

## **Davis & Shirliff Celebrates its 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

Davis & Shirliff, the Region's leading Water and Energy equipment supplier will soon be celebrating a major milestone, its 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, an achievement that is most unusual for any organisation, especially one that has the same family shareholding and essentially the same market focus since its founding. There are few companies in Kenya with this claim and D&S is therefore extremely proud of the achievement with various celebrations being held in May to mark it.

The company was founded in 1946 by EC (Eddie) Davis and FR (Dick) Shirliff, Mr Davis having recently left the army with a gratuity which he spent buying a stake in a small plumbing business he had worked with as a contractor. Mr Shirliff soon joined him and the initial expertise was provided by Italian ex-prisoners of war! The company was based at Westlands (now the Nyota Petrol Station site) and grew rapidly as the country recovered after the war focusing on boreholes, water supplies and the coffee industry. Notable early projects included the water supply for Karen Estates, the entire water supply infrastructure until the mid-60's being installed by D&S. Also other estates supplies including Gigiri, Kitisuru, Kibagare, Rosslyn and later Runda were also D&S projects.

D&S grew with the country and in the mid-1950's the offices moved to larger new premises at the present location in the Industrial Area. An added activity was swimming pools, both residential and commercial, and many were built that are still in use today including Limuru Girls School, Loreto Convent, Kenya High School and the YMCA. The company also installed water treatment plants at all the Kengen Tana River hydro power stations as well as at the many new lodges that were constructed then. In 1970 partner Dick Shirliff retired and his shareholding was purchased by a long serving staff member, Devji Shingadia. He and Eddie Davis then ran the company, retiring CEO Alec Davis joining in 1976. Eddie Davis passed away in 1982 at the age of 79 and Alec then assumed his shareholding, in 1990 purchasing Shingadia's shareholding as well. The 70's and 80's saw slow but steady growth as the country grappled with various economic and political problems, though there was a particular focus on building the pump business, notably Grundfos and Davey that were introduced in the mid-1960's and also additional premises space was obtained through the purchase of two adjacent plots.

1993 was a significant year for both Kenya and D&S as economic liberalisation occurred and this was the catalyst for the company's rapid growth since. It was also the year that Pedrollo products were introduced, now the Group's largest supplier. These two developments enabled a distribution strategy to be introduced as supply constraints were removed and also establishment of the branch network, which is now so important for the Group. Initially Kenya branches in Westlands, Eldoret and Kisumu were opened and between 1995 and 2000 subsidiaries in Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda were established. Also the pump business grew hugely with Pedrollo and new solar and power generation activities were established.

Since the Millennium, growth has greatly accelerated. Major initiatives have included a complete re-development of the Industrial Area site and the expansion into adjacent plots, the opening of subsidiaries and associate companies in Zambia, Ethiopia and South Sudan, the establishment of a branch network with new ones about to open in Ongata Rongai, Narok, Kitui, Mombasa Downtown, Jinja and Lusaka Downtown, introduction of the successful Dayliff pump range as well as several new international suppliers including Lorenz, Kohler and DAB and a huge expansion of the product range. The numbers are impressive, over the years nearly 1 Million pumps, more than 15,000 pool filters and 7 million kW of solar panels having been supplied and 7000 boreholes equipped. Staffing has also grown correspondingly and the D&S Group now employs over 600 permanent staff operating from 48 sites. Equipment has been supplied to every type of user, industry and institution imaginable and it is true to say that most Kenyans will regularly benefit from

a Davis & Shirliff product in the course of their daily activities. When that product is water the benefit is considerable and the company proudly and rightly claims that it has been improving people's lives for 70 years.

Today D&S is a thoroughly modern and innovative company that has been crafted by its long history though has its focus firmly on the future. The product range has hugely expanded with a focus on six market segments – Water Pumps, Boreholes, Swimming Pools, Solar equipment, Water Treatment and Power Generation. Though much equipment is imported the Company is a significant manufacturer making fibre-glass products, its distinctive yellow pool filters being especially popular, as well as fabricated steel items and it also assembles a wide range of water related equipment. A recent investment has been the establishment of a control panel manufacturing unit with a capacity of over 1000 panels a year. The present focus is 'Leadership Through Technology' and many new interesting products have been introduced including locally manufactured Reverse Osmosis and Ultra Filtration plants, variable speed pump sets, remote monitoring controllers and Solar power generating systems. Service is another important priority for the Group and its large vehicle fleet is a common sight on Kenya's roads. The Company is also proud of its IT resources with a centralised ERP system that is used regionally, all system development being done in-house. Other functions include a highly resourced Supply division to handle the Group's up to KShs1Bn stockholding, which also carries out clearing, and a well-resourced training department that trains both staff and customers. A recent innovation has been live streaming so training sessions are relayed throughout the Group.

A particular Group focus has always been the availability of adequate physical facilities and the Dundori Rd site has been in a state of almost permanent reconstruction for the past 20 years. The most recent development has been the construction of a 1,500m<sup>2</sup> four-storey block that will provide additional office space as well as a 180 seat canteen and a fully equipped Training facility. This is being inaugurated by special guest Abbas Gullet, Secretary-General of the Kenya Red Cross during the Anniversary celebrations. Another recent investment is a similar sized HQ in Mombasa for the Coast Region. This was opened in February.

It is often said that success is transitory and sometimes unsustainable, though D&S has managed to maintain unbroken growth for an exceptional period of time. This has been achieved by commercial focus, manageable ambition, consistency of ownership and, importantly, living the values of Quality, Integrity and 'Altiora Peto', which translates to embracing continuous change. The other key factor that has created this success story is the unusually harmonious staff relations and enormous staff commitment and motivation since the company's founding. This has been achieved by recruitment and training of consistently high calibre people and also by enlightened, generous and fair employment policies that have enabled people to reach their potential with rewarding jobs and enjoy a secure future. Over 90 staff have completed 25 years' service and also many alumni have progressed to senior management and technical positions in the country's water sector. D&S has certainly played a significant role in developing the human resource base of Kenya's water industry.

D&S is now a widely recognised brand in the region and is proud of the contribution it has made. Of course the anniversary is just a moment in a journey and the Group continues to grow with a number of initiatives in hand and great plans for the future. Alec Davis is retiring from executive responsibilities from the end of May to assume the role of Chairman and the executive team under new CEO David Gatende will drive this growth. The company is also fortunate that the third generation Davis's, Edward and Henry, have joined the business, so continuity is assured. The Group continues to expand in product and markets and looks forward to keep serving the region with essential products that certainly improve peoples' lives and also being a several hundred million US\$ company by the end of the next decade!