

ARKATI

THE VASSALLO GROUP PUBLICATION

2016





TRADITION.
INNOVATION.
DIVERSITY.

CELEBRATING 70 YEARS
OF SUCCESS
1946 - 2016

With a heritage spanning over seven decades, Vassallo Group is one of Malta's most well established and successful companies, with a staff complement of over 1,700 and investments in a larger variety of key macro sectors mainly in:

CONSTRUCTION

ELDERLY CARE

CATERING

PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

BESPOKE FURNITURE

HOSPITALITY

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

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Arkati December 2016

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Editorial

Looking back at the past year one can definitely say that it was indeed eventful on many fronts. It was, after all, a special year in which the Group marked its 70th anniversary. This issue of Arkati covers the special events held throughout the year reaching the climax on June 4th with the 3rd edition of The Shine Award which was held at The Manoel Theatre.

This edition of the Arkati magazine includes a full interview with Group Chairman, Nazzareno Vassallo in which he looks at the Group's past as well as the present and future encapsulated in the tagline chosen for this year: Tradition, Innovation and Diversity.

We also provide the latest information on our main projects for this year including Casa Apap Bologna, our first home for persons with disability, the newly inaugurated Malta North Waste Treatment Plant and the largest single project investment our Group would be embarking on – the purpose built University Residence.

Arkati 2016 also includes a number of reports covering all areas falling under Vassallo Group. In this edition we shall meet a number of key players within our Group who provide the latest information on what is going on in their area of responsibility.

During this year a number of staff events were held. Such events serve as an opportunity for our members of staff from the different companies within the Group to meet each other in formal and informal events as well as to join forces in order to contribute towards a worthy event. This year's CSR day held at the San Blas Rehabilitation Centre is just one example.

Whilst wishing you all the best for the festive season, I also hope you enjoy reading the contributions within this publication as much as we enjoyed compiling them for you.

Charlo Bonnici
Director, HR and Communications

Shut Down Notice

With the festive season nearly upon us, we would like to take this opportunity to thank all our employees for their hard work and commitment over the past year and to wish you, your families, our esteemed clients and readers a **MERRY CHRISTMAS** and a **Happy New Year**. We would like to notify you that Vassallo Builders Group Ltd Offices in Mosta will be closed from 23rd December to 1st January.

In Memoriam

Vassallo Builders Ltd salutes the memory of the three employees **JOE FALZON, PROKO KNESEVIC and DJORDJE MEDIC** who passed away this year.

Birthday Wishes to the Chairman

Wishing you strength for achieving your goals and good fortune in everything that you do!

Happy Birthday from all at
Vassallo Group



Nazzareno Vassallo

Chairman, Vassallo Group

Tradition, Innovation, Diversity

Why did Vassallo Group choose 'tradition, innovation, diversity' to mark its 70th anniversary?

Those words sum up our history. We started from traditional roots and grew through innovation and diversity. My father was a farmer. He owned a truck so he was asked to help clear debris from the sites of public buildings damaged in World War II. He did this in partnership with Giuseppe and Mikelang Gatt. They then became involved in rebuilding. That partnership lasted until 1965.

“

I look back on my 50 years in this business with great satisfaction. ”

The subsequent Vassallo partnership between my father and my elder brother lasted until 1971 when we set up Vassallo Builders Ltd between my father and his five sons, including myself. It was innovative at the time to form a construction company. I was the youngest, but my brothers wanted me to be the managing director. At first, we were only involved in construction. A few years after we set up the company, we started diversifying in construction related activities.

My father retired in 1985 and I became the sole owner of the company when I bought my father's and my brothers' shares in the company. I had many ideas to expand and diversify the business further. My children were still at school so I had to look outside the family for key personnel. It was unusual then to appoint non-family members to key positions,

but the diversity of expertise and outlook has helped Vassallo Group to innovate and grow. Construction is our main line but we are involved in other sectors. We are involved in property development, buildings for sale and rental property and property management. Commercial tenancy is now a key pillar of our business. We are also involved in joinery, architecture, care for the elderly, alternative

units of social housing around Malta. In 1977 we were awarded the contract for and started to build the Danish Village in Mellieha. This was a new idea for Malta, the first ever turnkey project and it was the biggest private contract in the 1970s. We began with a field and 23 months later we delivered the keys of the whole complex ready to receive the first guests. That success led to more diversification. We set up



Danish Village under construction

energy, catering, hospitality, information technology, and this year we created HILA Homes Ltd, our new service for people with disabilities.

When you look back over Vassallo Group's 70-year history, what are its major achievements?

Vassallo Builders was and is a major player in construction. In the 1970s, we built over 1200

our joinery works division in 1974 and in 1979 we began to develop holiday flats for tourism. We worked on many hotels. By 1982 we had built our own hotel - the Bugibba Holiday Complex - which we then expanded to 450 beds in 1987 and to 1000 beds in 1999. In the 1990s, we started the first privately owned home for the elderly. At the time, the existing homes were those run by government and by the Church. They did sterling work, but succeeding commercially in this sector needed a change in social culture and in attitudes to



Bugibba Holiday Complex

residential care. Casa Arkati was a purpose designed building, the first in Malta. At that time, it was a bold step and it is one of our major achievements of which I am proud.

We then moved into administering homes operated by third parties. We began with the Government home in Zejtun. We brought in partners from the UK, experts in the field of Public Private Partnerships, and ran a 3-year pilot project on this basis. This showed our business model was 33% more cost effective for government so it was rolled out across the sector. Public-private partnership in this sector is now the industry norm. CareMalta Ltd has raised standards and the sector is so well developed that competitors are moving in. We want to achieve the same success with HILA. Our aim is to provide a person-centred approach, enabling people to maximise their independence and potential.

Vassallo Group has been engaged on public projects under different administrations. What are your comments?

Vassallo Builders was and is a leading player in the construction sector, so we are well positioned to take on big projects which are usually government driven. In the 1960s, when we were still partners

with Gatt Brothers, our peak was building the polytechnic and Valletta's city gate, which has now been replaced. In the 1970s we were one of the key contractors especially in social housing and schools. Today, government is our main client in the elderly sector and for infrastructural projects like the new MBT Plant in Maghtab. We view government

as our principal client, regardless of who is in power. We have always had good relations with government and have worked successfully under different administrations but we have also diversified from being contractors to being generators of projects ourselves.

What major construction projects has your company worked on and what is the next big development?

There were many projects over the years. In the hospitality sector, after the Danish Village,

we built the Bugibba Holiday Complex, the then Coastline Hotel, Radisson Bay Point and Radisson Golden Sands, The George, and Riviera hotel. In the residential care sector, we built Casa Arkati and developed Villa Messina and extended both twice. We also developed Roseville, Prince of Wales, Zejtun Home, Casa San Paolo and Casa Apap Bologna, Tagliaferro Business Centre, The Landmark, Quantum Place and The OneOneO project at The Strand, to mention a few.

We were involved in building the new airport terminal, terminal two at The Freeport, the Oncology Hospital, Life Science Park, MBT Plants at Sant' Antnin and Maghtab, Salini Salt Pans, St Elmo Bridge, Midi Project and, currently, the total refurbishment of Phoenicia Hotel and Riviera Hotel, again to mention just a few.

Our next big project is our partnership with the University of Malta. We signed an agreement recently to build a new residence on campus between the university building and Mater Dei Hospital. It will be a safe social and residential environment and will accommodate more than 800 students. This will be Malta's first ever purpose-built, students' residential village, and it is our first partnership agreement with



Tigné Point - MIDI Project



Coastline Hotel



Villa Amadeo - Mosta

the University of Malta. Signing it was a very satisfying way to mark our 70th anniversary and we are looking forward to delivering the first phase by September 2018.

Vassallo Group recently consolidated its management structure. Why did you do this and what changes did you make?

We are known to be a structured group. I think that is the best way to do things. Projects should be structured. A company needs structure using the best people. When we set up a new business, Vassallo Group supports the new company financially and administratively but we believe each business must be self-reliant and none should depend on the group. In the first year we provide support, in the second year the new business should be taking off and by the third year it should be self-reliant or reviewed for possible closure. With hindsight, I can now say that certain business lines weren't a good idea for us but we took the best the decision at the time and were able to exit when necessary.

“It takes a lifetime to build a reputation and we want to maintain ours.”

We have reengineered Vassallo Group's management structure to meet the challenges of the future. We have a holding company for the group as a whole and a board of directors for each company within the group. As a family, we meet at the holding company with

both non-family non-executive and executive directors. We were the first family company to appoint non-family members to our company boards. As group chairman, I chair the boards, but there are no more than two other family members on each one. The other members are executive and non-executive directors who are not family members.

We have a strategy board for Vassallo Group as a whole which meets every month. Last year we set and approved Vision 2020, a five year plan for the Group. Each company then set its own targets and objectives in line with the overall group strategy. In our first year of Vision 2020, we are on target. We track our progress monthly and adapt our company strategies accordingly. Close to 2020, there will be another review for the following five years.

What are the challenges for the next few years?

It takes a lifetime to build a reputation and we want to maintain ours. We have been frontliners for 50 years and I feel satisfied that we have built the group successfully. We want to grow our business, increase our turnover and continue to innovate and diversify. That is the reason why we have consolidated our management structure.

I am proud that my grown-up children are personally involved in the business. That is what every parent wishes for. My children joined the family business because they wanted to and they have found their own niches within the group. This was always my dream. I was one of five siblings who were all involved in construction. I planned for diversity so each of my children would have the chance to find



their own way in the business and not feel that they are competing with each other in the same sector. Family business is usually passed on when the owner retires. I wanted to do things differently. My children were shareholders from the start, so they have grown up with a stronger sense of ownership and belonging.

The Great Siege Bell Monument



The Landmark - Qormi



The Shareholders - Family



Mellieha Home



Mater Dei Oncology



Vassallo Group employs 1700 people from over 50 countries. How do you view your employees?

We are fortunate that our team was always loyal. Hundreds of our employees have been with us for a long time. They are part of our company's history and part of the reason we are where we are today. All our employees are like an extended family to us. I am happy to work among them and I am proud that my children feel the same way too. One of our best occasions is when we all meet up at our Christmas staff party.

Over the last 70 years Vassallo Group has entered various partnerships, sometimes for years. What is the secret of your success?

I believe in partnerships because you cannot do everything yourself. Other people have experience and market presence which we do not have. These factors are important for us, but the most important qualities are honesty and mutual trust. Anything less than 100% is not viable. You cannot have a partnership based on 90% or even 99% trust. I am happy with the number of successful partnerships we have had in various sectors: tourism, demolition and excavation, joinery, and education where we set up a TEFL school. And I am especially pleased with our latest partnership with the University of Malta.

A new book, "Vision", has been published. Is this your biography?

"Vision" is our 70th anniversary publication. I wouldn't call it my biography. It does speak about my beliefs and experiences, yes, but it is about how the company evolved in a national context. Of course, there is the Mosta angle too. That is where my family is from so it is an



Malta International Airport in progress

important part of our company's story.

You have led Vassallo Group for fifty years. What was your proudest moment?

There were so many over the years, but I can mention one that is outstanding. This was when the airport terminal building was opened. We were one of seven contractors who are usually competitors. This was Malta's first ever construction consortium. It was a national project and we finished it on time. Every time I travel, I feel proud of what we achieved there. I can also mention opening hotels, creating jobs, our new partnership with the University of Malta. Introducing services for the elderly has been the best dividend for me. Every year, at Easter and at Christmas, I spend days at a time meeting all the residents individually. I enjoy doing this and feel it is appreciated. Our services for the elderly have been a success and I hope to replicate

that with HILA, our new service for the disabled. My next hope is for the disabled to become part of the Vassallo Group extended family.

Do you have any regrets?

I always look at the positive things in life. Regrets happen, yes, but I prefer to think about the good things. On the whole, the good has more than outweighed the bad. I look back on my 50 years in this business with great satisfaction. I learned a lot from many people I met along the way and I feel grateful for that. I didn't go to university but I always say that for 50 years I attended the university of life and I have never missed a single lesson.



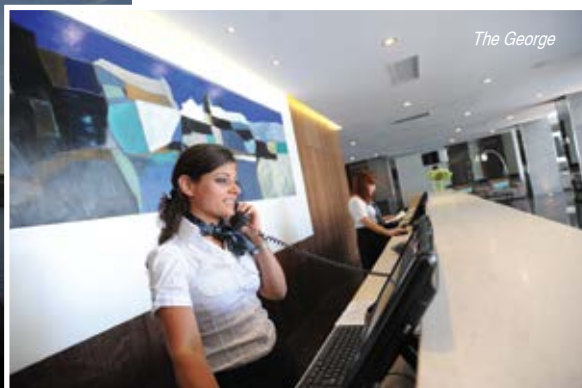
Opening of Casa San Paolo



University Project



Valletta Bridge



The George



Pio Vassallo

CEO, Vassallo Group

Building for a better future

“We like to build things that people can enjoy and which make Malta better than it is now.”

Vassallo Group has evolved from its roots in traditional construction but the construction sector still accounts for a large part of its total turnover. In a competitive market, having a lean construction arm with complementary internal resources is what gives the Group its competitive edge.

“We are involved in large scale, complex projects, like civil engineering projects and design and build projects,” said Pio Vassallo, CEO of Vassallo Group. Many projects require a large, lump sum investment and have a high business risk that can only be carried by contractors with sound financial backing. At this end of the scale, there are few players and Vassallo Group is one of the leaders. “Construction is where we excel and where we have long experience and deep knowledge,” said Mr. Vassallo.

Large-scale projects require a complex set of specialised professional services which the Group subcontracts as needed. Each project starts with clear objectives and deadlines that govern all decision making processes across the project's

management structure. “We have long standing relationships with designers and with mechanical and electrical engineering firms,” said Mr. Vassallo. “Whenever we engage subcontractors, the whole operation is seamless. Everyone works with the same objectives and deadlines in mind right from the start. There is no room for uncertainty.” Developers are often accused of not caring about the environment but Vassallo Group's policy is to minimise environmental impact. Solar panels have been installed on all company buildings, reducing potential annual carbon emissions by 11,000 metric tons of CO². The Group reengineers and repurposes existing buildings where possible. The former Lowenbrau factory in Qormi is one such example.

“On construction sites, we recycle waste and water,” said Mr Vassallo. “We are always open to new ideas of how to improve our environmental record. We are exploring the

use of electric cars and expect that most of our company vehicles will be electric.”

