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Murrysville company applies bald eagle cam technology to African poaching fight

MARY ANN THOMAS (MAILTO:MTHOMAS@TRIBWEB.COM?SUBJECT=RE: MURRYSVILLE COMPANY APPLIES BALD EAGLE CAM TECHNOLOGY TO AFRICAN POACHING FIGHT) (MAILTO:MTHOMAS@TRIBLIVE.COM) 🐦 (https://twitter.com/MaThomas_Trib) | Wednesday, Nov. 8, 2017, 4:21 p.m.

COURTESY OF BILL POWERS

Bill Powers of Murrysville-based PixController visits with a cheetah being cared for at an animal rehabilitation facility in Namibia.

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Whether it was the fields full of antelope, "Trouble" the meerkat befriending visitors, or the morning ritual of checking the bedroom floor for errant snakes that slithered in overnight, a Murrysville man knew he had arrived in Africa.

Or was it just missing a visit by Angelina Jolie at a nature reserve and animal rehabilitation facility in Namibia's Namib desert, operated by the N/a'an ku sê Foundation, funded by the Jolie-Pitt Foundation.

This was not merely the vacation of a lifetime but, rather, the opportunity of a lifetime for Bill Powers, president and CEO of PixController. The Murrysville-based surveillance camera company is known for its webcams of bald eagle nests in Harmar and the Hays section of Pittsburgh.

To learn more

Ecological Defense Group (EDGE):
https://ecodefensegroup.org (https://ecodefensegroup.org)/

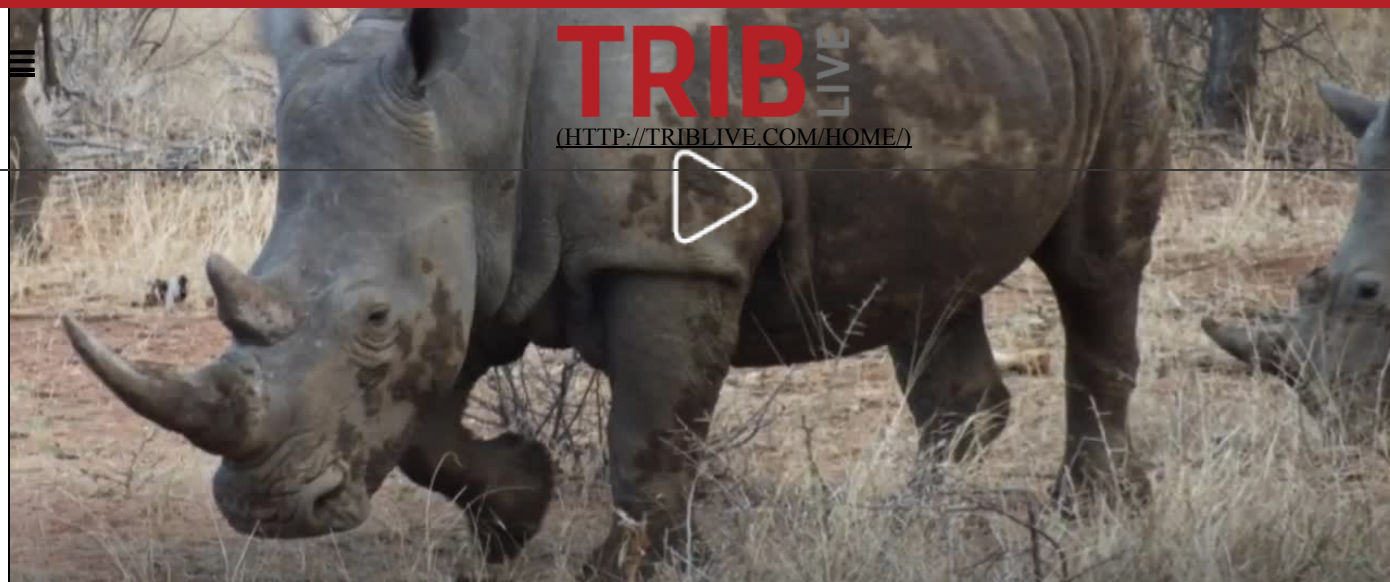**PixController of Murrysville:**
http://www.pixcontroller.com/WebCam (http://www.pixcontroller.com/WebCam)/WebCam.htm

N/a'an ku sê Foundation:
http://naankuse.com (http://naankuse.com)/

Powers was among a core group of nine people from around the world chosen and sponsored by Ecological Defense Group (EDGE), a North Carolina nonprofit offering African governments and other groups the latest technology to stop the poaching of rhinoceroses, elephants and other animals.

Since the start of the poaching epidemic in 2008, South Africa has lost more than 6,000 rhinos, according to the nonprofit StopRhinoPoaching.com.

More valuable than gold, rhino horns used ostensibly for medicinal purposes sell for $22,000 per pound, while elephant ivory jewelry and trinkets go for up to $1,000 each, according to the African Wildlife Foundation.

"We're a conservation-oriented company," said Powers, who visited South Africa and Namibia for almost two weeks in October. "We understand the position that the governments there are in, and we want to help."

EDGE brought experts to look at the problems with wildlife security in remote areas that are off the grid — without cellphone reception or power lines — according to Stephen Lee of Pittsboro, N.C., who founded EDGE to apply technology in Africa to counter poaching and help with economic development.

Lee, who is chief scientist at the U.S. Army Research Office, has worked with sophisticated surveillance equipment used by the military that could help African governments with their poaching problems, but much of it is too expensive.

"What attracted me to Bill's work with sensors and surveillance is his low-cost, robust systems," Lee said.

"We don't have a technology or a tactic we are selling," Lee said. "We go to the park rangers and identify solutions. And it's up to our partners there to move ahead with a project."

The PixController equipment proved to fill a niche, with some already on its way from Murrysville to Africa, according to Powers.

This equipment can provide images in real time of disturbances or threats at watering holes or other places African wildlife frequents.

PixController designed and produced an "undercover eye" that syncs with miniature cameras and sensors buried in the ground that can detect footsteps and the presence of weapons, according to Powers.

PixController is working on surveillance systems at watering holes in Botswana, where elephants and other wildlife drink. He's also working on a live webcam at Namibia's Namib desert, which will stream live like the bald eagle webcams PixController runs locally. Plus, there are other proposals being considered for surveillance equipment for more anti-poaching efforts.

"This African webcam is a way to educate the world public about wildlife in the area and poaching," Powers said.

He is able to keep costs down because of low overhead and a desire to field-test customized new products.

Powers credits his four years of webcam experience at the Harmar and Hays bald eagle nests as the "proving grounds for our technology."

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