

Key to safe, reliable and affordable transport

The Tshwane University of Technology's (TUT) Department of Small Business Development has been awarded the R5 million Gibela Research Chair in Manufacturing and Skills Development to establish a technology incubator under the Enterprise Incubator Programme.

Officially registered as the Rail Manufacturing Centre For Entrepreneurship Rapid Incubator NPC, its mandate is to support the modernising and renewal of an ageing railcar fleet.

Prof Khumbulani Mpofu says, "It will also ensure safe, affordable and reliable commuter transportation, thus

directly and indirectly contributing to economic growth in the country as a driver in developing new technology-based enterprises and cooperatives.

"The Rail Incubator will translate TUT's technological innovations into new technology-based businesses.

Successful incubatees are earmarked for the Gibela Supplier Park, an ecosystem for suppliers to the Gibela manufacturing facilities and will supply parts in the railcar manufacturing value chain."

Incubatees' year-long contracts will be signed by 30 September and they will receive business training for the dur-

ation. Graduates will provide either a product or service to the railcar manufacturing industry.

In 2013, a contract was signed between PRASA and Gibela, a consortium established by Alstom Southern Africa Holdings, Ubumbano Rail and New Africa Rail.

Then, last year Gibela entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with TUT to cooperate in research and development through a Research Chair to support the replacement of the rail agency PRASA's fleet with a modern service.

The Research Chair was then appointed under the De-

partment of Industrial Engineering's Professor Khumbulani Mpofu.

He elaborates, "Our vision is to pioneer innovative research in manufacturing technology development and manufacturing value chain skills development geared for the revitalisation of the South African commuter railcar-manufacturing sector."

The Gibela Research Chair has a Steering Committee with three members from the consortium, three from TUT's academia and an international advisor.

It also has research students working closely with the Gibela partners to resolve

challenges faced in the state-of-the-art manufacturing facility.

This research contributes to both human capital development and the promotion of manufacturing technology entrepreneurship as well as job creation to address inequality and poverty, while preparing the students for work in the manufacturing industry.

Last night Prof Keolebogile Motaung, founder: Global Health Biotech (Pty) Ltd; and assistant dean: Postgraduate Studies, Research, Innovation and Engagement, Faculty of Science, was a 1917/1918 NSTF award winner.