“Some of our projects have an immediate environmental impact themselves, like the national waste treatment plants,” he adds. “We do our best to limit damage and we avoid controversial projects. We will not be involved in land reclamation, because it is too contentious. We like to build things that people can enjoy and which make Malta better than it is now. Malta's size means that the impact of any new project is very visible. Look at the Fort Saint Angelo project, for example. The whole area has been totally regenerated.”

The scale of some projects means that partnerships are necessary. Mr. Vassallo believes that successful partnerships are based on shared values and beliefs, and on mutual trust, honesty and respect. “Conflicts of interest need to be declared up front and unanimity is key in decision making,” he said.



“It’s a great source of satisfaction to us that our employees identify with Vassallo Group.”

“Good governance is a priority and you need to be very organised. In our partnerships, we have monthly meetings to review our progress. Most of our partnerships have worked out well and we recently signed a new one with the University of Malta to build the new University Residence. We’re very excited about this. It’s a very big and innovative project, the first of its kind in Malta”

Mr. Vassallo said that the Group’s employees are “our biggest asset by any measure”. Some have been with the Group for over 40 years and, in some cases, their spouses, children and even their grand children have also joined the staff. “An employer needs to remember at all times that employees are people first and foremost, not just another resource,” Mr. Vassallo said. “They need to feel that they are invested in the company too. This is very important, especially when you have international staff, as we do.”

“We have a bonding culture in our company,” said Mr. Vassallo. “Conflicts are inevitable because of personal, religious and cultural differences, but they are ironed out. We avoid

putting people in confrontational situations. On our construction sites, for instance, we allocate people to teams where we know they can work together. Whenever we finish a project, we have a launch ceremony and celebrate on site with the whole team. Our employees have brought their own traditions into the company. On one large project the construction team organised a roast on site. This has now become a tradition.”

“When we hear our employees talk about the company in terms of what “we” are doing, we know that they feel involved,” Mr. Vassallo adds. “It’s a great source of satisfaction to us that our employees identify with Vassallo Group.”



Carraffa Buildings



Malta International Airport



Golden Sands Hotel



Natalie Briffa Farrugia

CEO, CareMalta

A private company with a public conscience

This is not a line of business that can be measured just in terms of cost-efficiency.

centred care in our nursing homes, particularly as one third of residents are living with dementia. The shifting trends are placing new pressures on the supply side of residential care for the elderly, which CareMalta is geared up to meet.

In 2013, a new national strategy was put in place. Government



Malta's population is ageing and life expectancy is growing. The latest figures show that, on average, an 80-year old in Malta can expect to live for another nine years. In 2016, a quarter of the total population was over 60. By 2025, the baby boomer generation will be elderly. This means that more people will need more support and care for longer periods. Along with rising life expectancy, we expect to live better for longer, and to remain in our own homes as long as possible. People move into a care home only when necessary, such as when their health diminishes or because of the onset of dementia. "The average age of residents in homes for the elderly is 83, which is 20 years past retirement age," said Natalie Briffa Farrugia, CEO of CareMalta Ltd. "We note that the age at which people enter residential care is rising too. In Roseville, for instance, the average age has moved up from 73 to 84 over a span of five years." CareMalta's vision is to promote person-

has set new minimum standards for homes for the elderly. All new homes will have to meet or beat those standards and, where necessary, existing homes will have to be upgraded to meet the new requirements within a ten-year transition period. Government will also introduce a classification system for care homes, which Ms. Briffa Farrugia said is very much required in this sector.

CareMalta welcomes new and better regulation as it raises standards across the sector. "We embrace the new regulations holistically," Ms Briffa Farrugia said. "Our homes have always been self-regulated to a high standard. Our service is value-based. We believe in earning and keeping a good reputation through setting high standards of service. People's expectations have been raised because of the standards we have set.

Ms. Briffa Farrugia reflects with pride at the successes

that CareMalta has established over the past one, two and three years both as the first private operator in this sector and also as the pioneer in Public Private Partnerships. "We delivered quality because we didn't experiment," Ms Briffa Farrugia said. "We researched the field to understand best practices before investing. Our homes were modelled on high international standards and our investment over the years is visible in the quality we deliver. We have set a high bar for the whole sector in Malta."

Private sector provision offer the advantages of efficiency, sound management practices, being customer-focused, and long term vision and planning, but sustainability is crucial. In care services, 70% of the costs are labour, so can the private sector play a bigger role in the social field? Ms Briffa Farrugia believes so, but says success depends on non-commercial criteria as much as on profit. "The success of a public private partnership cannot be determined on the basis of economics alone," she said. "If you only look at profits, the partnership will fail. This is not a line of business that can be measured just in terms of cost-efficiency. You need to look at other criteria.

CareMalta is diversifying by providing services such as respite services and residential services in the disability sector, through HILA – Home for Independence and Limitless Abilities. "The same concerns apply," Ms Briffa Farrugia said. "Operators cannot simply be profit-driven. We are a private company with a public conscience. With HILA we hope to set the same high standards we have established in the elderly care sector. This is another innovation we look forward to delivering."



Natalie at the Opening of Academic Year



The CareMalta Academy

To counter the difficulties in engaging workers in the care sector, the CareMalta Academy was set up in 2015. The Academy provides training to current and prospective care workers in the elderly and disability sectors. So far more than 650 people have achieved level 3 of the European Qualifications Framework in the sector, earning certificates from City and Guilds.

“Although many of the foreigners at the academy can obtain a work permit once they get their qualification, the Academy is also training groups of people who then go to work in another country.

Furthermore, the Academy is also offering courses leading to MCAST qualifications in advanced health care and a course leading to a qualification in the area of disability – a sector which the group has recently entered into with enthusiasm and commitment.



Natalie Briffa Farrugia during the Opening of the new Academic Year



Students attending the opening of the new Academic Year





Janet Silvio

Business Development Manager, CareMalta

Doors open at Casa Apap Bologna

Casa Apap Bologna is a beautiful townhouse situated in the heart of Mosta which has been converted into a state-of-the-art home which will host and offer support services to people with disabilities. It features two floors and a penthouse. With a total investment of more than €2 million, the new home has recently opened its doors, and falls under the umbrella of the HILA initiative (Home to Independence and Limitless Abilities) which was set up in 2015. **Janet Silvio**, Business Development Manager at CareMalta, is also the person responsible for HILA and tells us more about it.



Casa Apap Bologna recently opened its doors as a respite home for people with disabilities, welcoming people for short stays – it can vary from a weekend to a week or two or even a month. Ms Silvio explains that residents' ages can vary from young children, youths and even older, until the age of 60 at which point they are classified as elderly.

"There are many reasons for respite services in this sector", explains Ms Silvio, seated

comfortably in the bright and airy reception area of the home. "There are parents of children with disabilities who would need to rest or take some time off to recharge their batteries before taking care of their children again. There are some parents who have hospital appointments or even hospital stays and need someone to look after their children for a short while, so Casa Apap Bologna is the ideal venue".

Fun-filled live-in weekends

HILA has already organised a couple of live-in weekends at Casa Apap Bologna, "These weekends serve a dual purpose," says Ms Silvio. "Not only do they offer parents some time off; but the residents themselves get a taste of what we can offer, and we also believe they will learn something from the experience of being away from the home environment they are used to."

"Throughout their stay at Casa Apap Bologna, we try to expand their horizons with different things: life skills, meeting and integrating with different people with different needs, the way we let them help us – like clearing their dishes, and helping in the kitchen and looking after their rooms. This nurtures their sense of responsibility and independence."

Needless to say there is a large fun factor involved, and the live-ins were chock-full of activities with residents enjoying barbecues in the house's extensive garden, outings, crafts, visits to The Cake Box down the road for coffee and pastries, and much more, to encourage interaction between the residents which increased their nucleus of friends.

The home welcomed 14 people for the first live-in, and it was so successful and demand was so great that 24 people joined for the second one. Feedback was important to help the organisation improve the experience future.

Ms Silvio says, "Not only did we have new people each time; but on one occasion we had a 40-year-old resident who never spent time away from home. So while it was a challenge for us, it was ultimately satisfying

that the experience was so positive for him... and that his parents had their mind at rest that he was being taken care of." Some live-ins required careful planning, such as one involving physically and mentally disabled 10-years-old, yet overall, the success factor has been very high.



Rachel and Daniela's experiences at Casa Apap Bologna

Two of the residents at the live-in, Rachel Umanah and Daniela Farrugia, both of whom have Down's syndrome, joined in for the interview to give an account of their experience. Rachel is 23 years old and works in the laundry department at Casa Arkati, the home for the elderly in Mosta. She describes her job in detail, explaining how she gets to work from Siggiewi and back every day by bus. Once at work she sorts out the different types of laundry - towels, clothing etc. before placing them for the wash; and eventually sorting them out before being distributed back



to the residents in their rooms. She loves her job, stressing the importance of the sense of responsibility and independence it gives her. Rachel also speaks enthusiastically about her recent visit to her relatives in Nigeria; and shows off the hairstyle she acquired while she was there. Asked about her experience during the Casa Apap Bologna live-in she describes it as two fun-filled days; saying that the barbecues, film nights and a visit to the Salina Bird Park were special highlights.

Daniela is 23 years old, and works as a kitchen helper at Zammit Clapp Residential home. She works from 8am to 12pm. Her job consists of helping out with the preparation of food trolleys for the residents, preparing sandwiches, cakes, teas and coffees. Once residents have been fed, she is then back in the kitchen helping to clear up. Daniela loves her computer, and says

she spends lots of her free time listening to music, playing video games, watching stuff on YouTube, and like Rachel, considers her stay at Casa Apap Bologna to have been great fun, although she says that having seen a snake at the Bird Park was a little scary! Overall however, she

rates the experience as positive, having hit it off with the other residents at the live-in and all the members of staff. Ms Silvio explains that Casa Apap Bologna is the first home in the private sector to offer respite services for disabled persons, and discussions are currently under way with the government to set up a public/private partnership to keep prices at the home accessible to all.

Casa Santa Monica – promoting independent living

It is envisaged that this partnership will also apply to Casa Santa Monica, a home in Qormi which is currently being refurbished. Unlike

Casa Apap Bologna, this will be a residential home to promote independent living; and once it opens, it will welcome people for a long period of time. The building will be split into small residences; to make life easier for them to live in. It can accommodate 10 people and the idea is to have people there who have a similar disability and form part of the same age group making it easier for them to integrate with one another.

What next for HILA?

There is much going on for HILA at the moment, with more events planned over the coming months. Ms Silvio says that more live-ins will be organised, even as Casa Apap Bologna accepts its first guests. She would also like to organise classes – for both able and disabled persons to promote integration, something she firmly believes in. Ms Silvio also plans to work hard on creating awareness about accessibility. "Unfortunately this is still an issue," she says.

"Many churches, restaurants, coffee shops still offer no ease of access or disabled bathrooms. Ever since I've been working in this sector I've become more conscious of the lack of accessibility, and this requires more and more awareness.

"We have also recently signed an MOU with the Mosta local council to join forces to spread awareness of our events and the services and facilities we offer, and they can refer people who need these services. In the long-term our hope is that eventually in areas where we open a facility, we will create a corresponding partnership with the relative local council"

HILA currently has eight members of staff; and the plan is to introduce a platform for volunteers, who can become part of their community and help improve people's lives. Ms Silvio also comments on the importance of the courses in disability studies being offered by the CareMalta Academy, which she is confident will broaden applicant's horizons and knowledge of the sector; which will in turn go on to encourage more and more people to join.

"After all," says Ms Silvio in conclusion, "the more time you spend with persons with disabilities, the more you realise they are pretty much the same as us, and integration will undoubtedly be beneficial to society as a whole."





Robert Grech

Rehabilitation Centre Manager, LiveLife

Successful outcomes for a variety of patients

Centrally located in Sliema, **LiveLife** specialises in physical rehabilitation, with modern private rooms and innovative state-of-the-art facilities and equipment required to aid rehabilitation. Since opening its doors almost five years ago, the centre has provided new hope to a number of patients treated there. **Robert Grech**, LiveLife's Facility Manager, tells us more.



Over these past four years or so LiveLife has witnessed many success stories, where patients come in with limitations and go back home functional again. "Obviously we get very good results when it comes to orthopaedic conditions because they respond very well to rehab," elaborates Mr Grech. He reports that the average stay is 17 days. "Neurological conditions such as traumatic brain injuries take much longer; as do strokes, however I am pleased to note that we had very good results with patients with these conditions, and as a team we believe that we have a winning formula here." He also cites instances of war injuries, with the centre having treated some casualties from the conflict in Libya.

"The vast majority of our patients are elderly; who have suffered falls, have had knee or hip replacements, post-cardiac conditions and so and what must be kept in mind is that these elderly patients might have other 'core morbidities' so certain patients come in following a knee replacement and also suffer from serious kidney, liver or respiratory problems. We see elderly patients who have had a severe chest infection which takes quite a toll on them, and don't recover well so they can't

walk properly, or those with severe arthritis and the idea is to try to get them back to their previous levels of mobility. In a nutshell, the rehab services need to be tailored to each individual's purpose, and we strive to ensure the patient leaves here being as self-sufficient and independent as their condition allows.

Mr Grech is keen to point out that the centre is not only aimed at older people.

As a physical rehabilitation centre LiveLife is open to everyone aged 16 and over. "When you look at the statistics, the average age is obviously 60+ however we have treated young patients who need rehabilitation after a trauma, like a car accident or a sports injury. So for example, if they sustained a fracture to the leg, apart from working on getting the leg better, if they can use their upper body freely, they use the gym to keep in shape and healthy while their leg is healing. Ultimately, while an elderly patient's aim would be to regain as much mobility and independence as possible, a young person's rehab goal would be to go home, to be able to drive again, go back to work, to take care of their family."

