



# Son of the soil

A PASSION FOR PLANTS AND LANDSCAPING LED A YOUNG DURBAN ENTREPRENEUR TO START A GROUNDBREAKING BUSINESS THAT IS GROWING FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH, WRITES GARTH JOHNSTONE

Originally from Port Shepstone, Bulelani Cele is very at home in his office at Eagle Building in the Durban city centre. But his passion is away from the bustle and high-rise buildings, in the gardens and grounds of homes, offices and in rural areas.

After completing studies in electrical engineering at the Durban Technical College and doing his apprenticeship with an automotive components company, Bulelani – who has worked extensively in the Ridge area – discovered his passion for landscaping. "My uncle worked for a large landscaping firm and, after seeing what he did, I used to spend every

weekend and holiday on site soaking it all up."

Bulelani continued in his position at Feltex Automotive and studied project management, but the landscaping bug had bitten him hard. He started helping his uncle on site, particularly with design and layout and, when his uncle grew seriously ill, Bulelani was recommended to manage the site of a major job at Sibaya casino. "My uncle died in 2004, but while he was ill in hospital, he put my name forward to the landscaping company," says Bulelani.

This was the first seeds of his own company, Asizame Landscaping (which would later be renamed Vico Landscapes) and soon he had turned his back on electrical engineering to run his own landscaping business. By August 2005 he had set up business in a flat on North Beach, before moving to Eagle Building in July 2006.

Key to the success and stability of Asizame, says Bulelani, was a contract he was awarded to run a "Greening the Nation" project in the Eastern Cape in late 2005. "I had been working on this tender for a long time and once I had secured it I could focus on getting my business running smoothly."

The tender worth R1.5 million, funded by the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism and implemented by the South African National Biodiversity Institute, was a "hugely rewarding job" which allowed Bulelani to develop and improve skills crucial to the running of the business.

In October 2007 Asizame cc made way for Vico Landscapes (Pty) Ltd and Bulelani and his team set about securing new contracts. Vico, incidentally, is a clan name associated with Bulelani's family. "It also sounds like a shortened version of 'victory'," he says. Today the business has 14 full-time workers and uses a number of casual labourers. Bulelani believes strongly in developing student talent, "and if they succeed and prove themselves, sure I will give them an opportunity".

Annual turnover tops R2 million a year, and work includes a project with Real Landscapes at Sibaya Lodge, greening projects for the eThekweni Municipality in the INK area and in

