

Profiting from their experience

SMALL businesses can access free mentoring and support in Dandenong on Wednesday 16 October.

The State Government's Mobile Business Centre last visited the area 12 months ago.

It provides information about Small Business Victoria's year-round services including low-cost seminars, workshops and programs.

There's also extensive literature on board about planning, starting and growing a business - everything from registering for taxation to formulating a business plan.

South East Metropolitan Region MP Gordon Rich-Phillips said a pool of volunteers from the Small Business Mentoring Service would provide expert advice during the visit.

"These mentors have extensive experience either running their own small business or working in senior management roles," he said.

"Their skillset includes marketing, finance, human resources and sales."

The Mobile Business Centre will be on the corner of Walker and McCrae streets in Dandenong between 10am and 4pm on 16 October.

Visit business.vic.gov.au/mbc or call Small Business Victoria on 13 22 15 for more information or to book a mentoring centre.

Grant stirs creative juices

A \$20,000 grant will help central Dandenong food businesses make the most of the revitalisation happening around them.

City of Greater Dandenong last week received the cash through the State Government's Streetlife program for a Food Retailers Capacity Building pilot. The council's retail development co-ordinator Leanne McCready said 10 businesses would take part in an individually tailored mentoring program.

"Support may cover core retail management skills, business planning, visual merchandising, customer service, marketing, HR issues and technology," she said.

"The pilot project - which has the potential to be extended across the municipality - helps build on Greater Dandenong's identity as a 'foodie destination' with involvement in the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival, Good Food Month plus our ongoing food and cultural tours."

Streetlife is a four-year program that supports Victorian businesses through grants to develop targeted projects to improve competitiveness and economic outcomes in shopping precincts.

Small Business Minister Louise Asher said retail was the state's second largest employer and a key economic driver.

"The Streetlife program recognises that local retailers have experienced a number of challenges over recent years, including a tough local climate, online retailing and restrained consumer spending," she said.



Hilton manufacturing managing director Todd Hartley looks over the solar panel field. 106145

Picture: DONNA OATES

Switched on to solar

By CASEY NEILL

HILTON Manufacturing's solar farm is the largest of its kind in the southern hemisphere.

Each of the 340 panels installed on the Dandenong South factory's roof will follow the sun to soak up as much energy as possible.

Managing director Todd Hartley switched the system on for the first time last Friday 4 October.

"Over the past week we thought we may have made a huge mistake, with all the wind and rain," he said.

"We were starting to think a wind farm may have been more productive."

"I believe Jacques (Esper) our project manager even went to bed with his lap top on Monday night to

watch the rooftop live feed in case any panels blew off in the 130km/h an hour winds.

"The journey has begun."

The panels will generate 98.6 kW of power per hour - 40 times greater than the average single residential solar installation.

"To our knowledge there is nothing of this scale in the southern hemisphere," Mr Hartley said.

"This is a great news story not only for Hilton but for the region."

"We want to encourage other local businesses and educational facilities to visit our site and learn more about environmental sustainability."

"We hope the work we have done with our factory will inspire the community around us to grasp a greener future."

A rooftop viewing platform will serve as a showpiece for factory visitors and give easy access for maintenance.

Terry Bremner from power and automation technologies company ABB said the installation was "globally unique".

"There is nothing like this in the world," he said.

"All I can say is wow. Six months ago this was just a factory roof."

The former Federal Government provided a \$250,000 grant for the project.

"Over time it makes you money," Isaacs MP Mark Dreyfus said.

"Other companies can come and see it in operation."

"Seeing is believing."

Hilton started 37 years ago in a 200 square metre tin shed in Hilton Street, Dandenong.

"We currently employ 230 staff, at last count, consisting of 25 different nationalities," Mr Hartley said.

"We are a preferred supplier to the defence, truck, leisure, health care, bus, traffic management and rail industries."

"We produced just shy of 1.6 million parts last calendar year."

"We are one of the country's largest sub-contract sheet metal manufacturers."

Mr Hartley described the business as dynamic, diversified and progressive.

"Manufacturing is alive and well," he said.