

# Eskom lights the way for SMMEs

BY SAMANTHA KAUSA

THE Eskom Development Foundation honoured the finalists of their 2009 Small Business Investment competition at a glitzy awards dinner held at Kyalami Castle in Gauteng last month.

The finalists hailed from across SA and represented the agricultural, manufacturing and services sectors. They were chosen from 101 entrants after the foundation advertised the competition in local media.

Any small business, not only foundation grant holders, could enter provided that it had been in business for more than 18 months. The investment competition launched in March last year, together with the annual small business expo, is one of their flagship projects.

The Eskom Development Foundation is a wholly owned subsidiary of beleaguered electricity utility Eskom and began its operations in January 1999 as a vehicle for Eskom to deliver on its corporate social investment (CSI) objectives, one of which is the development and

promotion of sustainable small businesses.

Rather than hand out loans, the foundation provides small business owners with grants with which to improve their knowledge of finance, marketing, products and other essential business processes, as well as to occasionally buy equipment.

Grant holders are monitored and assisted with mentors where necessary for about two to three years. This is to ensure that the grant has been correctly used and the business is on a sound footing.

"Eskom is by no means the only contributor to the South African SMME sector. We have, however, taken a different approach," says Haylene Liberty, foundation CEO.

"This approach gives small companies a boost and frees the owners up so he or she can grow the business and employ people. The additional problem of repaying a loan and interest is removed.

"The highlight of the foundation's support to SMMEs of course, is this competition and the accompanying Eskom Small Business Expo."



From left: Ashlee Nankoo of Ashlee Panelbeaters; Haylene Liberty, CEO of Eskom Development Foundation; Thomas Ntsie of Ntsie Cast Iron Manufacturing; Dalisu Thelmmela of Dala-lsu Trading Enterprises.

Three business owners were chosen as winners from the 22 finalists per province representing registered, black-owned SMMEs, one each from the agricultural,

manufacturing and services sectors. The winners of the competition will be further developed with the view of enhancing their skills and business performance as entrepreneurs

as well as making sure that these enterprises operate in an energy-efficient manner.

As part of being chosen as a finalist, the business owners had the opportunity to showcase their products or services at fully subsidised stands at the Eskom Small Business Expo which took place from September 12 to 14.

According to Liberty, the expo has in its 12 years of existence proved its worth over and over again. "This year we had more than 100 exhibitors and estimate we had about 8 000 visitors, many of whom represented major companies wishing to create links with SMME companies," she says. "Through the expo we create avenues for the SMMEs to market and sell products and there have been many success stories emanating from Eskom's support to small businesses.

"We found that many of the companies have grown significantly. Some have become exporters, most had created jobs in their communities and others have even grown to the extent of supporting local community projects."