

July 2005

## OSS at work in digital doorways throughout SA



What do the towns of Cwili, Mamelodi, Mapela, Mamtwa, Itsoeng, Phuthaditjhaba, Welkom and Soweto have in common? They each boast a Digital Doorway, the innovative kiosk developed by the Department of Science and Technology, the CSIR (Council for Scientific and Industrial Research) and Eskom to promote computer literacy and learning through the concept of minimally invasive education.

The so-called massification (widespread roll-out) of the kiosk has seen some 100 seats deployed in all provinces of SA over the past few months.

### Solution

Open Source Software (OSS) has provided the solution. Says project leader Ronel Smith, "For the two single-seater Digital Doorways (in Cwili and Mamelodi), we have used Debian with KDE for the User PC, while the file server runs on FreeBSD. In the case of the 23 four-seaters, the User PC works on Mandrake with KDE, and the file server on FreeBSD."

Smith cites several advantages to this project of using OSS. "Two significant advantages are the cost saving and the absence of licence agreements," she says. "We are also able to configure the software as needed using our in-house expertise." Remote management and administration can be done with ease using OSS to ensure that the Digital Doorway continues to provide a source of information and a learning tool to all South Africans.

Praise for the Digital Doorway project has been forthcoming from many quarters, both for its innovative use of technology and its widespread impact. It is proving to be an effective and cost-effective means of ensuring that South Africans everywhere are able to bene-



**A four-seater Digital Doorway installed at Phuthaditjhaba, Free State**

fit from the information society. By exposing people to computer technology on their own terms through a device that is accessible and easy to use, the device is promoting the improvement of computer literacy and a growing awareness of science and technology. The incentive to explore and learn is further encouraged by the option to customise content on a Digital Doorway to the needs of the relevant local community. As such, it can be used for other applications, including Government service delivery and information distribution. For more information, please contact Ronel Smith, [rsmith2@csir.co.za](mailto:rsmith2@csir.co.za), [www.meraka.org.za](http://www.meraka.org.za)

