

Microsoft uploads EC digital hub for rural youths

New Komani facility will also provide training for SMME IT companies as part of emerging partner programme

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The Microsoft Virtual Digital Hub, the first in SA and the Eastern Cape, was set to be a beacon of hope and bridge the digital divide, premier Oscar Mabuyane said at the launch of the facility in Komani on Wednesday.

The hub seeks to spread critical digital skills among small businesses, and build their information and communication capabilities.

Mabuyane said: "While the emerging digital economy presents enormous opportunities, the socioeconomic challenges of our province impede access to these opportunities and prevent citizens from participating actively in this economy."

"Digital transformation is unfolding at a high pace. The digital economy is a reality."

"For anyone to be relevant in

the modern world, they need to know how to navigate the digital economy and be an active participant.

"We are going to ensure that the masses of our province, particularly those in the rural communities, are not left behind. They are going to be part of this digital journey as we seek to end the digital divide," Mabuyane said.

Sixteen SMME 100% black-owned and black women-owned ICT companies will be trained and certified as "Microsoft gold partners" as part of the emerging partner programme.

Microsoft SA CEO Lillian Barnard said: "Our goal of forging important partnerships like this with the public sector is to build SA's ICT capability to navigate the fourth industrial revolution, and help South Africans create new ways to address issues of unemployment, poverty, equity, sustainability and global competitiveness."

The project will select up to 100 Eastern Cape interns to be trained in the Microsoft intern-



PIONEERS: A few of the data science beneficiaries at the launch of the Microsoft Virtual Innovation Hub in Komani on Wednesday, the first to be launched in SA. The hub aims to develop critical digital skills. Picture: SIPHE MACANDA

ship programme aimed at unemployed youth.

Zimkitha Siyali, an unemployed youth from Sterkspruit, is doing a data analysis programme at the hub.

Siyali said: "I got a call last Friday which has to do with skills — a friend of mine took part in it and I decided to put my name down."

"Anything that has to do with skills you have to do."

"It helps you build up your profile at the end of the day. We started on Monday and so far it has been good."

Implementing partners include the Eastern Cape Socio-Economic Consultative Council (ECSECC), the National Electronic Media Institute of SA (Nemisa), Walter Sisulu University (WSU) and non-profit organisation Afrika Tikkun.

Nemisa CEO Trevor Rammatwa said they were the implementing agent.

"The WSU CoLab will assist to reach out to those in rural areas to attend training and to have access to the internet so they can access online platforms. There will also be troubleshoot-

ing available so the participants can be in contact with facilitators. We also hope to work with local municipalities, Technical Vocational Education & Training (TVET) colleges, schools and the Small Enterprise Development Agency (Seda) for maximum access. The digital age cuts across all industries and we need those digital tools," Rammatwa said.

Microsoft government and corporate affairs head Andile Stoffie said the programme would run until December, but was still in its first phase.

"We will deploy and measure the impact of the programme, take the learning and implement accordingly."

"We do not have the value in investment and only once the programmes are implemented will we be able to give those answers," he said.

Also benefiting from the digital schools initiative are 10 Eastern Cape schools, 10 teachers and 10 Grade 10 pupils who will attend workshop designed around the Microsoft Education Transformation Framework.

Uber to expand to smaller towns and cities in SA Rain, cold and wind forecast as front heads up coast

SIKHO NTSHOBANE

E-hailing service Uber has announced plans to expand its operations into smaller SA towns and cities, including Mthatha and Komani.

Uber Sub-Saharan Africa general manager Frans Hiemstra said they were committed to improving access to transport for riders in smaller cities, focusing on affordability and safety.

The expansion will cover at least 21 smaller cities and towns, making the service available in more than 40 cities across the country and serving more than 80% of the urban population.

This means riders will now be able to request an Uber in areas like Polokwane, Cape West Coast, Mbombela, Newcastle, Thohoyandou, Uptington, Mar-

Uber is committed to keeping riders moving and drivers earning and despite the challenges brought on by the pandemic in the last year

gate, Richards Bay, Welkom, Phuthaditjhaba, Ermelo, Garden Route, Kimberley, Emalahleni, Middelburg, Worcester, Rustenburg, Potchefstroom and Klerksdorp.

