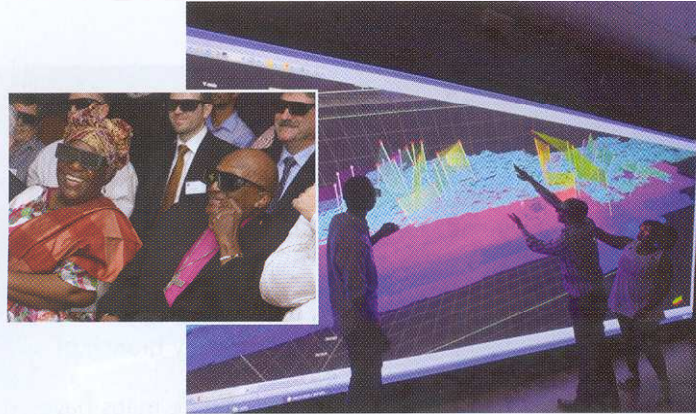


An amazing contraption!



An advanced immersive virtual reality system has been opened by Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu and his wife, Leah at the University of the Western Cape. The Highly Immersive Visualization Environment (HIVE) will enable the viewing of geographical, geological and other geoscientific data for whole countries and continents in one real-time virtual environment. Demonstrating the power of the system, David Cockburn-Price of suppliers Virtualis sent a virtual wasp to buzz near the bishop's head. The Archbishop, who is also the University's Chancellor, let out a whoop and his trademark giggle and added 'This is an amazing, amazing contraption!'

Professor Paul Carey, Director of the HIVE, adds 'We believe we now have the most advanced virtual reality system in South Africa. It allows us to take the real world and bring it into this room, making it interactive and almost touchable. People can benefit from virtual experiences because it is possible to explore, design and train virtually and bring that virtual knowledge to bear in real life.'

Financed by several companies including BP, the project will help the next generation of South Africa's geologists. The HIVE is sited in a brand new, secure and custom-built unit within the Department of Applied Geology. A central Dell server coupled with a dedicated fibre-optic line links 30 high-end 3D modelling computers with a two-channel, tracked ActiveWall and the postgraduate research suite. This in turn, will connect to the University's multi-terabyte data storage system via 10Gb network connectivity, enabling high-speed data transfer and advanced modelling of very large datasets. The Virtualis ActiveWall is driven by a Dell workstation with NVIDIA graphics, with the display featuring high-end Christie Digital Mirage projectors and an Intersense IS-900 tracking system.

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