

civil engineering

Warehouse wonderland, and more

The construction industry has taken a knock over the last year, but The Abbeydale Group remains strong.

Major construction and civils company, Abbeydale Building & Civils (Abbeydale), excels at building relationships and delivering large-scale projects in an industry suffering at the hands of an economic recession. MD Mike Macfarlane took Laura Cornish behind the scenes to learn the true meaning of construction success.

Despite a worldwide recession, the company has been fortunate enough to take on a vast number of projects, which has kept it steadfast and competitive.

"We have a good return base from our clients, and a lot of repeat business, which has positioned the company well in these trying economic times," says Macfarlane, who admits that the company is working harder in order to find new projects. Fortunately, Macfarlane expects a noticeable improvement in the markets in the second and third quarters of next year.

In addition to Abbeydale Building and Civils, the Abbeydale Group consists of two further business units. Akhane Construction, Abbeydale's four-year-old empowerment company, has annual turnover of R160m, and is headed by MD Pierre Rossouw.

Historically disadvantaged staff with a minimum of 10 years service qualify to belong to an employee trust, which owns 30% of Akhane. "We are proud of this initiative, which has resulted in an increase in site staff loyalty and morale."

The Abbeydale Group also owns a niche concrete flooring business: CLF Concrete Laser Floors. CLF specialises in laying high-tolerance concrete floors, as well as repairing and maintaining existing concrete floors. Macfarlane has known CLF MD Peter Norton for over thirty years, and believes that established relationships such as this one have positively impacted on The Abbeydale Group.

"We are a close-knit business which accepts 'carrying down the line' of employment through to its workers' families, which helps carry down the company's culture. Our staff turnover is extremely low," Macfarlane adds.

The company will start the new

Ericsson head office.

32 built november/december 2009

year on a good footing, when it commences with its most recently awarded project, the refurbishment and extension of the Hobart Road shopping centre in Bryanston.

An entire new addition to the shopping centre will be built behind the current facility, and the existing centre will undergo extensive refurbishment to give it a look similar to that of Theysens Island in Knysna.

While Abbeydale is proficient in all areas of construction, its primary areas of expertise include large distribution warehouses and corporate head office projects for industries as diverse as chocolate manufacturing, wood-chipboard manufacturing and glass recycling plants.

Chocolate manufacturer Ferrero Rocher entrusted Abbeydale to complete its local manufacturing facility on a turnkey basis. The project required a tour of some of Ferrero Rocher's European facilities, so that international standards could be met. The project, which took nine months to finish, was successfully completed in May.

Glass manufacturer Nampak Wiegand also utilised Abbeydale to complete its Cullet plant in Roodekop on a turnkey basis. Alongside project manager Profica and design engineer WSP, Abbeydale will complete the recycle waste glass facility in March next year.

For wood-based chipboard manufacturer Sonae Novabord, the construction of a state-of-the-art chipboard factory in White River was completed in 2007. The fine concrete tolerances of the machine bases, pits and cast-in rails made the project a challenge, but "extremely gratifying to complete," explains Macfarlane.

Macfarlane joined Abbeydale, founded in 1981 by Mike Bernon, in 1988, and over the last 28 years it has grown from a small building company, with an annual turnover of just R6m, to one of the largest private construction companies in Johannesburg, having a turnover of over R650m a year. Abbeydale has 240 direct employees, and Macfarlane explains that the relationship between the company's directors is long-standing, dating back between 15 and 20 years.

A WEALTH OF WAREHOUSES

One of Abbeydale's largest projects, the construction of a 100 000m² Unilever distribution warehouse in Boksburg for developer Griffin Holdings, was started in September 2007. The bulk earthworks took up a considerable portion of the cost and time Macfarlane explains, and cost R52m out of a total project cost of over R350m. Particularly challenging was the construction of 14m high and 200m long concrete walls, which divided the warehouse into three separate chambers. Construction was completed in April this year.

Other noteworthy warehouse projects in the company's portfolio include a 39 000m² warehouse for clothing retailer, Pepkor (2007) and a 40 000m² warehouse for trade and retail wholesaler, Supply Chain (2008). September saw the completion of a new Builders Warehouse in Pomona, Kempton Park.

OTHER LARGE-SCALE PROJECTS

Lyndhurst motor dealership.