"Uber is committed to keeping riders moving and drivers earning and despite the challenges brought on by the pandemic in the last year, we are seeing signs of recovery as more consumers are riding with us again," Hiemstra said.

"We're bullish that we can deliver strong growth as we continue to unlock opportunities through the Uber platform and our entry into these new cities is testament to our investment in SA."

Since its launch, Uber has reportedly provided earnings opportunity to more than 15,000 active driver-partners.

Hiemstra said, however, they were not ready to reveal their plans around Uber Eats in areas like Mthatha and Komani just yet.

"We are focusing our efforts on building the best possible product to serve the current markets we are in."

Hiemstra said their ambition was to be everywhere and offer more cities the stress-free convenience and affordability that came with using Uber.

"When we decide to launch in

a city or town, we first look at a number of factors, like smartphone penetration and network quality, and demand from riders and drivers.

"We then look closely at our business model, the needs of our rider and driver community as well as the products offered in each city and provide the best possible option that is unique to that market," Hiemstra said.

While thousands of driver-partners had received earning opportunities, the service had also empowered female drivers to get behind the wheel through various initiatives, including its Women Rider Preferred feature.

Hiemstra said Uber also always engaged with all relevant stakeholders and regulators before setting up operations in any city or town.

Asked if users in areas like

Mthatha and Komani would enjoy the same comfort and safety as users in bigger cities, Hiemstra said safety was top of their priorities for both riders and drivers.

This included vehicle information, instant feedback and traceable trips.

Mthatha businessman Zwelinzima PK Dweba, a nightclub and a restaurant owner, said Mthatha was a very busy place and had been crying out for a service like Uber.

"It is cheap and efficient. But more than anything, it presents an opportunity for our people to start making serious money."

According to Hiemstra, platforms like Uber could help fuel economic recovery in the time of Covid-19 by giving people flexible work to get back on their feet.

MIKE LOEWEE

Another cold front is moving through the Eastern Cape, bringing an estimated 20mm of rain to add to last week's average of 15-20mm. Eastern Cape SA Weather Services spokesperson Garth Sampson said.

The national weather office issued warnings of disruptive, heavy falls, localised flooding and traffic dangers in Buffalo City Metro, Great Kei municipality, Port Alfred, Nelson Mandela Bay, Cape St Francis, Kouga, Patensie, and Joubertina.

The service predicted that air temperatures over Buffalo City would drop to a minimum of

11°C while the day temperature would fall from 20°C on Wednesday to 18°C on Thursday and even 15°C on Friday.

Rainfall over these days would be 3mm, 10mm and 3mm, totalling 16mm.

This rain follows pea-sized hail stones and small cloud bursts which fell over the city on Tuesday night.

Sampson said there would be light snow in the Eastern highlands, but rain would mainly fall on the coast, with some inland as far as Makhanda and Mthatha.

He said the frontal system with a ridging high pressure system would be in place on Wednesday night, Thursday

and into Friday. Rain and wind were expected along the coast as far as Port St Johns.

He said the interior could expect some prefrontal winds but these would only be up to 40km an hour.

The wind, from the west, would be cold, he said.

Sampson stated emphatically that the province would be getting a "major flood" at some point from now on, or "this year or two years' time".

"We are way overdue for a flood and when it comes, it will be devastating," he said.

However, this week's rain would not save the province from drought.

Gogo stuck between walls after fleeing family

SHONISANI TSHIKALANGE

A blind woman in her 60s was fleeing from her children during an altercation over money when she fell and became trapped overnight in a small space between a residence wall and a boundary wall.

The woman, who was trapped for more than 14 hours, was rescued on Saturday after being stuck from about 6pm on Friday.

It is believed that on Friday her children had asked her for money and when she refused, they threatened to burn her Meyerton house, said Midvaal Fire Department station officer Nico Gouws.

"She then fled and tried to

jump the wall to the neighbours but due to her not being able to see, instead of jumping over the wall she managed to jump into the space between the wall and the garage of a neighbour, where she got stuck.

"That was at about 6pm. The neighbour found her the next morning and alerted us," said Gouws.

