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Parastus Nepolo

AirConditioning and Refrigeration Technician

What started off as fixing domestic electrical and refrigeration appliances while in his first year at the Windhoek Vocational Training Centre (WVTC) has catapulted Parastus Nepolo's business into a fully-fledged entity that now renders services to individuals, private sector and the Government.

The 40-year old Nepolo, known among his peers as Mdu, originally hails from Okathima KaNangolo in Omusati. He is the owner of a prospering and successful business; Millennium Refrigeration & Electrical.

Born Entrepreneur

Soon after graduating as a qualified Airconditioning and Refrigeration Technician, and driven by the desire to be his own boss, Nepolo

trusted that inner voice and went with his gut in registering his company, Millennium Refrigeration & Electrical. "I had this dream to become an independent contractor, even before I enrolled at Windhoek VTC. I never wanted to go look for employment. I wanted to start my own business and be my own boss," he remarks.

It was during his time at Windhoek VTC that Nepolo started to put the building blocks in place for what was to become Millenium Refrigeration & Electrical, a company which today employs about 120 permanent and 40 casual employees at its eleven branches in Windhoek, Ongwediva, Keetmanshoop, Rundu, Mariental, Opuwo, Eenhana, Swakopmund, Grootfontein, Otjiwarongo and Katima Mulilo. "While in my first year, I started walking from door to door



and fixed the domestic electrical appliances of home owners. In my second year, I started purchasing broken appliances from students, which I fixed and resold to new university students and at the Katutura State Hospital Nurses Home", he relates.

Balancing classes with his booming business was not easy. Nepolo and a classmate, Chris Simon, who today is the company's Technical Manager, would often have to walk to the Old Compound in Katutura, where they opened a stall. "Ours was very much an afternoon business. Customers would drop their appliances at the stall next door and we would collect them and work late into the evening fixing them, whereafter we would have to return to the Windhoek VTC hostel by foot. Times were tough, but we persevered. Success never comes on a silver platter. With determination and

resolve, you can turn hardship into triumph", he notes.

A Busy World

Airconditioning and refrigeration technicians install, maintain and repair heating, cooling and refrigeration systems and equipment. They may install ducted airconditioning in a family home, or build large walk-in refrigeration units for businesses needing mass food storage. They bolt and build units into buildings with brackets, piping, gas and water lines, cabling and wires. Following pre-set specifications, they use motors, pumps, filters, switches and gauges to put together the heating or cooling system that is required for the job.

Millennium Refrigeration & Electrical specialises in the

installation of domestic and industrial airconditioning and refrigeration systems, cold-freezer rooms and electric and solar networks. "Airconditioners are becoming commonplace, especially considering the Namibian climate with its harsh summers and cold and dry winters. Having a proper airconditioning system in place helps reduce heat and humidity, thus reducing the impact on our ability to perform and complete work tasks", Nepolo says. "The work environment might seem physically demanding, but I have employed many graduates, including female graduates, who take care of installations and service maintenance for our customers, which include service shops, hotels, factories and cold storage plants.

It's all about talent, skills, hard work and passion", Nepolo says.

Growing Business

Nepolo is certainly not resting on his laurels and has now ventured into construction, real estate, property development, tourism and the services sectors. "I am always on the lookout for new opportunities, and as such, I have entered into a number of business partnerships, which include a lodge, bakeries and three residential complex construction projects. Millennium Refrigeration & Electrical also has its own warehouse from which we sell refrigeration, airconditioning and electrical spares and components", he explains.

His business acumen is also recognised by industry peers who have elected him into the structures of the Namibia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NCCI). "They know me as a strong advocate for local economic

Passion for VET

Nepolo remains a firm believer in the potential of Vocational Education and Training in empowering technically inclined youth with the skills so desperately needed to build and strengthen the Namibian economy. “Without technical and vocational skills, we would not have buildings, electricity, and infrastructure. It doesn’t matter how you look at it. If you don’t have these skills, you don’t have an economy. We don’t have to look far for evidence. Look at Germany, Finland, South Korea. Strong economies built on technical and vocational skills”, he said.

He also serves on the Namibia Training Authority’s Airconditioning and Refrigeration Technical Working Group, responsible for the development of industry-relevant training curricula in this area. “I believe that improving quality in our discipline should be a shared responsibility. As industry roleplayers, we need to remain involved in the further development of our discipline and to support its further growth. My company therefore takes in Airconditioning and Refrigeration trainees from across the country as interns, because we believe that we need to play a role in their empowerment and in preparing them for the world of work. Its all about partnership”, Nepolo explains. He also maintains strong ties with his alma mater, the Windhoek Vocational Training Centre, where he was the

motivational speaker at the 2015 graduation ceremony.

Perception

Asked about how to deal with the unfair societal perception under which technical and vocational occupations are labelled as inferior options with limited prospects for career growth, Nepolo encouraged parents to reject the notion that technical and vocational training courses are not worth pursuing.

Vitality

Nepolo believes in planning and routine. He wakes up at 04:45 and exercise in his home gym for an hour. He has daily on-site planning meetings at 07:30 where they discuss key daily assignments and progress. Each meeting ends with a prayer, whereafter his teams leave for their work sites.

Ascribing his growth as an entrepreneur to the support he enjoys from his wife and family, Nepolo believes in ploughing back. As the patron of the Onampila Combined School in Oshana, he is a staunch supporter of the school’s excellence programme and sponsors cash prizes to the top academic performers, annually. His former primary school, Emvula Combined School named their sports field after him, after he invested in sports equipment and in upgrading work. Today, Parastus Nepolo is not only an Airconditioning and

Refrigeration Technician, he is also an entrepreneur, a teacher, a technical expert, a business leader and a philanthropist. His story and passion for what he does teach us that success is not the key to happiness. That, on the contrary, happiness is the key to success. That, if you love what you are doing, success is sure to follow.

Sometimes it is difficult to accept my new role to manage a growing enterprise as its Managing Director, and that instead of picking up a screwdriver or wrench, I have to deal with contracts and meetings to grow and sustain the business. But, I still get my hands dirty from time to time. This is just who I am. Once a technician, always a technician.

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