A vast array of facilities and equipment

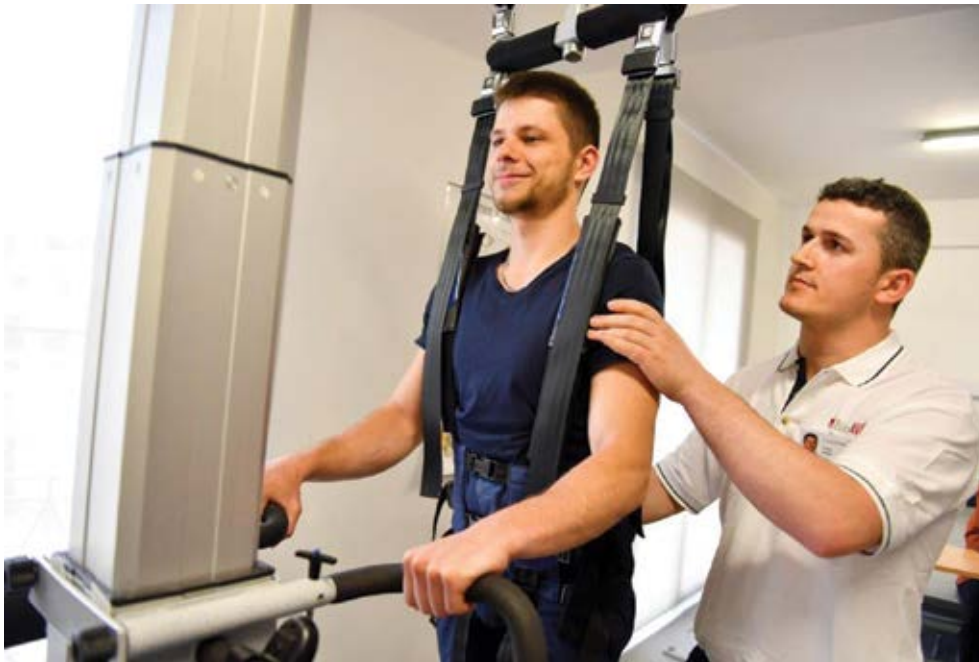
"Obviously, the more facilities you have in a centre the more varied rehab options you can offer," says Mr Grech as he launches into a description of the many amenities offered. "Our pool is an indoor, heated pool, and it's kept at around 30 degrees all the year round. The benefits of hydrotherapy are many – the

patient is working in a warm environment, their movements are facilitated by the water, they can use water as resistance as well. It is also beneficial from a psychological point of view, because it is extremely relaxing to dip in and exercise in the warm water. We also offer regular aqua-aerobic classes, which apart from the therapeutic benefits are also great fun! The pool therefore offers an opportunity to a particular group of clients who might not be able to sustain exercises on land.

"The gym can be seen as an extension of the physiotherapy department however it operates on its own as well," he continues. "The equipment at the gym is all user-friendly and includes a special range of equipment which uses air resistance, which facilitates use especially for frail elderly users. We also have an anti-gravity treadmill, which is unique to Malta and what it does is help patients with various types of conditions e.g. sports injuries, weight problems, orthopaedic or neurological problems or elderly-related problems. We have also invested in an electrical lifter and hoist to assist patients who cannot go down the steps for the pool. The wide array of equipment allows us to cater for a variety of different patients and adds value to the services."

Job Satisfaction

Mr Grech confides that the most satisfying aspect of the job is seeing the improved condition of their patients when they go home, knowing that he and his staff have met their expectations. "We give our clients a discharge questionnaire and obviously the positive comments that you receive are extremely satisfying, knowing that all the hard work that has gone in from each and every member of staff has paid off."



them. In other words we have all the ingredients, now we need to mix them and make the blessed cake!" he says with a laugh. Looking forward to 2017 and beyond, Mr Grech explains it's a matter of keeping an open eye for new opportunities that will help LiveLife improve its services even further. "We're looking at working with cardio-respiratory patients who would need specialised rehabilitation services, especially following chronic respiratory problems or cardiac surgery."

"The reality is that there are a multitude of other conditions where you can involve rehabilitation because at the end of the day, a team-led rehabilitation process can only improve the quality of life of our patients whose well-being is something we all hold extremely dear."

He hastens to add that "we also take note of any criticisms in order to continue to improve. Problems that you don't anticipate, do arise however we try to come up with strategies to solve them. We communicate as much as possible with all the team members and staff so that they are well aware of what is happening..."

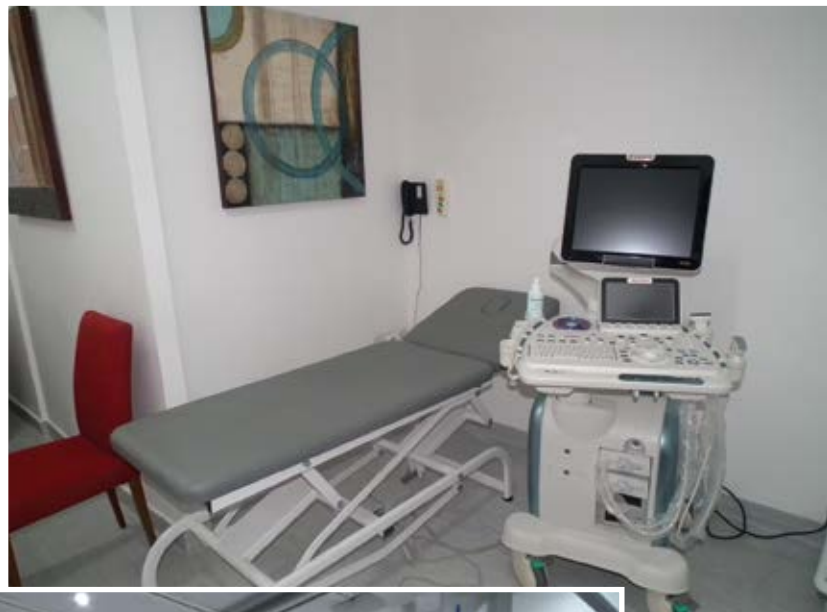
specialists in yoga and Pilates. So with all the personnel, equipment, and facilities in one place the centre's immediate goal is to consolidate

Looking ahead...

Since opening in April 2012, LiveLife has striven to improve the facilities and services it offers its clients and the future is to bring more innovations and improvements, Mr Grech tells us, with his trademark enthusiasm.

"2016 has been a culmination of investment in equipment and in human resources, getting the right people to work here. We have set up 12 clinics through which we aim to provide a series of services including orthopaedic consultants, geriatricians, sports medicine doctors, podiatrists, massage therapists."

He goes on to explain that the physical clinics are there and now the team is in the process of grouping different specialists together to offer dedicated services. The foot clinic was set up this year where management and the resident podiatrists evaluated the requirements and invested in the latest laser scans, pressure plates and other equipment. Now the focus is on the sports section with the sports doctors who have regular clinics. "We are also working on a back clinic, so we are in discussions with orthopaedic doctors, chiropractors, exercise physiologists, physiotherapists and





Ruben Vassallo

Director, Vassallo Group

The birth of each project

As the architect and designer behind a number of Vassallo projects, **Ruben Vassallo** - Group Architect and CEO of the Property Section - may be described as the most creative arm of the Group. He describes the process he goes through to lead a project, the Group's love of restoration projects and the importance of the Property Section within the Group.

How does a project come about?

"Obviously, the first thing we start with is the concept," says Vassallo. "Let's use CareMalta as an example – do they need to build a new home for the elderly, or upgrade an existing one?"

If the project is to upgrade, Mr Vassallo and his team will go on site, study it and assess what needs to be done. If it's a new building, the process is completely different. "To start off, we look at different sites," he says. "Of course, not all sites are necessarily suitable for every purpose, so we keep looking until we find the perfect site to suit our needs. Once we identify the site we start the actual process of design. We prepare a brief, which lists all requirements, how the process needs to work out and then we create the design around the site."

From then on discussions begin with the client – in this case CareMalta, and discussions involve with management, maintenance staff and so on. Mr Vassallo describes it as a very hands-on approach, and everyone concerned from top to bottom, including security personnel, have their input.

"The outcome of these discussions lead to the final designs," he explains. "In the meantime, until the permit is issued, we carry out intensive preparations; so once the permit is granted, we can start construction thereby reducing time frames as much as possible."

Mr Vassallo explains that it is the same process with every lead they get within the group,



however the design approach will be different. Homes that fall under HILA have their own needs, which are different to CareMalta. He elaborates that other companies within the group – such as CaterEssence and the Cake Box; residential and commercial developments such as OneOneO, Quantum and so on all have their own needs when it comes to construction. Each building is site-specific and kept within its context and that of its environment.

Creativity, the importance of Aesthetics, and the needs of the users

"We like to think of ourselves as creative; and we come up with different concepts and designs in all our projects," says Mr Vassallo. "Moreover, we always keep in mind the needs

of the people who are going to use or live in the space. They have to like the space, be comfortable in it – so it's not simply about the aesthetics."

"What we try to include in all our projects are open spaces and lots of light. Our aim is not simply to build up all available space. If we build something new I always advocate for some empty spaces - not only does it make the project more interesting; it enhances it for the ultimate users – especially people with disabilities and the elderly who need open spaces. Accessibility is also borne in mind, not only for homes for the elderly and disabled. It is vital that all type of buildings have accessibility," he notes.

The prestige of restoration projects

Mr Vassallo recalls with pride his grandfather, who set up the first family company in construction all those years ago. "We were brought up in 'bini'," he says. "And as a family, we love architecture and we love to restore buildings! Renovating an abandoned and derelict building and bringing it back to its original state and full functionality is for me very prestigious, and certainly is source of pride. You can say it's my father's hobby," he adds with a wink.



Villa Alhambra in Sliema was one of the many restoration projects undertaken by the company "there it stood, abandoned for so many years, and we carefully restored it and it's now being used as a family home," he says with satisfaction. "Roseville in Attard, now has a great function as an elderly residence; while Casa Apap Bologna in Mosta is now offering services to people with disabilities."

Clearly, a project like Roseville comes with many challenges. "Roseville is full of character, and obviously when we carry out a job like this our ultimate aim is to restore it back to its original state, so we studied it in great detail - the façade and the internal structure - and painstakingly restored its original windows, and doors, its original wooden shutters - all dating back to the 1940s and a vital part of its wonderful history. It was all done at great expense but definitely worthwhile." He shares an interesting tidbit. "Originally the villa was built in two phases, the ground floor and then years later the floor above it. And we discovered that the colours used during both phases were different, so when we restored it we went into that detail by studying the pigments used in the paint to keep it as much as possible as it was. In fact people looking at it may ask - why did they not match the colours? But there was a reason for that..."

Vassallo Builders Ltd - a one-stop shop

Vassallo Builders Ltd can be described as a one-stop shop having active joinery and steel sections as well as a scaffolding and plant section. Mr Vassallo observes there are many advantages in having many different sections under the same umbrella who come together on a project. "So if we are designing a steel staircase with wooden slats, we know the two sections can produce it together in-house; to carry out major scaffolding

manage it ourselves - we rent it out or partner up with other entities. We do this across the board, in the old people's homes; for office blocks like Tagliaferro Centre or Quantum; and residential, where we rent out apartments. Admittedly there are instances where we actually sell part of a property, but it's not the core part of the business."

Mr Vassallo remarks that the rental sector is one that is constantly growing, and is one that comes with its difficulties. "It does not offer a



rapid return on investment. The difference of course being if you built a block of flats or commercial property and sell it, you have an immediate return. And yet, nowadays there is plenty of diversification even in this sector; we are heavily involved in developing and renting the commercial spaces out for retail purposes."

works, you can involve people from various sections in one meeting, and so decisions are taken quickly, while obviously, an enormous advantage is that on site, the different sections come together which adds to the efficiency which ultimately saves time and money."

That said, Mr Vassallo makes it a point to mention that subcontracting is also a vital part of the process. "We have regular subcontractors on our books, to provide those services we do not have ourselves."

The growth of the Group's property management division

The Vassallo Group Property Section includes a large portfolio of buildings and properties which is constantly increasing. "Our portfolio includes residential, commercial, and retail, properties - mostly stuff we built ourselves, or bought," Mr Vassallo elaborates.

He is keen to stress that Vassallo Group are not developers. "We don't buy a piece of land, develop it and sell it. Once we develop it we

Furthermore the Group buys into property-related businesses. "We have entered a number of partnerships in different sectors, and slowly but steadily we are continuing to grow," he says. "Our aim ultimately is to enlarge the portfolio and continue to offer a better service to our list of satisfied clients."





Jonathan Buttigieg

Deputy CEO & Commercial Director, Vassallo Builders

A constantly evolving company and looking at the future...

Jonathan Buttigieg, Deputy CEO and Commercial Director of Vassallo Builders has been with the company for 23 years and has seen it grow and evolve substantially during that time. He speaks about the changes he has witnessed and his involvement in the Waste Management sector.

Mr Buttigieg looks back on his time with Vassallo Builders, which he joined as a planning engineer in 1993. "Back then," he says as he settles comfortably in his chair, "the construction side of the company had a turnover of approximately €6 or 7 million – and now it's at around €25 million, that is 4 or 5 times what it was 23 years ago, and that growth has brought about a number of changes within the company.

"We've employed more people, we've had to restructure the way we do business, with more focus on the buildability, and we have an energetic team of Managers, Supervisors, Quantity Surveyors, Accountants and Support Staff to control the day-to-day aspect of the business."

It is indisputable that the company has built up a very good reputation with its clients and the market overall over its 70-year history, primarily because the company believes firmly in delivering the project on time, within budget and to the quality that is requested by the client's specifications. "We try to position ourselves in the centre of this time/cost/quality triange at all times" asserts Mr Buttigieg.

He recalls that when he first joined, CareMalta was still in its infancy. "We were just opening Casa Arkati, our first home for the elderly. Since then we have built a number of homes - they have always been built by Vassallo Builders, so the natural synergy between subsidiary companies fuelled in part the growth of our construction business. Needless to say, the catering side has also evolved greatly over the years

generating more business, and contributing to the growth of the group as a whole."

Mr Buttigieg talks about an ambitious five-year plan that has been set out for the group the so called Vision 2020. "This plan will involve growth throughout all the different business sectors of the group including Vassallo Builders," he elaborates. "We are in the process of employing more people, both in management and workers. We are investing in new equipment. Our order book is fully sold out for next year and I would say around 70 or 80% of 2018 so we are extremely busy."

The Malta North Waste Treatment Plant

Vassallo Builders was heavily involved in the Malta North Waste Treatment Plant project commissioned by Wasteserv. It was a large-

scale project which presented many challenges; yet was ultimately beneficial to the country as a whole.

Mr Buttigieg explains that the company has been involved in the Waste Management sector ever since Malta joined the EU. The company was able to secure the first contract for the Magtab Aerial Emissions Plant, following the closure of the Magtab landfill; it was a contract to design and build a gas extraction system to prevent gases from polluting the area.

