

Vukile launches Retail Academy to give emerging retailers a head start

Retail Reit Vukile Property Fund has launched the Vukile Retail Academy to unearth and develop the next generation of talented retail entrepreneurs. The one-year programme developed by the academy will incubate emerging retail SMMEs, giving them on-the-ground experience in a formal shopping centre environment rent-free.



From left: Charmaine Monama from Mbewu, Amy Ntsane and Tsholofelo Mabonela from Lielo Beauty, Itumeleng Mthibeli from Vukile Property Fund, Thandeka Dlathe from The Scrummy Ice-Cream, Mpho Masia from Ikhaya Homeware and Given Koka from Malea Garments. Source: Supplied

The Vukile Retail Academy aims to develop the next generation of retail tenants, mentoring and guiding selected small businesses to set them up for success in SA's competitive retail environment. The initiative also expands the tenant base for Vukile shopping centres with new retail experiences, and looks to benefit the broader retail and retail property industries by fostering new talent.

This year, the academy has selected nine small retail businesses from more than 100 applicants for an opportunity to open their own retail stores in Vukile shopping malls. The first five candidates opened at Randburg Square in Johannesburg this month.

Candidates receive rent-free store space in a Vukile mall, assistance with store fit-out, financial support, interactive learning through a holistic mentorship programme from pre-eminent retail experts and access to the Vukile team to ensure their success.

During the year they commit to the programme, the small retailers will provide Vukile with quarterly updates on their business progress. As these up-and-coming businesses go through the Vukile Retail Academy programme, the property company will be looking for exceptional candidates to partner with to ensure their future growth.

De-risking entry into formal retail

According to Vukile, the initiative's positive social and economic impacts extend beyond enabling new retail businesses and empowering entrepreneurs – shoppers will have more choice, malls will have more variety, and more jobs will be added to

the retail value chain from design and construction to sales and distribution.

The nine retailers selected for the programme's 2022 launch are in different early business stages – some started selling online, others from markets and pop-ups. Together with Vukile, they will take a giant leap forward into the formal retail space – a highly competitive arena that has previously been inaccessible to most people starting on their entrepreneurial journey.

Laurence Rapp, CEO of Vukile Property Fund, says, “We are excited to further the economic development of South Africa and empower the next generation of retailers through innovative partnerships and a shared passion for retail. We are thrilled to welcome the Vukile Retail Academy's first candidates.

“By de-risking their entry into formal retail spaces, Vukile offers a unique marketplace concept that enables small businesses to formalise, diversify and thrive within a shopping centre ecosystem and compete in the greater economy.”



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19 Sep 2022



From fashion to beauty, homeware and food

The first nine Vukile Retail Academy candidates include Fakizinto Concepts and Malea Garments in the fashion, clothing and shoes category. Food retailers include Delisabhem Restaurant, The Scrummy Ice-Cream, Tso's Cafe and the confectionery of Zanwabo Cakes. Lielo Beauty, Ikhaya Homeware & Décor and Mbewu Fruit and Veg complete the lineup.

The entrepreneurs will be accommodated in modern retail spaces in either Daveyton Mall in Ekurhuleni, Dobsonville Mall in Soweto, Hillfox Value Centre and Randburg Square in Johannesburg. All the Vukile Retail Academy's store spaces will span 1,035sqm and feature identifiable similarities, but they will also be tailored to the products sold, the mall they are in and the shoppers they serve.

The first five Vukile Retail Academy retailers opened at Randburg Square in October 2022. They are:

Mbewu Fruit and Veg - Charmaine Monama

Kearabilwe Charmaine Monama started her fruit and vegetable business in 2018. Her business was born out of necessity. As her family was growing, she realised she was running out of affordable tricks to keep healthy meals on the table, and she knew she was not alone in this struggle. She is passionate about showcasing South Africa's indigenous foods and works with small-scale farmers and agri-businesses who, like her, believe in producing food sustainably.

The Scrummy Ice-Cream - Thandeka Dlathu

Thandeka Dlathu's love for all things delicious led her to finding her passion in ice cream. She started her business so that she can make people happy while doing what she loves. In opening her store, The Scrummy Ice Cream, her hopes are that her unique creations will keep ice cream lovers returning again and again for a scoop of her finest flavours.

Lielo Beauty - Tsholofelo Mabonela and Amy Ntsane

Amy Ntsane and Tsholofelo Mabonela are friends and business partners. They started their business in 2021 after finding a gap in the market to cater to women who are looking for beauty and make-up products that work with their African skin tones. Apart from creating a brand that can compete on a global scale, the entrepreneurs are motivated by their desire to serve women with their skill, by making each consumer who uses their products look and feel beautiful.

Ikhaya Homeware - Mpho Maisa

Mpho Maisa started her business in January 2021, driven by her love for home decor and designer furniture. Maisa's motivation comes from seeing the joy on her client's faces once she has delivered a finished piece of furniture to her client's specifications. She one day hopes to furnish some of the most lavish homes in South Africa with her brand of products.

Malea Garments - Given Koka

Given Koka discovered his passion for fashion design while he was in high school. He was motivated to follow his dream of creating designs and making people look good and from there, decided to start his brand, Malea Garments, in 2018. Koka's design style is streetwear meets youth culture. He wants to share his passion with young people by making his designs trendy and accessible.



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Lauren Hartzenberg 8 Aug 2022



Itumeleng Mothibeli, MD SA at Vukile, says, "This is a real opportunity that is breaking down barriers and disrupting the retail landscape by bringing emerging retailers serving niche market segments into the mainstream. Our selection process was rigorous and we believe the nine successful candidates have a very bright future indeed."

Mothibeli adds, "We'd love to launch South Africa's next big retailer on its path to success, and judging by the excellent calibre of our first intake of retail candidates, I don't doubt that this is a real possibility. We are thrilled to be part of these brilliant young South Africans' journeys as they write their own stories of retail success."

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