

Taxi owners on course to be 'professionals'

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THE owners of taxis, whose drivers have a reputation for being rude and unruly, want to be seen as respectable businessmen.

Hundreds of taxi owners in KwaZulu-Natal will benefit from an innovative university programme that will equip them to deal with basic accounting, computer technology and information on laws that affect the industry.

Sixteen taxi owners gathered at Durban University of Technology on Tuesday for an "orientation" meeting about the programme, believed to be the first of its kind in the province.

A priority for taxi owners was to clean up the image of the industry. Asked by a lecturer what they desired, most said they wanted to change their image of "bosses" to that of professional businessmen.

Others said they wanted to improve their financial skills.

The programme is being organised by the university's enterprise development unit and eThekweni Transport Authority will finance the training.

Hassan Shaibes, who chairs Copper Sunset Trading, said, "We need to change the face of taxi operators. We need people to see us differently. This stigma must change. People see

us as a group of thugs, violent and disrespectful, not as offering roadworthiness and customer relations.

"Most importantly they do not perceive us as professional business people. But all this is about to change.

"Most of us have years of experience in this industry. With this experience and the project, we will change perceptions using the skills we are taught to become professionals in the transport industry.

"We expect this programme to legitimise us as proper businessmen. It will take us to great heights. We can even become consultants in the transport industry and operate professionally in other business ventures," said Shaibes.

He said the two taxi associations had about 120 members and there was no programme to empower the taxi business.

Strini Pillay, DUT lecturer, said the programme would not only provide taxi owners with skills but would help remove the stigma attached to the taxi industry.

Pillay said he had big plans to make the programme a success, which included assignments for the taxi owners and sessions on Saturdays.

He said one of the plans included drawing up a code of ethics for taxi owners and drivers.

"It is important that we

have input and take collective decisions. You will be treated like students, sign an attendance register and follow a draft timetable," he told the meeting.

"Life is but a journey, enjoy the ride. You damage the road, you damage the vehicle," he said.

Pillay said he was confident the 16 who attended would graduate at the end of June.

Surendra Thakur, head of the enterprise unit and the chairman of the KZN branch of the Computer Society of SA, said taxi owners would be shown how to search for information on the internet.

"We intend to ensure taxi operators not only cross the digital divide but embrace technology to enhance their business," said Thakur.

The programme kicked off after two years of discussions between eThekweni Transport Authority, the enterprise unit, Durban Taxi Leadership and Copper Sunset Trading – which comprises South and North Beach Taxi Association and the Inner Circle Taxi Association.

Erik Moller of the eThekweni Transport Authority said he was excited at the turn-out of taxi owners.

"It is great that there is so much interest in the initiative. It started smoothly and has the potential to end well."