"On that contract we had partnered with a German company – Haase," says Mr Buttigieg. "The government had published its waste strategy plan – and the next stage was the Mechanical Biological Treatment (MBT) plant in Sant'Antnin which was a conversion and upgrade of the existing plant. Vassallo Builders then formed a joint venture to bid for a new





plant - the Malta North Waste Treatment plant which is one and a half times the size of the entire Sant'Antnin complex."

On this project, Vassallo Builders partnered with leading German and Portuguese companies - BTA International and Efavec. The consortium won the contract which had to be delivered within 18 months and managed to do just that. "We have just received the Taking Over Certificate of the project and are in the process of concluding the final account" says Mr Buttigieg. "With our partners, we handled the complete Malta North Waste Treatment Plant without any input or output issues, as opposed to just the Anaerobic Digestion Plant at Sant Antnin".

"The benefits of this project for the country are obvious and we are no longer landfilling waste which could either be recycled or which could produce energy," says Mr Buttigieg. "Only inert and unusable wastes is being landfilled". This plant will receive all the black garbage bags and will separate those fractions which are recyclable. Wasteserv will oversee

of the sale and / or exportation of those items. The organic fractions - food waste, kitchen waste - will be passed through a process called 'anaerobic digestion' which is comparable to fermentation. This waste decomposes and produces bio-gas, which is used to run two generators called CHPs - combined heat and power engines - and the resultant electricity is put back into the power grid. So we are in effect creating power from the waste.

Mr Buttigieg is clearly enamoured of this subject, as he continues to explain the fascinating process. "Besides the bio gas we end up with waste water that is then treated; rendering it safe enough to be disposed of in the national sewage grid. There is the possibility of making further use of that water

with an additional treatment step to satisfy the irrigation needs of the whole Maghtab Environmental Complex. Another by-product is an agricultural compost which could be used to produce engineering soil. This compost could be used to complete the actual landscaping and embellishment of the landfill itself.

A private company with a public conscience

A point Mr Buttigieg is keen to bring up is that Vassallo Group is firmly committed to the environment.

"We are a private company with a public conscience, and our commitment to the environment extends to more than our involvement in the Waste Management sector." In fact, Mr Buttigieg is also a director of Powerezi, which has covered practically all the roofs of the buildings owned by the Group with PV panels, thereby generating as much of their own energy as possible. "The next four cars we buy will be electric cars," he adds, and says with disarming honesty that "we acknowledge that construction is not really perceived as being a very clean business - the sites generate dust, the cranes and equipment generate noise and we occupy a good chunk of roads going back and forth with building materials. So we do want to make a statement about this because we do feel we can continue to contribute when it comes to the environment."

Another factor Mr Buttigieg mentions is the shift in the number of women who are joining the construction industry. "With the company we now have Architects, Quality Controllers and Quantity Surveyors who are women and they are often out on site. I'm proud that we are slowly removing the stereotype that construction is a male oriented industry. While CareMalta's workforce is quite the opposite with women making up 80% of the workforce, I hope that more women enter the construction industry to make up for the shortage of skilled and qualified people which is proving to be quite a challenge to overcome!"





Neville Calleja

Cost Control & Logistics Director, Vassallo Builders

Keeping within time-frames and budgets

The Director of Cost Control and Logistics within Vassallo Group, **Neville Calleja**, describes the very important aspect of Cost Control within the multi-million projects carried out by the group; the challenges faced by labour shortage; and the University Residence project the Group is about to embark on.



Getting straight to the point, Mr Calleja states that the primary need is to be profitable. "Profit alone does not guarantee survival, cash flow is critical too," he states. "Having won a project, we possess a contractual obligation and an amount of money for discharging this obligation. In addition, we take steps to maximise value-recovery opportunities, while minimising the risk of deduction by way of set-off or liquidated damages. We also strive to minimise our cost in order to ensure budgets are met. Cost control is a tool with which the team can minimise cost. Profit is the simple difference between value earned and cost spent."

Mr Calleja adds that controlling cost is not easy considering the myriad of people spending money on any particular project;

from the Commercial department procuring big-ticket purchases and subcontractors, to the Purchasing department together with the Site Management in buying sundry materials through a Purchase Order. "Control of spend within our company is crucial. Although subcontractors may be let on a fixed price, they will also be looking to boost their income. Reducing the risk of subcontract cost growth by means of a well-drafted agreement, and then managing it properly, is essential for us to control cost as much as possible."

Warming to the subject, Mr Calleja explains that project cost control starts from the tendering stage. "We have a cost system that contains a resource code structure. Where possible, these costs are applied to the resources included in

the estimate, simplifying the initial reconciliation between the 'estimate' and the 'working budget'. However, flexibility in fine-tuning the resource approach of the Cost Estimator and the intentions of the Works Manager are somewhat different. Nevertheless, we try to ensure that the estimate is reconciled against a working budget and/or actual costs."

A cost planning tool that keeps track of 'cost to date' and 'forecast cost at completion' and, importantly, which identifies the reasons for discrete cost movements between the current and previous costs is also utilised. "We analyse costs in detail during monthly Commercial meetings. Whenever possible, a cost performance report is drawn up depending on the needs and outcome results for each project. Being able to identify changes in costs will prompt questions over, for example, bad rates, operational inefficiency and more. The change in cost, tracked cumulatively, and allocated as a recoverable or non-recoverable cost will assist us recognise positive and negative trends, reconcile the perception of recoverable cost with the reality of variation register, and take proactive steps to avoid or mitigate potential cost escalations."

The use of an effective cost coding system also helps in the particularisation of costs should they need to be evidenced in support of a claim. We are always on the lookout for certainty of outcome as we forecast results, risks and opportunities across various projects. In conclusion, he adds that "we strongly believe that effective cost control coupled with realistic forecasting (budgets), subjected to regular review is imperative in order for us to maximise the potential of profitability."



Oncology

828 rooms, various commercial outlets and other amenities such as a child care centre, a language school, a gym and a pool. The skyline of each block will vary in height with the highest block towering 14 floors above road level.

“The clock has already started ticking, and we are now in a stage where we have frozen the construction design,” says Mr Calleja enthusiastically. “We envisage that the building permit will be issued before the end of the year. Works should commence during the first quarter of 2017, and we are committed to deliver the first phase of the project by September 2018. The remaining works are to be completely handed over a year later.

The challenges currently faced by the Construction Industry

Although the construction industry in Malta is thriving and continues to represent one of the most important sectors in the economy, it faces one important issue – labour shortage. “The severe shortage of labour supply in various construction trades, especially stone / brick masons and formwork erectors, is taking its toll on the industry,” Mr Calleja explains. “Together with the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), we are doing our part to train potential personnel (within the company

itself) in these skills, where manpower is in short supply. The results of these efforts are still insufficient to fill the lacuna in the various trades and it is evident that the short-term solution is to import the required manpower from abroad,” he adds.

The University Residence Project

The €25 million in this project is the largest investment that the Group has secured over its 70-year history. The proposed development will cover an area measuring 11,000 square meters, and will include four underground parking levels; eight residential units including

A long but interesting journey!

Mr Calleja has been involved in different roles on prestigious projects during his 27 years with the Group. He occupied roles as a Quantity Surveyor, Projects Manager and Commercial Manager before being appointed to a Director. He has worked on, among others:

- Malta International Airport (€5.8m)
- The Malta Freeport (€19.8m)
- Tigne Point Development (€33.5m)
- Radisson SAS Golden Sand Resort & Spa (€11.9m)
- Mellieha Home for The Elderly (€8.5m)
- Roseville, Home for the Elderly (€1.3m)
- New American Embassy (€8.9m)
- The George Hotel (€2.8m)
- B.W.S.C. Power Station (€8.6m)
- Life Sciences Centre (€2.6m)
- Oncology Centre, Mater Dei Hospital (€7.0m)
- OneOneO Apartments (€6.3m)
- MBT Plant (€19.5m)
- The Phoenicia Hotel- ongoing (€16.0m)





Joe Buhagiar

Managing Director, DSL Health and Safety

The role of a Health and Safety company...

Joe Buhagiar is the Managing Director of DSL Health and Safety, the company engaged to provide Health and Safety consultancy and services to the Vassallo Group. He talks about his role within the Group, the Health and Safety Culture within the Group, and the importance of employing solid Health and Safety practices at all times.

Mr Buhagiar starts off by explaining DSL's relationship with Vassallo Group. "DSL and Vassallo Group signed a contract to cater for all Occupational Health & Safety (OHS) issues and work practices within the group in January this year, however we had already worked together on a number of construction projects. Over the years we have obviously built a strong working relationship." Essentially, DSL's role is to communicate and implement OHS practices throughout the entire group. "OHS is a vast subject; the spectrum is huge especially in a Group of this sort which includes companies like CaterEssence, CareMalta, Vassallo Builders and many others, whose OHS needs are different."

OHS practices are ongoing issues with new situations to be faced and new ideas to be discussed constantly. With this in mind, the Group's existing policies were reviewed. Discussions were then held with top and middle management, site managers and workers, with DSL explaining the intricate details of OHS. DSL then drew up a comprehensive OHS policy document which was in turn communicated to all parties. From there on, it has been DSL's role to advise on and oversee the implementation of this OHS policy.

"Health and Safety is also about being proactive – proactive education and proactive sharing of ideas,"

says Mr Buhagiar, a man clearly passionate about the issue. "We strive to educate the entire workforce - so you might ask, why do people working in an office need to know about Health and Safety? Granted, to a certain extent, the risks a clerk or a manager will encounter in an office are not the same as a construction worker working four storeys high on a harness, but you always have to be prepared. Our ultimate goal is to avoid incidents and accidents at the workplace. When these happen, you have loss of income, injuries, hospitalisation, in some tragic cases death and you can also face OHS Authority fines, litigations and stop orders. Ultimately it is the wellbeing of the individual

that is top priority – our job is to ensure safety on site at all times."

Vassallo Group's OHS practices

When Mr Buhagiar came on board as consultant, Vassallo Group already had a solid policy in place – and here Mr Buhagiar is quick to praise his predecessors who laid the foundations for him to carry on the job.

"There is definitely a strong OHS culture within the Group, and it gives me enormous satisfaction to witness the dedication of everyone within the company to ensure OHS



is an integral part of their daily operations, from ensuring the mandatory use of hard hats, vests, safety shoes which are mandatory all the time, to ensuring all necessary safety equipment is available.

The company directors have direct input in this, and hats off to them all - and I can honestly say that Vassallo Group is one of the leaders in the industry when it comes to OHS."

Mr Buhagiar explains how he and his team carry out a number of site visits every week, noting all that is in conformity with regulations and studying any issues that may arise. "We have solid one-to-one relationships with everyone on site – managers, foremen and workers. We make it a point to involve them in our visits and discussions; and they are free to raise any concerns they may have."

Tool Box Talks

Mr Buhagiar cites the importance of planning and describes the concept of toolbox talks. These are informal on-site meetings that focus on safety topics related to the specific job. "You need to plan your day," he explains. "Every morning, the site foreman meets with the workers and the health and safety officer to discuss the works for the day and establish any safety issues. So for example, if working at heights they would need harnesses, lanyards and anchor points. If there is manual handling, do they have the necessary trolleys? What about the scaffolding? Is there any possibility of falling objects? The list is endless.

A follow-up report on each site visit is compiled. This is a detailed yet straightforward check list on which any potential hazards and risks are noted and solutions recommended. "That said," Mr Buhagiar clarifies, "any issues would be raised immediately on site, so by the time the report is received, the issue would have already been sorted."

Vassallo Group is also very diligent when it comes to risk assessments of all its premises, including the elderly care homes, the newly set up HILA establishment; while ensuring it is in total conformity with OHS legislation including all types of insurance.

"In my many years in the business, I have come across potential clients for whom Health and Safety was a burden and an additional expense; or who adopts an 'ejja ha mmorru' attitude" says Mr Buhagiar with a sigh. "But the Vassallo Group takes it very seriously and has devoted great energy and resources to its OHS practices."

Training and Awareness

Mr Buhagiar reiterates his mantra about being proactive in education, and ensuring everyone

in the company is aware of OHS issues at all times.

"We organise induction courses that tackle workplace hazards and safe work practices for all new employees," he begins. "We have a series of PowerPoint presentations that are relevant to the different companies' requirements. The Health and Safety policy document is communicated to everyone. We hold training sessions, seminars, site visits and there is constant communication between us and the workforce; all designed to reduce the risk of incidents and accidents".

DSL obviously has a strong day-to-day working relationship with the Human Resources division of Vassallo group - with HR director Charlo' Bonnici and the HR team. "We communicate regularly to discuss what is being done during any particular week - what sites visits are planned, whether there are any issues anywhere, training modules that are happening and risk assessments that have to be carried out. We discuss OHS Authority requirements. It is, as I said, a constant ongoing process which needs continuous liaison through phone discussions, emails and meetings."

DSL Health and Safety

Mr Buhagiar has over 12 years' experience in the sector and in 2008 he set up DSL Health and Safety in partnership with three architects, his brother Prof. Dion Buhagiar, Prof. Alex Torpiano and Dr Marc Bonello, but he always ran the show himself. "I was a full time employee and a director of the company from the start. I began making contacts, taking on small jobs, and the company grew considerably over the past eight years.

"In January 2016 I bought out my partners, and DSL is now running over 100 construction sites. We employ four safety officers as well as my wife Maryanne Buhagiar who is company secretary and handles all the accounts." Among the major projects DSL handled over the years are the City Gate Project and the new Oncology Department at Mater Dei; while currently overseeing the Phoenicia Hotel refurbishment and the OneOneO complex in Sliema.

"I pride myself that DSL is a client-oriented business and we go the extra mile. It is a sector that is complex and carries huge responsibilities which I am constantly aware of, given people's lives are at stake.

"Unfortunately, accidents happen – and people die," he says sombrely "This is traumatic, tragic and has huge consequences on the family members of the victim his co-workers and the company he works for; and this is why it is such a vital component of any organisation.

"I reiterate Vassallo Group's commitment to

this, from Chairman Nazzareno Vassallo all the way across the organisation. Bear in mind that the Group has come for praise from the OHS Authority for its work practices, and it is a matter of pride for DSL that we are the Group's partners in this sector."

Reno, Silvio, Gordon

Projects that have reached fruition... and are ongoing

The construction projects undertaken by Vassallo Builders are many and varied. **Reno Vassallo**, Construction Manager, and **Silvio Fenech** and **Gordon Micallef**, site managers, talk about the numerous projects that the company started, continued and completed over the past year, and the numerous challenges these projects presented.



