

# Company wins award

## Legion Thwala

A novel electricity vending solution has landed Expertron, a company at the Innovation Hub in Pretoria that is part of the Gauteng Government's Blue-IQ initiative, an award.

Expertron managing director, Dr Walter Smuts, received two support programmes for industrial innovation (SPII) awards from the Department of Trade and Industry.

The awards were presented to him by Darkie Africa, MEC of Economic Affairs in the North West Province at an awards ceremony in Mmabatho on November 3.

Expertron was selected as one of ten finalists from among 113 entrants to attend the award ceremony in Mmabatho where they were named the winner of the small business category as well as the winner of the prestigious chairman's award for all categories.

This is the second award that Expertron has received for the Cell Power product.

At the Africa Utility Week in Cape Town

earlier this year, Expertron also received the Eskom-sponsored Prepayment Innovation Award.

Cell Power, developed by Expertron with SPII money support, uses standard cell phones as payment terminals for selling prepaid electricity.

Municipalities can now use vendors from local communities who run their own business to sell electricity to others in their community without any risk as the vendors prepay for the electricity that they sell.

According to Expertron managing director, Dr Walter Smuts, Cell Power has been designed to offer a very low barrier of entry for vendors to start a business. "Vendors register existing mobile phone numbers on the Cell Power server as a vending terminal," he says.

To sell electricity to a client, the vendor sends the transaction details via cellphone to the Cell Power server, which will check if the vendor has sufficient prepaid money and sends back an electricity voucher number.

The client is given

the number in exchange for cash and enters the number on the electricity meter keypad at home to load the purchased credit onto the meter.

Tshwane Metro has been using the Cell Power system operationally since July 2005 by appointing and accepting payments from vendors.

According to Dirk Pieterse, chief engineer of electricity at the Tshwane Metro, who was instrumental in rolling out Cell Power, this electricity vending solution has been successful, not only in delivering, but also in generating jobs.

"During the first year of operation, close to 180 cellphones were registered as payment terminals on the system."

"Tshwane Metro pays the vendors a 5% commission, their vendors have a combined turnover of between R2,5 to R3-million per month, while some of the top vendors turn over about R125 000 per month, translating into a monthly income of approximately R5 500," Dr Smuts concluded.

