

ISOC-ZA Press Announcement

[14 March 2005] The South African chapter of the Internet Society (ISOC-ZA) announced the first Internet Fiesta to be held in South Africa. Internet Fiesta is a global event that is organised by the various chapters of the Internet Society, on an annual basis to promote the Internet to communities that have little or no online experience. The first Fiesta will be held in Belhar, a remote suburb of Cape Town and starts at 11am on Saturday 19 March, and runs through the night until 3pm on Sunday 20 March.

According to Alan Levin, chairperson of ISOC-ZA, "Internet Fiestas have been proven across the globe as a fun-filled and successful Internet outreach model, introducing the Internet to communities that have little or no online experiences." ISOC-ZA partnered with the disadvantaged community of Belhar in Cape Town to achieve this goal. "The community which has a high rate of unemployment, volunteered to assist with local arrangements," says Levin.

The Shuttleworth Foundation will sponsor fifty computer stations running Ubuntu Linux, the most popular open source operating system. The Uninetwork ISP is sponsoring a 2Mb/s broadband connection.

The project team has induced the local council to renovate the community hall in time for the Fiesta. As a knock on effect that decision stimulated the Universal Services Agency decision to sponsor the community centre development as a telecentre after the Fiesta.

"A wide range of catering featuring local foods and local music and entertainment has been arranged. Together with the electrical installations, basic marketing costs, catering and security has been organised with the support of the Provincial Government of the Western Cape" says Levin. In future the Fiesta will be rolled out to other disadvantaged rural areas around South Africa. The department for Government Communications and Information Systems (GCIS) has also come on board to assist with marketing this inaugural event.

ISOC-ZA members together with members of the Schools Linux User Group (SLUG) will act as volunteers to the hundreds of people expected to join in on the festivities while learning more about how the Internet can benefit disadvantaged communities. In India for example there are over 50, 000 Internet Café's where many families use it to stay in touch with sons and daughters in North America and the United Kingdom at a fraction of the cost of making a long distance telephone call.

The event is open to all and there is no entrance fee. "The overall goal of ISOC-ZA is to develop our Internet society and engender enthusiasm for Internet technologies. By working closely with the community, we expect to demonstrate its potential for social and economic upliftment" says Levin.

More volunteers are needed to help make this event a huge success. Interested parties can contact Jennifer Husler at jenni@isoc.org.za.

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