Reno Vassallo starts by listing the numerous projects that Vassallo Builders completed this year. "We completed the Mechanical and Biological Treatment Plant in the North of Malta for Wasteserv- this was inaugurated in February. We also recently finished Casa Apap Bologna in Mosta, a respite home for persons with disability. We also completed the Lidl supermarket in Mosta; which was opened on June 20."

Silvio Fenech, on his part, is currently overseeing phases 2 and 3 of the OneOneO project, a block of luxury apartments and commercial premises in Sliema. "It consists of three levels of parking, commercial premises and 58 apartments & penthouses," Mr Fenech explains. He is also involved in Quantum Place consisting of two levels of parking, two third

party shops, five levels + one intermediate level of office space and a penthouse office.

Mr Fenech adds that during this year he was also involved in a number of other projects, including the completion of phase one of the OneOneO project, converting of rooms into clinics at the Prince of Wales residence for the elderly, and more.

Gordon Micallef in the meantime is currently working on the Hotel Phoenicia, which is currently undergoing an extensive renovation.

The complexities and challenges of construction

It is almost redundant to say that construction projects of this magnitude present considerable

challenges, and Mr Vassallo, Mr Fenech and Mr Micallef all have interesting stories about their respective projects.

Mr Vassallo cites the Mosta Lidl as a prime example. "It was the first project that we built with precast elements such as columns, beams and walls, which were imported from Sicily." He goes on to explain that using precast elements helped the timeframe enormously, given the client wanted the project finished in a relatively short period of time."

Bringing the items down from Sicily brought on a number of headaches. "We had to organise our own shipments," recalls Mr Vassallo. "Bear in mind that each element is very heavy, some weighing around 33 tonnes. We then had to transport them from Hay Wharf to Mosta. We had to transport them at night to avoid traffic – leaving the port at 2.30am and arriving on site around four hours later. Much manpower was used to manoeuvre the lorries and equipment safely along the roads and we also needed a police presence to control the traffic."

"In a project of this magnitude, you will face obstacles and challenges all along the way," says Mr Vassallo. "And yet, although we estimated that the job would take us four months, by working on Sundays and Public Holidays, we finished it a month ahead of schedule... leaving us with a very happy client!"

Mr Micallef observes that the work on the Phoenicia was similarly expected to take around four months. However, the project presented many challenges from the start. He explains that "apart from the internal refurbishment – changes of bathrooms, removal of carpets to expose and renovate the old tiles, wall maintenance, and repairs to the prestigious



Gordon Micallef

and ornate dining room ceiling - there were various structural improvements planned, and a complete redesign of the pool area.

"However," he says, "as works began and our investigations deepened, in certain areas we found more deterioration than expected, so more works had to be planned. In each instance, special care had to be taken in the restoration as this is an 80-year-old listed building."

If this were not enough to throw the plan off schedule, the issues were compounded even further by the discovery of archaeological remains on site. "As we were excavating we found ancient walls, some of which were known to Heritage Malta, but others were not." Consequently, the project architects had to go back to the drawing board and the area redesigned around the remains, which will now be restored and protected. Mr Micallef is happy to conclude by reporting that the project is now back on track, and the hotel will soon be fully restored to its former glory.

Mr Fenech concurs with his colleagues, commenting that in an industry of this kind, challenges are constant, and vary depending on the project. "For instance, as both projects I am working on are very close to the sea shore, one of our problems is sea water ingress and it was a major task to keep water levels as low as possible, so we can lay the foundations in the safest and easiest way possible."

Mr Vassallo also comments about the challenging nature of the Maghtab project which took two years to complete. He is quick to praise the efforts put in by the entire team of the manager, foremen and workers under the direction of Jonathan Buttigieg. Among the challenges surmounted were the initial excavations the magnitude of the area covered by the project; and the complexities of the various processes and phases it went through prior completion.

Casa Apap Bologna was much less complicated, he says and was completed in a few months. "But this was merely a house in Mosta which required internal renovations and now it is up and running."

The team certainly has no time to sit on its laurels, with works on Casa Santa Monica in Qormi, another residence for persons with

"We have Italians, Serbs, Indians, and Moroccans. We employ people from Bulgaria, Latvia, Tunisia and many more. It's a United Nations workforce," he says as he rattles off the list with a smile.

"Of course, there will always be challenges. Where possible we accommodate our worker's different requirements. You need to keep the team on site happy – not only with the work but with each other. On site they work in groups, and you sometimes need to allocate teams appropriately. Due to the conflict in ex-Yugoslavia, for example, some of the people from the region will not work together, so some careful planning has to go there, otherwise the project will suffer. If they have problems, they discuss them with us, even if it's a personal issue, and we offer them the support they need."

Mr Fenech adds that the most crucial issue is one of language. "A very large number of our foreigners do not understand English, however, when that situation arises, we approach those whose English is better and they act as leader and interpreter for the others. Also, many of the people in a particular trade or profession come from the same country, which allows them to function very well as one unit."



Silvio Fenech

disabilities in progress; and the refurbishment of Villa Messina in Rabat about to start as is the refurbishment of the Hotel Riviera in Marfa, which is due to reopen in mid May 2017.

A United Nations workforce...

Within the company there are a number of employees from different countries and backgrounds and having different levels of experience. Mr Vassallo explains that easy access to better education and easier jobs means fewer Maltese people go into construction, and so the company needs to recruit from overseas.

"I've been here 13 years, and some of the foreign workers have been here as long as that," says Mr Vassallo in conclusion. "We get used to each other's ways of working and attitudes. We've never had any major conflicts on site. All our workers are well-paid and we trust and respect them and appreciate what they do. This makes them proud to be a part of the company."

Purpose-built University Residence

- A First for Malta

The University Residence project is unique and one that Vassallo Group is proud to take on in its 70th anniversary. The University Residence will be built by a public-private partnership between Vassallo Group and the University of Malta. "This is the largest single project investment yet in our Group's 70 years history. We are very proud to have been entrusted by the University of Malta to develop Malta's first ever purpose-built and on-campus residence," said Nazzareno Vassallo, Chairman of the Vassallo Group.

The Group recently signed a partnership agreement with the University of Malta to build,



campus.

The University Residence project will also incorporate the University of Malta's English Language school, which currently operates at the University's existing, off-campus residence in Lija. Additional facilities will include a large underground car park and a child care centre, servicing both the University of Malta itself and Mater Dei Hospital.

The project is being developed in phases and the first phase development is expected to come on stream by September 2018, providing space for 300 students to live on campus during the 2018-2019 academic year. Additional accommodation and facilities will be released in different phases of the project's development. In its final design, the University Residence will accommodate upwards of 800 students.

All of the University Residence's commercial, functional and sports facilities will be open to visitors, and not just to students who live on site. This means the facilities can be enjoyed by all students attending the University of Malta, even those who lodge elsewhere, creating an attractive and vibrant atmosphere.

At the time of writing, the University Residence project was in an advanced stage of the design phase, and details were being finalised by the Vassallo Group in collaboration with the University of Malta. "We are looking at other

international projects to work out how we can shorten the construction period to meet or beat our planned deadlines," said Pio Vassallo, CEO of Vassallo Group. "We are looking for fast track solutions that can save time wherever possible. For instance, we are considering installing prefabricated bathrooms, which will cut back on the time we need to install these essential facilities."

"We are in the right place at the right time for this project and we are very excited about it," Pio Vassallo adds. "We like to be the first in what we do. You only ever remember the name of the first man on the moon. I am certain many will remember our Group once this fabulous project is completed. It will bring to Malta a 'state of the art' on campus student accommodation development that will be the envy of many international Universities."

finance and manage the on-site residence which will be located between the existing University of Malta campus and Mater Dei Hospital. The agreement with the University of Malta will see the Group invest Eur25 million in the project which will be developed under the partnership agreement over a 3-year span and then managed for a 60-year term.

Mr Vassallo's vision for the University Residence project is for it to function "as a youth hub, a residential, social and entertainment space for young people in a secure, well-equipped and well-managed environment." The Residence's anchor facility will be the on-campus accommodation for international students. The project is planned to function like a small, efficient and well organised village, offering a mix of residential, commercial and sport facilities, including catering outlets, a laundry, a post office, common rooms, and a multi-faith prayer room, as well as sports facilities, a gym, swimming pool and indoor basketball court, which will complement the existing sports facilities at the other end of the



"This is a largest single project investment yet in our Group's 70 year history"

Annual Chairman's Lunch 2015

Mr Nazzareno Vassallo, Chairman of Vassallo Group hosted this event which has now become a traditional occasion. Some 150 guests which included employees forming part of the various companies within Vassallo Group and major stakeholders attended this lavish lunch and were later presented with a commemorative gift and the company's yearly publication of the Akati Magazine by the Group's Chairman.

Christmas Party 2015

More than a thousand employees attended a metallic themed Christmas party organized by Vassallo Group. The event was held at the Casino Maltese in Valletta. Employees together with their partners and spouses, who form part of Vassallo Builders, CareMalta and Cateressence got together to celebrate in style this annual event hosted by the Group's Chairman Mr Nazzareno Vassallo.



Top Management restructuring

As part of Vassallo Group's Vision 2020 strategy, a number of changes at senior executive level of Vassallo Group have been implemented. These changes come in a very important year for the Group as it is celebrating its 70th anniversary.



Woman's Day celebrated

"Pledge for Parity" was the theme chosen for this year's international women's day which is celebrated every year on the 8th of March. Once again, Vassallo Group chaired by Mr Nazzareno Vassallo organized a special lunch for all its women employees.



Arkati Foundation Day

The second edition of the Arkati Foundation Day organized by Vassallo Group was successfully held on the 4th of March. The foundation, established in 1991 involves and encourages employees to make donations towards the Arkati Fund. The Arkati Foundation utilises the funds to help employees forming part of the Group who have been affected by extenuating circumstances, such as illness, the death of a relative, or other misfortunes.



Planting of Trees

70 employees representatives from Vassallo Group celebrated the Group's 70th anniversary by planting 70 trees at the recently inaugurated North Mechanical & Biological Waste Treatment Plant in Magħtab. Present for the event was also the Minister for Sustainable Development, the Environment and Climate Change, the Hon Leo Brincat, Group Chairman, Mr Nazzareno Vassallo, Wasteserv CEO Mr Tonio Montebello, various Directors, Managers and other employees who contribute in the various sectors within the Group.



Blood Donation Day

As part of its annual Corporate Social Responsibility and 70th anniversary initiatives, Vassallo Group organized its annual blood drive at their Head Office. The event was organized together with the National Blood Transfusion Services.



Gorg Agius wins Nazzareno Vassallo Award 2016

Mr Gorg Agius, known as Gorg tal-Muzew or "God's poet", was awarded for his contribution towards making the lives of elderly and other patients in hospitals a little bit more cheerful, at a ceremony held under the patronage of the President of Malta, her excellency Marie Louise Coleiro Preca at Verdala Palace. He was awarded the Nazzareno Vassallo Award organized by Malta's leading care provider, CareMalta.





Business Breakfast

"Is there a bigger role for the private sector in the social field?" was the theme of a business breakfast organized by Vassallo Group at the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry in Valletta. This event was one in a string of events organized by the Group to mark its 70th anniversary.

The Cake Box Café Mosta opened

The Cake Box Café in Mosta was inaugurated on 17th June by Vassallo Group Chairman Nazzareno Vassallo accompanied by Group Director, Chris Vassallo and CaterEssence Executive Chairman, Ing. Alex Tranter. A number of directors, members of the management team and other guests were present.



New University Residence and Community Complex

The University of Malta concluded an agreement with Vassallo Builders Group Limited, for the construction and operation of a University Residence & Community Complex, following a call for proposals issued last year. A Letter of Acceptance for the construction and operation of the new residence and complex was signed by Professor Juanito Camilleri, Rector, and Mr Pio Vassallo, CEO of Vassallo Builders Group

End-of-works BBQ at Casa Apap Bologna

The traditional end-of-works BBQ was held at Casa Apap Bologna on Friday 29th July. Vassallo Builders and CareMalta management and employees, contractors, suppliers as well as the new HILA employees attended this event. Barbecued food prepared by our own CaterEssence was served during the night which came to an end with the cutting of a cake supplied by The Cake Box.





Open Day at Casa Apap Bologna

The first open day was held at Casa Apap Bologna in Mosta on Saturday 30th July. A good number of people turned up for this event aimed at showing the facilities to be offered by this new home operated by HILA which is located a short distance away from the Mosta church. A number of parents together with children who have different were shown around and had questions answered by the management and staff at HILA. Food and drinks were served by employees at Caremalta who assisted throughout the the Open Day.

IT security discussed at Annual Engagement Seminar

Various senior managers, managers and deputy managers across the Vassallo Group discussed IT security during the annual Autumn Engagement seminar. IT security expert Ian Attard spoke about the different risks that every user of IT equipment and systems is open to and how to avoid them. During the seminar the new HR portal named Staff Zone as well as the Group employee handbook were launched by HR Director, Charlo Bonnici who provided information how employees will be able to access both the portal and the handbook. A number of new and revised HR-related policies were also announced.



"I am the Brand"

Various employees from all the companies within the Group participated in training seminar focusing on the theme "I am the brand". The speaker was Dr Beverly Cutajar from Think Talent. Members of staff who normally come in contact with clients, relatives of elderly residents, suppliers and members of the public were invited to attend. Various tips were provided on how to improve our customer care skills and the way we project ourselves and our company to others.

Long term care discussed

Questions like "Should we be adding life to years and years to life of older persons?", or "Do we need to keep treating certain conditions such as cholesterol beyond certain age at the risk of over loading the older person with medication?", were asked during a seminar organised by the CareMalta Academy within the CareMalta Group as part of the company's events to mark the International Day dedicated to older persons celebrated on October 1st. The seminar facilitated by PBS journalist Mario Xuereb, focused on the future of long-term care of the elderly. The seminar was attended by various stakeholders including doctors, nurses, public officers, managers of old people's homes, elderly persons and academics.





Equality Mark Awarded

The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) has awarded the Equality Mark Certification to four operating companies within the Vassallo Group namely Vassallo Builders, CareMalta, CareMalta Mellieha and CaterEssence.

This certification is based on evidence of our true commitment to implement relevant policies and practices that concern gender equality and family friendly measures at the place of work and in the access to and provision of goods and services. This certification allows these companies to use the Equality Mark logo in all their communications.

