleague from Cape Town.

AvoChoc clients include Copa America (the world's oldest and one of the largest international football tournaments) and Project Isizwe, the largest government funded public space free Wi-Fi provider in Africa.

Another PE startup is Hello

World Code, founded and run by computer science and electrical engineering students turned entrepreneurs.

NMMU graduate Chris Wentworth established his own company in Port Elizabeth this year called W2IT Solutions.

Wentworth said that up until recently, computer science graduates from NMMU tended to rush off to Johannesburg, Cape Town or head overseas because Port Elizabeth didn't offer sufficient software development opportunities.

"This is changing and it's exciting. It will make a huge difference to the economy and intellectual capital of Nelson Mandela Bay Metro and the Eastern Cape."

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GLOBAL APPEAL: The CEO of Port Elizabeth-based software development company a AppN Tech, Direschin Pather

NEWS IN BRIEF

PE court delays hacker's sentence

THE mastermind behind a R19.7-million hacking scam will hear his fate in less than a month, after yesterday's sentencing was postponed in the Port Elizabeth Magistrate's Court.

Former KwaZulu-Natal Education Department official Mduzuzi Mkhize, 42, appeared briefly in court, where his case was postponed to October 6, due to a Zulu interpreter being sick.

On September 6, Mkhize was convicted on charges which included fraud.

He is accused with former NMMU student Lungisa Kosi, Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality former acting head of staff Kholeka Ngqondi, her husband Khayaletu, Nonhlanhla Mazibuko, Mandisi Busakwe and Phumla Ntonzi, of hacking into the Bay municipality's database in August 2009 to steal close to R20-million.

They are being tried separately from Mkhize and will be back in court on November 25.

The syndicate installed a software programme onto the municipality's database, which then automatically e-mailed the keystrokes to a member of the syndicate.

This information was then used to transfer money from the municipality's account. – Tremaine van Aardt

Fund to appeal Joost payout

THE Attorneys Fidelity Fund's board of control says its legal representatives have read the judgment ordering it to pay former Springbok player Joost van der Westhuizen R385 000 and have advised there are sound grounds for an appeal.

The Pretoria High Court on Wednesday ordered the fidelity fund to pay the money to the ailing former rugby player, who said he urgently needed the money to be paid out from the trust fund of his former attorney, Robert Klippenberg.

The attorney died in December last year. The fidelity fund is a statutory body whose objective is to protect the public against loss as a result of the theft of trust funds by legal practitioners.

Van der Westhuizen, who is seriously ill with motor neuron disease, took the fund to court after his claim for the allegedly misappropriated money was turned down. The fund said yesterday it appreciated the circumstances pertaining to Van der Westhuizen, but that it had a duty to apply the provisions of the Attorneys Act.

"Accordingly, our legal team has been instructed to prepare an application for leave to appeal the aforesaid judgment." The filing of the notice of appeal will result in the suspension of the judgment. – TMG Digital

New police response system tested in Bay pilot project

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PORT Elizabeth is the testing ground for a new policing model to ensure speedy response times and better control over the emergency control room and officials.

The pilot-project system could be rolled out countrywide should teething problems be resolved.

This comes in the wake of recent crime figures showing a rise in violent crimes like murder, car and truck hijackings, and home and business robberies.

Earlier this week, police stations were ordered to send police members, in some cases 10 from a

station, to the operational command centre.

The new system will be rolled out in phases and will allow senior police officials to test reaction times and resources through live monitoring.

The need comes as the 2014-15 annual police report revealed average response time for police to an emergency situation in the Eastern Cape was 18 minutes – one of the longest in the country.

The new project aims to consolidate existing hi-tech resources, such as car-tracking devices and control room computer systems, to ensure a more efficient response – particularly to crimes

still in progress.

The project is the brainchild of national Management Intervention Unit head and deputy national commissioner Lieutenant-General Gary Kruser – who is also spearheading the anti-gang initiative, Operation Lock Down.

Similar concepts are already operational in several first-world countries.

The pilot project involves the Mount Road cluster, which includes the Mount Road, Hume-wood, Walmer, Gelvandale, Bethelsdorp, Kabega Park and Algoa Park police station areas.

Should the pilot project work, it would see police resources com-

bined, leading to intelligence-driven operations and quicker response times.

The project – which launched on Thursday – will see the Bay's multimillion-rand 10111 control centre in Korsten monitored by the operational command centre.

Police spokeswoman Colonel Priscilla Naidu said the centre aimed to integrate and coordinate efforts to prevent and combat crime within the cluster.

Officials involved with the project – who declined to be named as they are not allowed to speak to the media – said the new operation placed pressure on crime intelligence operatives – who

work undercover – to provide information about crime havens and hotspots.

"This would effectively enhance command and control of operational officials on the ground.

"It allows management to identify hotspot areas through crime analysis and then do a mass deployment in that area, while the vehicles and officials can be monitored by the centre."

The operational command centre is the heart of the operation and will be manned by staff and senior officers who can oversee all response (and crime prevention) vehicles 24 hours a day and

also assess 10111 to make sure it operates effectively.

One of the officials said the system would ensure a quicker response but also allow for better oversight and control over police on the road.

"For example, if there is a high-speed car chase and shootout, this system would allow the control room to deploy vehicles to intercept the criminals as well as provide backup to any member in need without them even requesting it," the official said.

"The pilot project aims to identify teething problems so management can assess if it should be rolled out."

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