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BOFFINS PUT THEIR HEADS TOGETHER

The call went out this week for Greymouth's high-tech engineers, trainers, programmers, analysts, consultants, technicians and managers to meet at Revington's Hotel.

But instead of wet fields and sideline refs, the well-attended conversation on Thursday night focussed on wet ware and systems.

"Welcome to the foundation meeting of Technology West Coast, the region's new association for IT, communications, and other technology professionals!"

Those were the words of organiser Carl Turney, who explained to his peers the motivation for forming such a group. "I wanted us to come together to share our knowledge, to network and to have a bit of fun and relaxation, but most importantly, I think a professional association like this encourages intellectual stimulation and a sense of pride."

Turney is Programme Coordinator for Tai Poutini Polytechnic's Information and Communications Technology department in Greymouth and is a passionate advocate for professional networking and the sharing of knowledge. "It benefits the individual, but also their employers and ultimately the local economy."

He says face to face networking is especially important in high-tech roles,, because many such people work in isolation. "When you're working alone, it's very helpful to have a fellow professional with slightly different skills and experiences to talk with, and to help resolve problems or glitches when they crop up. It neatly overcomes the disadvantages of working on your own.

"Networking is helpful for the individual, but also by bouncing ideas off each other and helping to problem-solve, technology specialists are improving the efficiency and effectiveness - and ultimately the bottom-line – of their employers' businesses. That's got to be a good thing."

Turney sees IT and similar professionals as playing a key role in businesses of all sizes. "They are a key part of almost every organisation these days. If crucial information is lost, or equipment malfunctions, organisations can go bankrupt. I personally know of small

businesses overseas, for example, that have gone belly-up because their systems were not maintained as professionally as they should have been.”

He hopes a professional technical association on the West Coast will allow those in the industry to continually upgrade their skills. “These days, it’s about life-long learning, and continually improving our abilities. As the learning won’t be as formal or as in depth as what goes on at Tai Poutini, it complements nicely” says Turney, referring to both his employer’s support and endorsement of the Association, and its accredited IT training programmes.

American by birth, Turney has worked in a few countries, and plans to make the West Coast his home and New Zealand his citizenship. He said arriving in Greymouth earlier this year made him feel a bit like like Goldilocks. “It feels like this is the just right chair and the just right bowl of porridge!

“I want to spend the rest of my life on the West Coast and do what I can to help local organisations and the local economy.”

Turney is also co-founder of a new local association for migrants and ex-pats, which met for the first time last weekend.

The professionals at Thursday night’s meeting talked about where to from here, and said they look forward to meeting again in approximately one month, at a local government-owned facility.

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About Tai Poutini Polytechnic:

Tai Poutini Polytechnic (TPP) offers a range of exciting programmes including information and communications technology, outdoor education, ski patrol, ecotourism, jade and hard stone carving, professional chef and civil construction. Tai Poutini Polytechnic has campuses in Auckland, Matamata, Christchurch, Wanaka, Invercargill, Westport, Greymouth, Reefton and

Hokitika. In 2009 TPP is offering programmes at Greymouth, Reefton, Westport and Hokitika Campuses with no tuition fees (conditions apply).