

Orange Farm ICT hub expands

THE ORANGE FARM ICT hub - which has provided local SMMEs, entrepreneurs and students with much-needed business services and skills since it opened in November last year - is expected to be better equipped to serve the local community, after its move from its current premises in the Orange Farm Library complex, to new, larger, premises in the Orange Farm Cultural Centre, at the end of this month.

This is according to Douglas Cohen, project consultant: ICT sector support programme, economic development, City of Johannesburg, who says the idea behind the ICT hub is to grow the economy of Orange Farm, with the community members using the hub to run their businesses, and to provide business advice and business-related services to other businesses in the area.

"In return for ICT skills and business training, a group of eight volunteers now run small businesses in the Orange Farm community, offering a range of services, such as desktop publishing, document scanning, professionally-created business plans and photocopying," Cohen says.

Cohen says awareness of the hub and its activities is key to growing the hub as a viable business. He has appealed to Gauteng businesses to support the hub, by outsourcing DTP services, such as the design of business cards and pamphlets, amongst others, to the hub.

"The hub is fully equipped with computers, printers, telephones, fax machines, photocopiers and related equipment, following a R100 000 donation from



the SA branch of Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC)," he says.

The funds to equip the hub were raised during a CSC corporate golf day held in Cape Town in November last year, according to Gerald Naidoo, CSC SA's director: new business, and CSI executive sponsor. "CSC and its partners wanted to contribute meaningfully to boosting skills development in the community. CSC remains committed to sustained development and the process of skills transfer in Orange Farm and SA," says Naidoo.

CSC SA partnered with the City of Johannesburg and the CSIR Information Technology Centre in establishing the ICT hub. The CSIR Information Technology Centre provided the necessary skills

training and transfer, and brought in the appropriate partners required to connect the hub with the rest of the world, while the City of Johannesburg funded the building of the new centre.

Already, 12 local community members have been trained, and the centre is soon to be used as a test bed for wireless voice technology.

Says Cohen: "The future of this project is even more exciting, with the potential that the wireless connectivity solution will bring.

"Not only does the Web bring access to information, jobs and tenders for local business, but will also include a VoIP telecentre. This means cheaper calls for the community, and even free calls to linked satellites of the hub within Orange Farm, such as clinics, businesses and schools."