

Media release: Immediate



JET SETTERS: Founders of Millbug based in Port Elizabeth, Eastern Cape, Sabelo Sibanda and Thulisile Volwana has left for America and will rub shoulders with other like-minded ICT entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley, in the USA.

SNII client selected by Forbes ranked accelerator for Silicon Valley excursion

January 18, 2016: THE founders of Millbug in Port Elizabeth have been invited on a one-month trip to America to visit Silicon Valley - the world's most influential dreamland for ICT start-ups.

Millbug – a client of Seda Nelson Mandela Bay ICT Incubator (SNII) in Port Elizabeth - members Sabelo Sibanda and Thulisile Volwana also founded another company Tuse along with Michael Kyazze.

Shortly after the launch of Tuse's public beta version of the Tuse application on the Google Play store, they were invited to join Founders Space in Silicon Valley.

Sibanda hails from Port Elizabeth while Volwana is from Engcobo in the Transkei while Kyazze is from Uganda.

Sibanda and Volwana both studied Commerce at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) while Kyazze Michael studied Computer Science at NMMU. The three met through a mutual friend about three years ago.

"Founders Space are one of the top 10 start-up accelerators in Silicon Valley according to Forbes magazine. During the course of the programme, we will interact with corporates, angel investors and the top venture capitalists in Silicon Valley to hopefully take our offerings to the entire world," said an excited Sabelo Sibanda, co-founder of Millbug.

The Tuse application, which launched earlier last year, is an Android app that allows people to communicate freely without the need for traditional telecommunication infrastructure.



WIRELESS COMMUNICATION: The Tuse app allows people to communicate without the traditional telecommunication infrastructure.

"The Tuse app had a public beta launched and the feedback the company received from more than 250 beta testers has helped us design the final product was released in late-December last year. An iOS version of the Tuse app is also being developed," said Sibanda and will be available in February 2016.

"We hope our stay at Silicon Valley will help us build a large network of partners and experts who can help Millbug rapidly deploy our innovations. The problems we are solving are unique and will need significant resources to deploy at scale," said Sibanda.

Millbug, were the developers of the solar powered Vuya Tablet PC in 2013.

After joining SNII three years ago, Millbug today still benefit from the incubator's expertise.

"SNII have been of great assistance in getting the device (Vuya Tablet) tested and certified for sale in compliance with South African law," said Sibanda.

Millbug's co-founder Thulisile Volwana was also mentioned by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for releasing Africa's first solar powered tablet, the Vuya Tablet. The tablet uses wi-fi only for connectivity and takes at least eight hours to charge.

"Being mentioned by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation gave us exposure and it helps when it comes to client and user acquisition. The article is a fantastic endorsement as the Gates Foundation does a lot of really amazing things the world over. It is a privilege for our work to be recognized and acknowledged by them," said Volwana.

Sibanda said that working towards a smart, safer and green city through technology needed to be sped up in Nelson Mandela Bay.

He recommends that green energy practices be observed as well as the adoption of free communications protocols.

"All smart cities, traditionally, begin with internet ubiquity. This is reliant on the availability of traditional telco infrastructure or open wi-fi initiatives. The wide adoption of the freely available Tuse application would cover a region at almost no cost and ensure safe, decentralised and free communication. Running on our solar powered tablet PCs, we can have a green and smart city through technology which is starting to happen in Port Elizabeth where we have built the required solutions. But there is a long way to go."

Apart from developing the Vuya Tablet and the Tuse app, they have also developed solutions for various clients from Port Elizabeth, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Ghana, Nigeria and the United Kingdom.

Millbug's goal is, according to Sibanda, to "always bring happiness to people who need it the most. Altruistic as it sounds, this implies solutions ubiquity in our chosen field".

His advice for upcoming businesses is to treat employees with respect and dignity which is the quickest way to succeed.

"They pay it forward to your clients. It's easy to persevere when everyone has the same goal and vision that you all work together on consistently."

Sibanda added that there has never been a better time to be a technology entrepreneur. "Focussing solely on making money is the quickest way to fail."

Sipelo Lupondwana, SNII centre manager, congratulated the Millbug team for being selected to visit Silicon Valley.

“Millbug’s Vuya tablet was successfully commercialised through incubator support last year. The device received various international media attention. Our Enterprise Development team all played a crucial role in successfully commercialising Millbug Vuya,” said Lupondwana.

He added that SNII will continue to be the place where Port Elizabeth’s technology entrepreneurs, young ICT businesses, and inventors with ideas come to in order to be developed into successful enterprises.

“We offer world-class office facilities and spaces, IT infrastructure and connectivity to reduce the cost of doing business. We also have good business coaches, mentors and business support services in place.”

During the 2014/15 financial year SNII 10 new ICT and technology start-ups were established from 11 projects. In terms of job creation from SNII clients, 46 direct jobs, 102 indirect jobs and 25 casual jobs were created for Nelson Mandela Bay’s regional economy during the 2014/15FY.

The combined turnover of SMMEs and incubator beneficiaries added R5,1 million to the regional economy of Port Elizabeth.

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Issued on behalf SNII by Meropa Communications

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