

Tech Park looks to the future

By Marcus Power

A GROUP of fledgling technology companies is creating waves at the University of Ballarat Technology Park.

From online marketing, to social networking to flight simulation technology, the businesses have a promising commercial future, the park's director of business development Mal Vallance said.

Mr Vallance said 30 small businesses now operated from the park, with plans for further expansion also in place.

"We've got 1350 people we work with every day. That brings in something like \$80 million in household income into Ballarat every year," Mr Vallance said.

"So it's a pretty important contributor to the economic and social well-being of this area."

One of the enterprises, T Garage, recently set up Vibe Village, an

“**Vibe Village is a first in Australia and there is really nothing like it around the world.**”

online community where producers and consumers interact to discuss products.

"T Garage was started as we believed there was a more efficient and effective means to engage consumers in the process of a branded discussion than the traditional mechanism of an advertising monologue," T Garage director William Saxton said.

He said the most powerful way to engage consumers around brands was through interactive dialogue, and Vibe Village allowed



HIGH TECH: University of Ballarat Technology Park is fostering several local IT businesses. From left, director of the Technology Park Mal Vallance with owners of Vibe Village Roger Lowe and William Saxton and AVT director David Howe.

consumers to pass to friends their experience of a product.

"Vibe Village is a first in Australia and there is really nothing like it around the world."

Another business with significant prospects is GoGofrog, which has developed a 3D social networking tool.

"Like Facebook or MySpace, GoGofrog users can build a webspace where they can post

pictures (and) ... keep in touch with friends and family via text, voice and video communications," GoGofrog chief operating officer Mark Willoughby said.

"Unlike regular social networking sites though, this all done in 3D so that users can build and decorate a virtual room that others can visit," he said.

"So instead of looking at the internet, you are in the internet

which is a completely different experience."

Meanwhile, a third enterprise at the park, Advanced VTOL technologies (AVT), provides the Australian Defence Force and foreign defence forces with important safety technology.

"AVT is developing a new Maritime helicopter Aid (MHA) to improve safety, operational effectiveness and usage monitoring for helicopters operating from ships," AVT director David Howe said.

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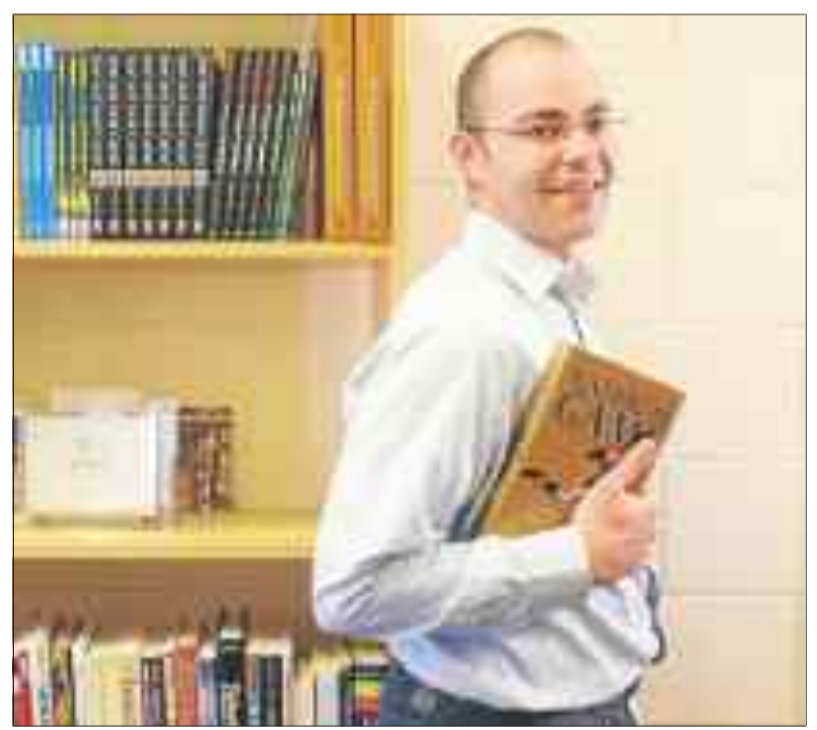
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WHAT A GAME: Dr Matthew Nicholson with a copy of his new book *A National Game: The History of Australian Rules Football* about AFL footy.

Book looks at AFL rise

THE AFL'S push to bring Australian Rules Football to the Gold Coast and Western Sydney is nothing new.

That's the view of Dr Matthew Nicholson, associate professor of sports management at the University of Ballarat and co-author of a new book detailing the rise of football.

A National Game: The History of Australian Rules Football examines the growth of the game from its origins in suburban Melbourne to its status as the most watched and one of the most played sports in Australia.

Australian Rules celebrated its 150th anniversary this month, with the first recorded game having taken place in Richmond parkland, near the modern day MCG, in 1858.

Dr Nicholson said from the very beginning, its players and administrators had a missionary zeal for

spreading the "greatest game in the world".

"There's always been this kind of evangelical fervour about Australian football," Dr Nicholson said.

"They tried to promote it to New Zealand (and) to South Africa."

And while contemporary debates rage over who is the greatest of Gary Ablett junior and Chris Judd, the book's cover depicts a player who might have topped both stars.

It shows Haydn Bunton, mid stride, with a ball as big as a watermelon tucked under one arm.

He won three Brownlow medals in VFL, three Sandover medals in Western Australia, and then umpired, coached and played in the South Australian National Football League.

"At the time WA, SA and Victorian football were on a fairly even par, so essentially he won six Brownlow medals."