Bring your Child to Work Day

Vassallo Group employees from Vassallo Builders, CaterEssence and CareMalta participated in this year's annual 'Bring your Child to Work Day'. This event is a great opportunity for parents to introduce their children to their colleagues and for children to relate to their parents place of work. Various activities were organised to keep the children busy and entertained throughout the morning. Children spent their time drawing, making crafts, preparing lunch and simply having a good time playing.



CSR Day at San Blas

Over 60 employees from various sectors of Vassallo Group volunteered to aid in a number of projects being carried out at San Blas in Zebbug, one of the rehabilitation centres run by Caritas. Helpers were split into teams where each group was assigned different duties. Works carried out included construction, maintenance, IT, cleaning and our Chairman cooking lunch for everyone with the help of a few volunteers. With everyone's input the teams managed to finish the tasks by noon, just in time to gather around for a well-deserved lunch. Mr Vassallo thanked everyone for their time and explained the three types of pasta he prepared with the help of his team. The event turned out to be a huge success, thanks to everyone who gave a helping hand.



Football Tournament in Aid of Arkati

Around 80 participants took part in a 4-hour football tournament in aid of the Arkati Foundation. The event took place on Friday 30th September at the Attard FC football ground. The tournament was won by Vassallo Builders Phoenixia who played against CaterEssence Kitchen in the final. Vassallo Builders Head Office and CaterEssence Bugibba played in the semi finals. CareMalta had the most participating teams, five in all. Pio Vassallo is seen in the photo giving the trophy to the winning team.





Indian Night

Indian employees which form part of CareMalta organised 'An Indian Harvesto' event to celebrate Onam – The Harvest Festival. This Indian festival of joy celebrated traditional Indian culture and traditional food. CareMalta CEO Natalie Briffa Farrugia and members of Caremalta's senior management team were guests of honour.

Philippine Independence Day

Independence Day is an annual national holiday in the Philippines observed on June 12th, commemorating the Philippine Declaration of Independence from Spain on June 12th, 1898. In Malta this was celebrated as a Lunch for all Philippine residents in Malta held at the Preluna Hotel, Sliema. CareMalta supported this event.



Management Training

Throughout 2016 Executive training programmes were organised for members of the senior management and management teams of Vassallo Builders, CareMalta and CaterEssence

A year-long programme was organized by Vassallo Builders for senior management and management. The programme, called APEX was delivered and coordinated by Think Talent. APEX is a leadership development programme that combines parallel coaching and individual personality profiling. It is aimed towards addressing areas of leadership, business and management development required by middle management positions.

A Senior Management Development programme spread over 2 days run by MISCO and delivered by Mr Joe Zahra was organized for the CareMalta senior management team. The main issues tackled were: Self Awareness, Change management and Organisational Performance.

CaterEssence held intensive management training courses focused on Strategic Management and Leadership Skills. The course delivered by Mr David J. Dingli was designed to provide the Senior Management Team with sharp strategic decision-making skills to be able to distinguish the difference between operational and strategic situations and ensure successful implementation of the Company's strategic vision.

Healthy Lifestyles Week

The Group organised the first edition of Healthy Lifestyles Week between the 21st and 25th November.

The aim of this week, organised in collaboration with the Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate had the aim of promoting a healthier lifestyle for our employees. A positive, safe and healthy environment for employees, is directly linked to increased morale, improved work-life balance which, in turn, positively impacts the business, our bread and butter.

Each day of the week was dedicated to the different topics covering Healthy Eating, Prevention of Cancer, Physical Activity, Smoke free as well as Social and Emotional Well Being. Activities included talks by professionals held in different places of work, free check-ups, discounted subscriptions to gyms, healthy food and much more.



Vassallo Group goes Pink

Vassallo Group celebrated Pink Day on Friday 21st October. All employees were invited to dress down for the day and wear pink clothes or a pink item in support of the Pink October campaign. Vassallo Builders, CaterEssence and CareMalta employees participated in this event. A hot dog day in aid of the same campaign was also organised. A number of employees also contributed by giving up a number of hours' pay.

Teambuilding events

Separate Teambuilding events were organized for Vassallo Builders and CareMalta management. Both events were held in Sicily, between 5th June and 8th June. Members of the Vassallo Builders management team left Malta on two boats where they spent the next few days embarking on a fun teambuilding programme which also included a number of games aimed at fostering a team spirit among those present.

Later on during the year, between the 16th and 18th November all CareMalta's members of the senior and management teams travelled to neighbouring Sicily to the annual teambuilding event. The jam-packed programme also including team events aimed at bringing the whole team together not just for those few days but also for the weeks and months to come.





Christian Vassallo

Director, Vassallo Group

The vision for the 2020 strategy

Christian Vassallo is the Strategic Director responsible for the implementation of Vassallo Group's 2020 strategy. He recently graduated as a chartered director from the Institute of Directors in London, and explains the 2020 Strategy in detail, outlining its inception, implementation, and what it means for the Group and its future.



The Vision for the 2020 strategy

Mr Vassallo explains that on his return from his studies, his biggest task was to convince the family that although the business was doing very well, they should sit down and plan a strategy for the next few years. "I wanted to establish where we wanted to go, I felt that while the directors and CEOs of the different companies within the Group are naturally driven to grow the business, we needed to have a stronger message for every single member of staff to understand what we are trying to achieve in the long term.

"I believe that this will help us utilise our resources better. I believe it will help us to attract better talent on the island, and help people grow as part of a large family within the business," he adds, with conviction.

The strategy had to be adopted and implemented within all our companies in the group. "So we sat down with all the key players in the companies and we created different strategies which plotted different future paths. In retrospect we now feel that in some areas we were a bit conservative, since we are in line to reach some targets before our expectations. "We then presented that vision to the group

and the Chairman, the CEO and the rest of the senior directors took it on. Once the main Vassallo Group Board of Directors and the companies' individual boards approved it, it was then endorsed by the Strategy Board, which I am responsible for – this is mainly made up of

non executive people who's responsibility is to see the strategy through.

The Fundamental principles of the 2020 Strategy

"We then asked a critical question: what are the numbers we are aiming for? And we set a number of targets around the increase of people working in our team, Vassallo Group Turnover; Vassallo Group Net Asset Value and the Vassallo Group Net Profit levels we need to be achieving every year until 2020."

Mr Vassallo explains that apart from the financial targets, another important component of the 2020 strategy is to increase the Group's workforce.

"We want to proudly remain one of the largest private employers on the island," he says emphatically. "In Malta there are a number of foreign companies employ those numbers but there are few Maltese-owned companies that do, and we are honoured and privileged to do so, and we have the responsibility to keep growing and contributing to the Maltese economy."

Mr Vassallo reiterates the company's emphasis on the importance of its workforce. "The strength of our Group is not strong because of the capital we are able to invest, our strengths lie with the good people who form part of our strong team. People who come to work with our group and start at an entry level job; our interest is in someone joining our team and growing with the company" He indicates a woman working in the office next door. "she started off as a clerk, after a few years she is now one of our Accountants within the company. That is our interest, to see those people growing, we feel we can trust them, they feel they can trust us, so having a strategy and a vision channels everyone in the right direction."

The Importance of the 2020 Strategy for Vassallo Group

Mr Vassallo explains that the shareholders are extremely happy with the success and progress of the group, especially in the year it is celebrating its 70th anniversary. "We plan to be around for another 100 years," he says, "so the next generation feel a huge responsibility. My father had humble beginnings, and today, look at what he's built. My generation started off in a much more privileged position, so we have a bigger responsibility to deliver more."

He adds that as a group, they have a huge responsibility to contribute towards the economy to which in turn will contribute towards the success of Malta. There is also the contribution the Group has made towards the environment with its heavy involvement in the Maghtab and Malta North Waste Treatment Plant projects, leading to the Group becoming experts in waste management.

Equally important is the Group's contribution to society - towards the care of the elderly, and



now, with the implementation of HILA (Home to Independence and Limitless Abilities), aimed at helping persons with disabilities.

He cites the success of CareMalta which has improved the quality of elderly care homes considerably, setting a new benchmark for the sector. "When my father was building Casa Arkati, the only competition were the government retirement homes. We sincerely believe that the elderly should enjoy a high quality of life. We helped create a private sector in that market, and it is a role which we feel very honoured to have played."

Implementing the 2020 Strategy

Once the Vision 2020 strategy was approved, the CEOs and top executives throughout the group took over the project. "They were instrumental in building it, they understand the vision behind it and what we are trying to achieve and now are part of implementing it," says Mr Vassallo.

"They produce accounts every month, which are compared to their budgets. The budgets are of course in line with Vision 2020 and so everyone is already coming in line. Thanks to Stephen Borg, (Finance Director) and his reporting technology, we have access to all the data and can assess where everyone is and we ensure targets are being reached. In the meantime, the strategy board has adopted effective and efficient processes to study potential acquisitions and they are already reaping results."

Threats... and opportunities

Mr Vassallo talks about potential threats to the strategy. "Our business is mainly based in Malta so the strength of the economy is one of the influencers on our results. If the economy is affected negatively - which hopefully is not on the horizon, well, that is certainly one of the threats we face.

"Competition may also be perceived as a threat," he adds. "And yet we have been here

70 years; competition is in our DNA, we are used to competing, we challenge ourselves every day but it is how we do business, it helps us improve."

While aware of potential threats Mr Vassallo prefers to look at opportunities, such as IT. "Technology is a huge opportunity, it helps us in our decision-making, in our resource planning; and we also need to look to the future and explore other areas - one of the targets which is not being dealt with right now is how we can increase our digital revenue stream, but we will get there"

The attainment of the 2020 Strategy goals... and beyond

Mr Vassallo ponders the future, and says that his target is not just to reach the 2020 goals and stay there. "If we achieve these goals it will put us in a stronger position to achieve even bigger ones and from that next step our perspective will be a bit different. We believe that Malta is an economy that is still in its early days, we believe much more can be done and we will see a lot of things changing. We try to push for the island to be dependent on more than financial services and gaming companies. We believe Malta can also be a hub for more people, new technologies and services. That will generate more business on the island and that in turn will help us as service providers. We feel that we are learning every day. We are on a journey and we strive to be leaders in everything we are doing."

"In certain companies we are already looking beyond 2020. For example, the student accommodation block for the University of Malta will start operating by 2018, so we are already planning 2020 and 2021 from an operations point of view.

"So, after ensuring everyone is in line with the strategy, and being more surgical on areas where we are not happy, my job then will be to have this long term perspective far beyond 2020."

In conclusion, he says with a twinkle in his eye, "my personal targets were bigger than what was put down in writing, but I believe that they will be reached. I believe in our team and I am confident that we will reach our targets well before our timelines!"





Alex Tranter

Executive Chairman, CaterEssence Ltd.

Delivering quality across the catering spectrum “

Quality is our hallmark”

CaterEssence Ltd. provides catering to business and retail customers. In 2016, the company took on new clients, diversified its product offering and developed new business concepts. Yet delivering quality service and products has remained a priority across all its divisions.

“Quality is our hallmark,” said Alex Tranter, the company’s Executive Chairman. “It is particularly important in CaterEssence’s core business which is catering for residents in all nine homes operated by CareMalta Ltd.” As of 2016, the company began providing a catering service to residential care homes operated by the Church: “We now service four additional homes and we aim to increase the number of third party operated homes that we service.” In CareMalta homes, CaterEssence Ltd. directly supervises food distribution right up to the point of service to individual residents, ensuring quality standards are maintained throughout. CaterEssence Ltd. residential home service caters for all dietary requirements, including low-salt and low-fat meals, minced and liquidised meals, sweets for people with diabetes, and so on.

“We ensure quality through expert advice from a nutritionist and dietician and feedback from residents’ committees, and follow through with staff training, including staff in the respective homes,” Mr Tranter said, adding that the company is “always looking for ways to improve our offering. Food is not just fuel. It has to be palatable and satisfy the eye.” Currently, CaterEssence Ltd. is working on making minced and liquidised meals look more appetising and appealing.

CakeBox, CaterEssence Ltd.’s retail operation, is at the other end of the catering spectrum. Set up two years ago when the company decided to develop its own retail brand, its first outlet was in Qormi near the company’s kitchen. Another much larger CakeBox outlet opened in Mosta this year and the brand’s product offering has expanded to include savouries as well as the wide range of pastries the Cake Box originally was known for. Customers drop in for a light meal or refreshments like coffee and cake, or to pick up healthy food to go from the outlet’s ‘Fresh Eats’ section.

The CakeBox concept is innovative for Malta. “It’s modelled on the food and refreshment outlets found in large cities,” Mr Tranter explains. However, those tend to specialise in one area – coffee or cake, say, or sandwiches or soup. Cakebox is different. It provides a quality product and service offering both to customers who want a relaxing café ambience and to those who want good food and drinks to go. This winter, the CakeBox range will also include soups to complement the current line of hot, savoury snacks, pastries and hot and cold drinks.

The company’s competitive edge is that it controls the whole supply chain. Feedback from customers has been extremely good and the company is planning to open more CakeBox outlets over the next five years: “We’re planning a new outlet in the Sliema / St Julians area in 2017. We’re also developing a shop-in-shop concept, setting up a CakeBox corner in established cafes.”

CaterEssence Ltd.’s hotel food and beverage management service has also seen new developments this year. The company added two well known hotels to a client list that includes The George in Paceville and the Blue Seas hotels in Bugibba and Paceville. “In mid-April, we were contracted to operate the bar and restaurant at the British Hotel in Valletta which we have branded as Panorama, and in July we were contracted to operate the full food and beverage service at the Preluna hotel in Sliema,” Mr Tranter said.

“We renamed the British Hotel bar and restaurant Panorama because of its spectacular views of the Grand Harbour. We redesigned the interior and menu, and repositioned it in the market as a casual fine-dining destination serving Mediterranean cuisine,” Mr Tranter said. Panorama now attracts non-residents as well



as hotel guests and is in demand as a venue for corporate events like product launches, and even for small wedding receptions.

The catering management service CaterEssence offers enables hotel operators to concentrate on their core business of selling and maximising hotel occupancy, whilst Cateressence looks after and operates all the catering requirements required by the Hotel. Hotels choose their own menus and CaterEssence provides staff and service for the kitchen and restaurant, takes care the food and beverages, manages stocks and delivery logistics.

