

# Innovative centre 'aims to do, not just talk'

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**O**n Wednesday 2 August 2017, the brand new and exciting Symbiosis Innovation & Acceleration Centre (SIAC), officially opened shop in the re-purposed South African Manufacturing Technology Demonstration Centre (SMTDC) in the Atlantis industrial area.

SIAC aims to kickstart Atlantis and the surrounds' commercial growth path, something that has stalled in recent years, by deploying an innovative approach to income-creation for local inhabitants, particularly the youth. On the realisation that SMTDC could not rely on Government funding or handouts, and needed itself, to become self-sustaining – a question of practicing what it preached – CEO Cornelius Scheepers, went in search of ways to create a space that would bring people from community and business together, to collaborate for mutual benefit. The result was the revamped and re-focused SIAC. Speaking to a jam-packed room on opening day, Scheepers, referenced a revitalised future for Atlantis and the West Coast saying: "We have taken the lessons from the past, understanding that we cannot act in isolation, which only promotes marginalisation, but that business, academia, civil society and all affected parties in any given area, need to work together to achieve the desired outcome – in this case economic inclusion. "Symbiosis is not interested in 'talking, but in doing' in partnership with this community." As pointed out by Chief Operations Officer and SIAC shareholder, Patrick Kadalie, the word 'symbiosis' refers to a mutually beneficial relationship between different people or groups. "This is how SIAC differentiates itself from the typical business incubator. We do not just want to service one sector such as manufacturing, as with the SMTDC, but

rather cut across multiple sectors such as agriculture, low carbon economy, media and many others." Putting words into practise, SIAC is partnering with the private sector to create real and sustainable opportunities, instead of relying on public funding, which is also under severe threat. According to Kadalie, this, what he calls 'Hybrid' model, will essentially ensure that communities become self-sufficient. SIAC also envisages that the model they use in Atlantis, can also be successfully rolled-out, into any community, to achieve the same positive results.

One of the first private sector projects to find a home at SIAC, is a fully equipped 120-seater call centre. The call centre was destined for Cape Town's Southern Suburbs, but after negotiations, Tai Collard, owner of Jataro Connect, was convinced to move the project to Atlantis instead. Once fully operational, the call centre aims to create 360 jobs – something the town looks forward to, as evidenced by the scores of young people queuing at the gates since dawn on the day of the launch. Also forming part of the centre's offering is Afrika Tikkun Services (ATS), that among other things, specialises in youth skills development and placement projects. "All of the young people outside those gates need to understand that they are superheroes. We do not think it's fair to tell young people all the problems we already know. We ask them to be part of the solution, and when they become the creators of their own solutions, you won't get people breaking down gates in search of employment," said Faatin Bux from ATS.

Yet another initiative that directly speaks the ethos and aims of SIAC, is the Impact Media Youth Hub, brainchild of Peter Lategan, a local entrepreneur and publisher of Impact News. His passion for his community, youth



**NEW BLOOD:** Stakeholders, staff and guests at the recent opening of SIAC, flanked by Scheepers (left) and Kadalie (right).

and the cultivation of other entrepreneurs has prompted him to enter into a collaborative agreement with SIAC. The hub will train young people in photography, journalism, design, radio presenting and production, filming and many other facets of media. Recruits will be trained to become entrepreneurs and effectively become co-owners of these hubs, changing the mind-shift from jobseekers to job-creators. SIAC will allow these selected young people to immediately leverage the business opportunities presented by being part of the innovation centre. "Atlantis has generally been portrayed negatively by mainstream media. By changing the narrative, we can change perceptions about our town and its people, something Impact News has been doing for six years," said Lategan. "The Impact Media Youth Hub will now assist young people to not only tell their own stories but use media to promote Atlantis as an investment destination of choice and a community that is busy turning the tide," he concluded. The event was attended by the executive and shareholders of SIAC, as well as civil society, business, community leaders, representatives from local government as well as the Mayor's office and of course, the youth themselves.



**BIG PLANS:** Cornelius Scheepers, Riaan Herbst (EOH), Glenda Bhana and Patrick Kadalie are some of the masterminds behind SIAC.