

TOUCHING THE STARS

by Charlotte van Rensburg

Mr Mpostol 'Jerry' Mashinini, a doctoral student in the University of Pretoria's Department of Information Technology and a distinguished businessman, has been declared the best in Africa.

As Sithabile Technology Group CEO and Chairperson of Odirile Investment Holdings, Mashinini had the honour of being named the Top ICT Businessman in Africa at the 8th annual ForgeAhead African ICT Achievers Awards, held in Sandton, Johannesburg, towards the end of 2006.

The theme for the awards was "Make the African century a reality", making it doubly appropriate that Mashinini – who is passionate about African culture and the empowerment of the disadvantaged – should receive this award.

A businessman who believes in giving something back to his community, Mashinini is a founder member of the KwaNdebele Computer Education Centre, established to introduce rural people to the principles of ICT, and the Super Web Trust in Mpumalanga. These initiatives have been highly successful – some 50% of the people who are computer literate in KwaNdebele, Mpumalanga, have received their training through these facilities.

According to Mashinini, he saw an opportunity to bridge the gap between the previously disadvantaged and the global community. "My aim was to empower rural communities to be computer literate. Furthermore, computers have become part of our everyday lives; in today's times you cannot live without technology. My objective is to contribute towards the economic development of our continent by introducing the relevant technologies such as disaster recovery, data management and ICT infrastructure."

A graduate of the UK-based Demon't Fort University with a Bachelor of Business Administration degree and an MBA, he also holds master's and honours degrees in Information Technology from the

Pretoria Technikon and a National Diploma in Computer Data Processing from the Technikon of Northern Gauteng. At the moment, he is doing his doctorate on the ICT topic "how to create a 'cyber community'" at the University of Pretoria. His goal is to implement initiatives from this, as part of his commitment to ICT empowerment.

Mashinini has lectured at the Wits Business School, teaching senior executives about ICT management and value, and at the Technikon Pretoria on a range of ICT-related subjects. He has served as a supervisor for MBA students within ICT. During a public service career spanning more than 15 years, his responsibilities were extended to include participation in several major projects, including Y2K readiness in the transport sector, Y2K management for national and provincial departments in the public service sector and as a transport industry representative on the SADC Y2K project team.

Mashinini has served in senior executive positions at the South African Revenue Service, the Post Office, and the departments of Transport, Land Affairs, Public Service and Administration, Finance (Treasury) and Housing. His extensive experience also provides a significant input in his capacity as a board member of various companies.

His company, Odirile IT Holdings, has a 47.5% interest in the Sithabile Technology Group (STG), a black-owned holding company that operates through subsidiaries that are carefully positioned in focused markets in the ICT sector in the South African economy. Since he took the helm, STG has witnessed phenomenal growth, increasing from a small business with just a dozen employees at its inception, to one that now boasts a staff complement of some 60 people. Mashinini insists that each staff member has clear key performance areas and indicators, a succession plan and a career path that includes all the relevant and appropriate training programmes.

Mashinini derives great satisfaction from company growth, which relates to market share and customer reach, as well as ongoing marketing with customers. "Internally, I am committed to creating

an environment where staff are content, thus ensuring productivity. I am passionate about assisting and empowering everyone around me and growing people from strength to strength, in order for them to achieve their personal goals. I am committed to BEE transformation and am keen to assist upcoming companies to prosper."

"It is vital for the growth of the nation that more black Africans enter the ICT space and develop into major players in this sector, and I would like to think that STG has contributed in some small measure to the development of the people of South Africa," he says.

"STG is also committed to bringing the latest, most reliable and affordable technology within the data management storage arena into the country and, in so doing, helping to grow the South African ICT market. This, in turn, will create even more opportunities for job creation in this vibrant arena and will lead to further empowerment of the previously disadvantaged members of our community," he concludes. 🌐