“We invest a lot in people with the right attitude and commitment and offer good conditions, training, and opportunities to work in different locations. This has helped us retain many of our staff members,” Mr Tranter said. The hotel catering division is managed by a former 5-star hotel chef, so hotel clients and their guests can enjoy 5-star quality expertise and management supervision. Hotel operators are charged on a per cover basis, which minimises their risks. Overall, the company adds depth to individual client service by leveraging its purchasing power, human resource bank, to deliver efficient and innovative solutions to each location. ‘Our people are our most important asset in making CaterEssence handle a wide spectrum of contract catering solutions for the Hotel and Healthcare sectors, as well as the retail food sector. We are very proud of our staff.’ Mr. Tranter concluded.

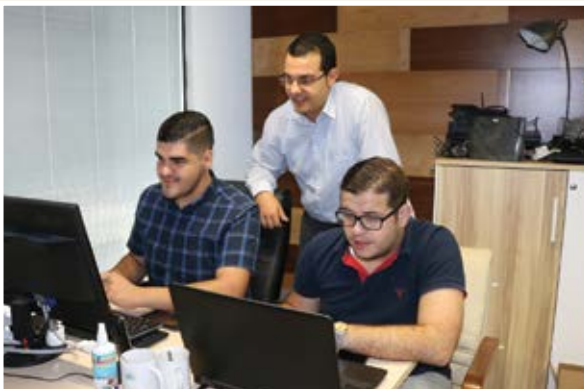


Carlo Aquilina

Chief Information Officer

Kick-starting the new IT setup

A company as large and diverse as the Vassallo Group obviously has a vast and effective Information Technology setup behind it. The current IT setup within the group happened quite recently. **Carlo Aquilina**, who joined the group as Chief Information Officer in July 2015, talks about the projects he and his team worked on during 2016 and what's more to come.



Mr Aquilina admits from the get-go that he knew that the overhaul of the company's IT Structure was never going to be an easy start.

"Bear in mind that before kick-starting the project I needed to understand the Group's structure, its companies, who is who, and analyse the different business requirements of the different sectors within the group" he explains.

"Our first project was to revise the user's equipment, so we got everyone the latest operating system and upgraded where possible," says Mr Aquilina. "We also created our own helpdesk system whereby all users open a 'ticket' for their requests – be they repairs of any nature, for example, or orders for new equipment. In this way, I could monitor the amount and kind of requests coming in and make sure these are followed up, and we see to around 250 of these tickets a month." Naturally, he could not tackle a task of this magnitude on his own, and over the next few months he built his team. Daniel Mercieca joined in November that year; Brandon Schembri joined early in 2016, as did Kevin Catania an IT apprentice, who is learning while helping on all projects. To ensure that all bases are covered, Aquilina explains that all members of the team have different skill sets allowing the work to be distributed better.

With regards to projects undertaken by Mr Aquilina and his team, he cites a whole list including the revision of Head Office and CaterEssence connectivity, a revamp of all users' PCs, the creation of new domain and file services, and the implementation of monitoring tools; while they started the migration of some services to the cloud. In the meantime, they also completed an internally developed site for the HR

Department – StaffZone - among many other projects.

A job which Mr Aquilina himself is overseeing together with the Finance Department is the implementation of ERP (enterprise resource planning) solution for Vassallo Builders. "The old financial software being used had passed its sell-by date; so I recommended that the company should opt for ERP, which integrates a number of applications finance, purchasing, time sheets etc. to allow for improved collection management, reporting and interpretation of data."

More innovation - The Use of IT policy

Another important innovation within the IT department was the launch of a 'Use of IT' policy, which essentially establishes the acceptable and unacceptable uses of IT, electronic devices, and network resources within the Group in conjunction with its established culture of ethical and lawful behaviour.

"The objective of the policy is the preservation of the 'CIA triad', i.e. confidentiality, integrity, and availability of systems and information used by the users or in our case, our customers," elaborates Mr Aquilina. "Confidentiality involves the protection of assets from unauthorised

access; integrity ensures that the modification of assets is handled in a specified and authorised manner; while availability signifies a state of the system in which authorised users have continuous access to said assets.

"We have to understand that a 'work PC' is not a 'Personal Computer' but a 'Professional Computer' and IT devices and Information Systems (IS) are provided by the business for business use only," continues Mr Aquilina. "Access to IT and IS is provided to employees to carry out their professional activities. The policy is divided into a number of sections including the use of IT and IS including passwords and accounts, Internet Access, Telephony and a summary of Dos and Dont's. I believe the more the company becomes IT dependent, the more one needs to regularise and safeguard its data, and the guidelines are there to protect both the company and its employees."

What's next for the IT infrastructure within the group?

So much has been done, yet so much is left to do, and Mr Aquilina reports that "we have many plans both as regards infrastructure and for Enterprise Systems in the pipeline." He is positive that this time next year, Vassallo Builders will be reaping the benefits of the newly implemented ERP system, which Mr Aquilina believes will also be introduced for the other companies within the Group together with Business Intelligence tools and dashboards for the directors. Consolidation of the other Enterprise software will follow suit. He concluded:

"We will also be looking into business continuity programmes through a solid, secure and sound infrastructure; I want to start leverage IT and allow the Group to take advantage of its economies of scale, maximise availability of infrastructure through 6PM which are part of the Group, support and boost productivity whilst providing the best customer (user) experience for all employees," he concludes with a smile.

New appointments and roles for Vassallo Group Directors

Mr Pio Vassallo

CEO of Vassallo Group and Vassallo Builders Ltd will be representing the Group at board level in all the partnerships that the Group currently has totaling over 30.

Mr Christian Vassallo

Director of Vassallo Group has been appointed with the implementation of the Group's 2020 strategy that should see it consolidating its leadership position within a number of sectors in which it operates.

Mr Tonio Depasquale

has been appointed Deputy Chairman of the Vassallo Builders, Caremalta and CaterEssence boards.

Mr Joseph Saliba

has been appointed Chairman of the Group's Strategy and Investments Board.

Architect Ruben Vassallo

has been appointed CEO responsible for the property companies within the Vassallo Group.

Mr Jonathan Buttigieg

has been appointed deputy CEO of Vassallo Builders Ltd and will maintain his duties as Commercial Director.

Mr Stephen Borg

has been assigned the new role of Director of Finance within the Group.

Mr Charlo Bonnici

has been appointed Director of HR and Communications. Mr Bonnici joined the Group in 2008.

Mr Neville Calleja

has been appointed Director responsible for Cost Control and Logistics within Vassallo Builders Limited.

New Recruits, appointments and promotions

NEW RECRUITS

VASSALLO BUILDERS LTD.

Julian Refalo

Site Foreman

CATERESSENCE

Calogero Rio

Catering Manager (Preluna)

Khodor Bayan

Catering Executive (Preluna)

Edward Brincat

Dispatch & Quality Coordinator

Joanna Camilleri

The Cake Box Assistant Outlet Manager

Raymond Agius

Maintenance Technician I

Peter Aquilina

Sous Chef (Panorama)

CAREMALTA

Paul Sceberras

Facility Manager, Zejtun Home

CONGRATULATIONS

Kevin Pace Obtained Masters in Construction Project

APPOINTMENTS & PROMOTIONS

VASSALLO BUILDERS LTD.

Edison Scicluna

Appointed to Metal and Joinery Manager

Adrian Grixti

Factory Foreman

Joe Sammut

Metal and Joinery Superviso

Josef Galea

Cost Planner Estimator

Malcom Zarb

Contract Manager

William Xerri

Site Foreman

Chris Micallef

Site Foreman

Paul Spagnol

Site Foreman

Gordon Micallef

Works Manager

Reno Vassallo

Constructions Manager

CATERESSENCE

Kevin Attard

Jr. Sous Chef (STG)

Simon Griscti

Cost Control & Purchasing Manager

Alessio Aquilina

Jr. Sous Chef (Homes)

Giovanni Meta

Jr. Sous Chef (Pastry)

Carlo Frascogna

F&B Operations Manager

Silvio Grima

Chef Tournant (CPU)

Johannes Tromp

Chef Tournant (BUG)

CAREMALTA

Eleanor Galea

Facility Administrative Asst., Zammit Clapp



Vassallo Group marks 70th anniversary

with Shine Awards



Vassallo Group celebrated its **70th anniversary** with a special edition of its annual Shine Awards night held at the Manoel Theatre on June 4th.

At this event awards for excellence in various areas of operation and for overall performance were awarded. These included awards for the best customer focus, green initiatives, project and service quality. Other awards given out for efforts related to health & safety, training and development, debt collection, cleanliness of company vehicle, the implementation of the RRRs philosophy within the company. Awards were also distributed to the best employee, supervisor and manager as well as to the best Arkati Foundation ambassador. Arkati Foundation is an internal charity within the Group which assists employees going through hard times due to illness or other situations.

In a speech during the event Group Chairman Nazzareno Vassallo touched upon the main achievements of the Group throughout the years making it leader in a number of areas in which it operates. He also listed the main challenges of the Group in the next few years particularly in view of the challenging projects it has embarked or will be embarking upon. These projects include investment in student accommodation, hotels, other commercial and residential property and an industrial park. The Group will also be opening the first home for disabled persons in Mosta later on this year and expanding its catering operations.

The event was compered by TV personality Dr Joseph Chetcuti who also played a number of classical musical pieces during the evening.

The night ended on a high note with the announcement of the coveted Chairman's awards for this year. These were given to Silvio Fenech, a works manager with Vassallo Builders and Denise Tierney a personal assistant at Caremalta. Both Mr Fenech and Mrs Tierney were awarded for their long service and their loyalty to their respective companies and to the Group throughout the years.

The Shine Awards 2016 came to an end with a reception catered for by Vassallo Group's CaterEssence.





Customer Focus Award
Josianne Sammut and Mark Spiteri

Green Initiatives Award
Mario Abela



Successful Project Award
Project: Malta North Mechanical & Waste Treatment Plant

Service Quality Award
Suzanne Camenzuli and Angele Darmanin



Safety Award
Andrew Zammit

Best Arkati Ambassador Award
Karen Dingli and Therese Vella



Training and Development Award
Joanna Vidal

Smart Appearance Award
Manuel Anto



Best Employee Award

Vladimir Sucrovic



Best Supervisor Award

Thomas Gatt

Best Manager Award

Kevin Debattista



Special Awards

Debtors Collection (Rent)

Silvana Borg



Debtors Collection (Operational)

Eliza Azzopardi



3Rs Philosophy

Joe Borg

Best Kept Car

Tony Gauci



Chairman's Awards

Silvio Fenech and Denise Tierney



Vassallo Builders Ltd

5 years



John Abela
Sylvana Borg
Jenise Darmanin
Simon Fava
Proko Knezevic
Charlot Lautier
Sarah Portelli

10 years

Durica Berber
Vladimir Ciric
Ivelin Kolev Dimitrov
Gojko Eror

Sasa Ljubonomonivic
Goran Maconavic
Dalibor Milic
Drogoljub Tubonjic



15 years

Carol Cassar



20 years

Alexander Borg
David Buttigieg
Eusebio Muscat
Louis Zammit



25 years

Michael Vella
William Xerri



35 years

Joseph Ghigo



Caremalta

5 years



Pauline Gatt
Ilona Bezzina
Lucienne Magri
James Cassar
Sandra Busuttil
Charmaine Grima
Mikela Angela Azzopardi
Laurence Bugeja
Justin Bonnici

Yolanda Cortis
Catherine Abela
Ritianne Pace
Sarah Poulter
Shirley Ann Agius
Vanessa Zammit
Helen Camilleri
Austin Panzavecchia
Josephine Theuma

Josephine Saliba
Magdalene Degiorgio
Marthese Cordina
Editha Ferrigi
Melissa Grech
Denise Caruana
Eleanor Demanuele
Carmen Danastasi
Margaret Borg
Marthese Abela
Mary Rose Galea
Vince Degiorgio
Sonia Maria Vella
Lydia Deguara
Jessica Agius
Marianne Ellul
Doris Attard

Joanne Marie Vidal
Evelyn Pisani
Josephine Ghigo
Amanda Galdes
Clotilde Spiteri
Ruth Tonna
Ruth Aguis
M. Lourdes Cini
Charlene Bartolo
Marisa Cachia
Karen Elaine Fenech
Mary Bonello
Doris Zammit
Charlene Schembri
Suzanne Camilleri
Mark Azzopardi

10 years



Natalie Delia
Carmen Grech
Eleonora Vella
Denise Tierney
Anna Mizzi
Angelo Fenech

Peter Elbourne
Mary Laganan
Doris Xuereb
Joseph Cini
Josephine Tanti
Victoria Falzon

Laila Baldacchino
Mary Doris Mifsud
Martin Curmi
Dorianne Vassallo
Charmaine Attard
Benedetta Camilleri

Claire Camilleri
Noel Borg
Mary Agius
Annette Cilia
Theresa Axisa
Katia Bonello

15 years

Marouska Scicluna
Mary Massa
Claudine Galea
Nicolette Sant
Mario Sciberras

Joan Kenely
Rita Camilleri
Maria Catania
Josiann Sammut



20 years

Joan Zammit
M. Concetta Cacciattolo
Magdalin Zammit
Theresa Spiteri



CaterEssence

5 years

Anthony Bartolo
Emanuel Deguara
Carmen Grima
Zvetlana Calleja
Michael Baldacchino
Rachel Lee Formosa
Raphael Lia





Stephen Borg

Director, Finance

A 'helicopter' view of the companies

Stephen Borg is the Director of Finance and Company Secretary of Vassallo Builders Group Ltd. He has been with the company since 2000, and was appointed Company Secretary in 2005. He talks about his two very important roles within the group.

Stephen has to combine two very important roles within his remit; especially given he monitors the financial situations of all the companies which the Group owns or has a stake in.

"Having two roles - both of which I deem to be full-time roles - was somewhat a challenge" he starts off by saying with a smile. "However looking back now, being Company Secretary has given me an insight into the operations of the Group as a whole that otherwise I would not have. I attend the board meetings of the 35 or so companies that form the group. This gives me a vital 'helicopter' view of all the different companies. It is the same in Group companies where we have investments."

Mr Borg goes on to explain that he also takes into account the inter-dependence of the Group companies, yet he is keen to stress that one of the philosophies of the Group is that each company must stand on its own two feet so there is little cross-subsidisation. "Naturally, there may be an initial period where they may need to be supported by the group," he clarifies. "Eventually, however, they must move on their own and it is also my role to ensure that this policy is executed within the group."