A neighbour who called for help, Pastor Dasen Govender, said: "My dog was barking in a weird way, very late. When we went out we saw nothing because it was quite dark."

"Early in the morning, after about 7am when my niece went out, she saw the gogo's hand stretched out from where she was stuck.

"I went to the backyard to check. I tried to go close to her and grab her hand to pull her up but I saw she was stuck. My first response was to call the fire department. When they came, the only way they could assist her was to break the wall — that's how tight it was," said Govender.

Gouws, who has been in the fire service for 13 years, said they received a call from the neighbour on Saturday at about 8am. He and crew members Eugene Pienaar, Andries Matee and Doris Seodisa rescued the elderly woman alongside two ER24 paramedics.

Gouws said on arrival he consulted with the neighbour. He was informed she was almost

We couldn't break the wall using a hammer or anything because it would cause further injury

completely blind.

"We then jumped over the neighbour's wall to reach her and make contact to be able to see how she was doing, and she was fully responsive."

Gouws said it took about two minutes to formulate a plan.

"One crew member of ER24 was assisting the lady while we then started with the rescue. Due to the lady being wedged tightly between the walls, we couldn't break the wall using a hammer or anything because it would cause further injury."

"We used the jaws of life, specifically the spreader, to wedge between the garage wall and the precast pillar to push the precast wall away from the lady, and as soon as it was far

enough, we could start the slide out the slabs one by one until she was freed," he said.

Gouws said the rescue took about 10 minutes.

Govender said he had become acquainted with the neighbour in the two years he had lived in the area.

My children and the neighbours close to her have been keeping an eye on her property to see that there is no vandalism or anything, but she hasn't been back yet. I think she is still in the hospital. I tried to get hold of her family but had no luck at this point."

Govender said that, as neighbours, they were concerned about her situation. — *Sunday Times Daily*

Sisters to walk ramp at Miss SA Teen finals



SIMTEMBILE MGIDI

Two Nelson Mandela Bay sisters will walk the ramp at the Miss SA Teen finals.

Manisha Parbhoo, 14, and her sister Hasina, 12, started modelling only in February, but both have already been named finalists in the prestigious beauty pageant for young girls.

The event will be held in Pretoria on October 10.

"Entering the competition was the easy part," Manisha said.

"We had to send pictures of ourselves and an introduction video where you introduce

yourself, hobbies, your interests and why you deserve to be in the finals."

She said that when she started modelling with her sister at the end of February she had not expected they would do this well.

"I started modelling to have fun and to gain self-confidence as I was an introvert and extremely shy."

"I still am kind of shy, but I come from a family of mostly confident, extroverted women. I knew I needed to make a change and I decided to take up modelling," she said.

What followed was a year of great success for Manisha, who went on to be crowned Miss Port Elizabeth Junior Teen, Miss RoleModels (Johannesburg) SA, and, most recently, second princess at the Miss Eastern Cape Teen on August 14.

"When I won those two competitions, plus being named a second princess, I was excited,"

she said.

"I honestly did not expect to win, having been a model for such a short time."

"It was probably the most exciting experience of my life." Hasina was crowned second princess in the Preeteen Miss PE pageant, and queen in the preteen division of Miss RoleModels SA.

On August 14, she was named Miss Eastern Cape Preeteen second princess.

She said she was excited about participating in Miss Teen SA, though she was nervous.

"This is the biggest competition to date, but all the pageants have been wonderful."

"They were all so different, with different models and judges."

"The most nerve-racking moment for me when modelling is when my name is called on stage, but once I am on stage I

am truly happy.

"I have always been shy, but I am far more confident now."

"Winning has always the best feeling."

"If I can celebrate my victory with my sister, that is the most important thing and by far the best feeling."

The girls' mother, Carlolene Forbes, 39, said she and her husband, Himesh Parbhoo, 40, had thought modelling would be a good way for their daughters to build up their self-confidence.

"I used to do modelling when I was younger," she said.

"I entered competitions, but I was never as successful as they are."

"We are proud of them, and we wish them the best."

"It's wonderful that they are winning competitions, but the most important thing is that they enjoy the experience and use their opportunities to the best of their ability."

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