A dynamic relationship with the banks

It can be said that the companies that fall under the Vassallo Builders Group Ltd umbrella consist of four major pillars. Mr Borg confirms that the initial bread and butter of the Group continues to be construction; and with that comes substantial investment in property and

property development.

The second pillar is private elderly care, which the Group pioneered many years ago, CareMalta being the largest operator locally. The Group also has a strong presence in the tourism industry through investment in The George hotel in Paceville and the Riviera in Marfa; the final pillar is the catering division through CaterEssence which provides food both to the hotels and the elderly care homes.

With these four major divisions and other investments – among others, the IT sector through VBGL's investment in 6PM, and Powerezi, through which the company has set up PV panels across all group properties – the Vassallo Group must have a very dynamic relationship with the banks and finance institutions.

Mr Borg concurs, saying that that the large scale projects carried out by the Group would not be possible without bank financing. "Over the years the Group has developed an excellent relationship with the major banks. It is not something we take for granted because it is a relationship that is built on mutual understanding – the banks understand what our requirements are and we understand what the bank requirements are."



Mr Borg is conscious of the myriad of information and reporting requirements the banks nowadays demand of their customers, and while conceding these are at times cumbersome, he does understand the banks' point of view, given their own obligations. "We also pride ourselves, on timely presentation of reports," adds Mr Borg. "If our sanction letter stipulates that the consolidated accounts of VBGL should be sent to the bank by June 30, I can say that in all the 16 years I have been here, and most likely before, they have always been submitted prior to that date. This is something the banks are happy with, and they know that when they require information from the Group it is presented in a timely manner."





Charlo Bonnici

Director, HR and Communications

A diverse workforce

With over 1,500 employees – 1,700 if you include those employed indirectly through subsidiaries and sub-contractors and the like – the Human Resources function within the Vassallo Group is naturally a very important one. So much so that in January this year **Charlo Bonnici**, previously group head of HR, was promoted to Director HR and Communications to work on a comprehensive HR strategy. He explains it in more detail.



Every company within the Vassallo Group has its own HR manager or HR executive. “However, in my new function,” explains Bonnici, “I am overseeing the HR perspective for the group as a whole.”

Needless to say, having such a large workforce poses a challenge in terms of communication between management and employees. Bonnici expands on how the HR department deals with this. “We issue memos, we have direct meetings with employees and we also have an appraisal system called VIP – valuing individual, valuing performance - which gives each employee the opportunity to meet their superior and performance is appraised, and any issues or, where relevant, complaints raised and discussed on a personal basis. New employees are given induction sessions which help them to get accustomed to their new environment.”

Bonnici is keen to emphasise that the group strives to keep the lines of communication open. “Directors and managers are always available to their staff. We firmly believe that support of our employees is important.”

Financial and emotional support, and employees’ well-being

This support is not only offered in the context of the job. If an employee has to face a serious

illness, or is going through a rough patch, the Vassallo group offers financial and emotional support via the Arkati Foundation which was set up 25 years ago – a foundation set up purely for this purpose and financed by the companies within the group, and by the employees themselves.

“Moreover our company doctors visit employees not just to certify sick leave but also to point out any issues relating to the employees’ health and we try to address them with them. This year, we have also kick-started a collaboration with the Health Promotion department to promote a healthy lifestyle among the employees and we held the first healthy lifestyle week in November.”

An international workforce

30% of Vassallo Group’s employees are foreigners coming from over 55 countries. Bonnici acknowledges that this poses a number of challenges, yet it is also a matter of pride for the group.

“The reality is we are finding it very difficult to fill certain jobs within the construction industry such as shutterers, labourers and so on, so we need to recruit from abroad”, he says.

“In the care sector, we have got a number of carers from India, the Philippines, African countries and more. We also have a number of foreign workers in catering. This means that now English is the working language and that has created some problems because some of our Maltese employees do not speak English. However we are geared up for this - everything is translated into Maltese and English.

Moreover, we are endeavouring to use other languages where possible; while sometimes we open courses in Maltese and English to help the employees improve their level of communication.”

Clearly the company thrives on turning problems into opportunities; but with so many nationalities cultures and backgrounds coming together at the work place, is integration straightforward?

Bonnici is quick to confirm that “yes, the level of integration is quite good – and we rarely have any issues with racism. Admittedly, we do sometimes face issues of bullying but race is not the reason. I honestly rarely encounter these sort of incidents, yet we need to keep working on promoting diversity and integration, because Vassallo Group believes in diversity; it’s one of the group’s core values. It also makes life very interesting,” he adds with a smile.



Joe Saliba

Chairman, Arkati Foundation

Celebrating 25 years of solidarity with its employees

Founded in 1991, the Arkati Foundation is run by Vassallo Group. One of the Foundation's main goals is to involve and encourage its employees to raise and contribute funds towards the work it carries out to care for the wellbeing of staff members who have been affected by extraordinary circumstances.

Joe Saliba, Chairman of the Foundation, describes its work and goals in greater detail.

The foundation was established in 1991 by Nazzareno Vassallo and his family, who, as owners of Vassallo Group, decided that they wanted to do something within the company to help any employees who are going through a bad patch – be it a health issue or similar.

"The Arkati Foundation is not about charity but about solidarity; and the idea is for employees to get the help they need without feeling they need to beg for it," says Mr Saliba.

The group's employees, are invited to 'donate' the financial equivalent of a day from their annual leave to the fund. The group matches that sum, thereby doubling the contribution. So when the need arises, any employee in need can apply to the fund – and their co-workers will be directly helping out.

Mr Saliba explains how the fund has helped. "Over the past 25 years, many employees have made use of the fund; either employees themselves or their families who have faced health or other personal problems. If for example they face an illness which takes up all their leave and sick leave, leaving them no choice but to be off work for some time without pay, then they can apply for funds to tide them over.

"We are not in a position to pay the whole salary," continues Mr Saliba. "Bear in mind that the money in the fund needs to be used up every year, and has to be divided between the needs of all those who applied during that year. I can say however, that over the years we have always somehow managed to support the needs of the majority of cases. In these past



two years alone we were approached by and assisted about 30 people."

Other ways the Arkati Foundation is of help

The foundation does not just offer financial help. Mr Saliba elaborates, saying that it helps if for example, an employee needs additional leave to be with a family member who is ill. "We also offer services that the group itself can provide - say if an employee needs physical therapy at LiveLife, as the costs to us would be much lower.

"Furthermore, adds Mr Saliba, "we have an agreement with the Richmond Foundation, which offers its services to any our employees who need mental health advice. There are people who suffer from tension, pressure, depression, or mood swings, and they can apply directly to Richmond to get the help they need." Mr Saliba makes it a point to emphasise that the employees making use of this service can rest assured that they will remain completely anonymous. "We won't even know who applied and is using this service, as Richmond only reports the number of people who applied."

Enrolment in the foundation

Given the success of the foundation so far, this year the Group has introduced a measure whereby all new employees are automatically enrolled within the Foundation.

"Previously, if an employee wanted to join the foundation they needed to apply for it themselves," confirms Mr Saliba. "We noticed however, there were instances of employees who were unaware of the foundation's existence, or those who expressed an interest in joining but never got round to it."

To counteract this and to encourage more employees to participate and ultimately create more awareness about the foundation and its function, it was decided that every new employee will automatically be enrolled in the system – with the possibility of opting out should they wish so. "Since then, everyone has opted to stay," notes Mr Saliba, "not only because it offers each employee a chance to help others, but because of the reality that they too may one day need the foundation's help."

Allocating funds to those in need

All applications to the fund are reviewed and decided upon by the foundation's board. There is a structure that needs to be followed, and people can apply either by approaching the foundation directly, or via 'ambassadors'. Mr Saliba explains the functions of these ambassadors, saying that in many of the companies within the group – and covering

all sectors including construction, catering and care – there is an ambassador whom the employees can approach. "We have noticed in the past that some people are reluctant to speak about the issues that are facing them so the ambassadors are there to facilitate their request and establish what they need – whether financial help or a service,

and the ambassador would then approach the foundation on their behalf and the board then makes the necessary decisions."

The board analyses the case in detail to see how assistance can be given. Mr Saliba explains that allocation of funds depends on the money available that year – so similar cases in different years may not necessarily benefit in the same way, as the funds available on a year to year basis need to be distributed accordingly.

"This is not a type of insurance," he emphasises. "Unfortunately we are not in a position to offer the whole amount to cover each individual's needs. It is a solidarity fund, where we try and help as much as possible. Now we are at the end of 2016, we know what we have available for next year; and of course if there are any funds left over from one year, they will be put into the fund for the next year, and so on."



"I honestly wish we could help everyone who applies," he confesses. "But we need to work with the funds we have. We are heartened however by the response we receive. We recently helped out someone who had only been with us for a short while, yet she faced a sudden illness. The money we gave her was very little compared to what she had to spend in total, yet she confided that the fact that the foundation rallied round to help was of great emotional support for her."

The Arkati Foundation should serve as a prime example for all employers – for after all, if you take care of the health and wellbeing of employees, offering them security and stability, and ultimately happiness, in the long run, it is beneficial to all.

Financial Statements 30 November 2015

Income and Expenditure Account

Year ended 30 November 2015

Note	2015 €	2014 €
Revenue		
Investment gains	10,361	10,079
Donations	22,729	13,063
Fees and Charges	(14)	-
Tax at source	(1,361)	(1,219)
	31,715	21,923
Allocated to:		
Accumulated funds	15,858	10,962
Distributable fund 2013/14	15,857	10,961
	31,715	21,923

These financial statements were approved by the board members, authorised for issue on 27 January 2016 and signed on its behalf by:

President

Member

Statement of Affairs

30 November 2015

	Note	2015 €	2014 €
ASSETS AND LIABILITIES			
Non-current assets			
Held-to-maturity investments	5	221,732	216,132
Current assets			
Other receivables		2,233	2,970
Cash and cash equivalents	6	17,976	10,280
		20,209	13,250
Total Assets		241,941	229,382
Current Liabilities			
Distributable Income		26,561	21,407
Net Assets		215,380	207,975
Represented by:-			
Capital Fund	7	11,647	11,647
Distributable Fund	4	26,561	21,407
Accumulated Fund	8	177,172	174,921
		215,380	207,975

Getting to know our employees

The OneOneO development in Sliema is a hub of construction activity, and three workers talk to us about their work experience with **Vassallo Builders**.



Ivelin is from Bulgaria, and Sasa and Milan are from Serbia. The three work as shutterers / steel fixers.

Ivelin has been in Malta for 13 years and speaks highly of the relationship he and his colleagues have with their site manager Silvio. "We have been working together approximately five years," he says, "and when you have been working with someone for so long, the work is more productive because you are used to each other's approach."

Sasa has been in Malta since 2004. Although he is also on shuttering and fixing, he likes it when he is assigned other tasks as he finds it challenging when the dynamics of his daily routine change.

"Vassallo Group is very encouraging with its workers" he says. "We are all very skilled workers on the job, and the group also make sure we have proper safety equipment, which makes it all easier."

Milan has been with Vassallo Group for three years. He cites one of the difficulties of the job as having to deal with all kinds of weather – with baking temperatures in summer or incessant rain in winter!

The next stop is **CaterEssence**. The first sign we are in a catering company is the appetising smell of food wafting invitingly from the canteen where some employees are taking their lunch break.

Simon is the Purchasing and Cost Control Manager, in charge of procuring all supplies for the kitchen. An important job is preparing the menus for the care homes. "This requires careful planning to ensure resources are used well and there is little waste," says Simon.

Chris works in Finance and has been with CaterEssence for just over two years. He comments that "being such a large operation, there is always something going on. It's great to be a part of such a large Group and

CaterEssence is a vital part of that group" These works on payroll – and with 243 employees it is quite a job. "I love the rapport between our department and the many employees - I strive to create a relationship of trust between us."

Carla is from Spain and she is in charge of Food Safety. An important part of her job is looking out for physical, chemical or microbiological hazards you can find in the kitchen – making sure food is safe.

Carston and **Darren** are chefs, responsible for the food for the Group's homes for the elderly. "A typical day in the kitchen runs from 6.30am to 2.30pm," says Darren. "I enjoy the new dishes and different recipes we get to prepare – we learn something new all the time!" When asked what he would be if he weren't a chef he says, "a lawyer... or maybe an actor!"



Andrea is a pastry chef in charge of the sweets that are prepared for the homes, the hotels and our two Cake Box outlets." He explains that each morning he checks the orders that would have come in overnight and then prepare the items for delivery. "If I weren't a chef, I'd have liked to be a hairdresser, as that is a profession I always liked," he says.

The kitchen would not function without help, and this is where **Gianluca**, the kitchen helper and steward comes in.

It is a quiet afternoon at **Roseville Home** for the Elderly in Attard. The residents are relaxing in their rooms and a number of staff are on break.

Charmaine is a carer and acting senior. "I love my job," she says and it is clearly true, although she admits with candour that it is tiring and difficult sometimes. Her colleague Natasha agrees. "However it's our job and we get on with it!" she says. She describes a typical day - the morning and breakfast routine, taking the residents for lunch and back to their rooms; tea and Mass in the afternoon, with an early supper in the dining room and back to their rooms for bed... in-between it's non-stop, making sure the residents are comfortable – but most of all happy.

Carmen came into this job quite by chance "I initially joined Roseville on a part-time basis. I



used to take care of my mother and mother-in-law and I felt I had an affinity for it.

"This is more than a job," she continues. "It is a vocation. You have to leave your problems at home and dedicate yourself fully to the residents."

George is a part-time laundry assistant whose job is to collect, sort and distribute laundry, among other duties. Lydia is a domestic, in charge of keeping all the rooms and public areas clean. She loves being surrounded by

elderly people, saying. "Some of the residents may be demanding," she notes "but I put myself in their shoes, and know that I may be in their position one day."

Victor, a man of few words, fixes things – chairs, doors, beds. "I go wherever I'm needed," he says. "Skond id-daqqa, nizfen!"

Peter is a nurse from India, whose duties include dispensing medications, and insulin, checking vitals, seeing to complaints of illness, and calling the doctor where necessary. "I didn't choose to work with the elderly," he says, honestly, "However, it has been a very happy experience for me!"

Maryann and **Edita** are both from the Philippines and describe their experience working in the home as a positive one. Apart from their regular duties, they enjoy getting to know the residents.

MY EXTENDED *Family*

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Home to Independence and Liberty Assistants



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