

UNITED ENGINEERING CONSTRUCTION (UNEC)

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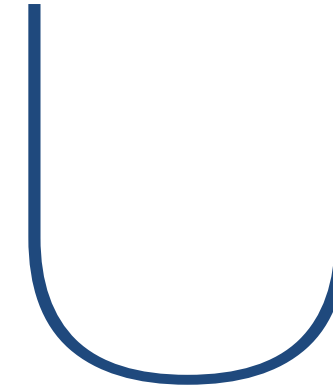
CORPORATE BROCHURE





Building through **bust to boom**

United Engineering Construction (UNEC) is responsible for some of the most innovative and iconic buildings in the United Arab Emirates. Now, it has its sights set on neighbouring Arabian markets and the Maghreb



nited Engineering Construction (UNEC) is above all a family company. Halim Muwahid, an engineer of Jordanian origin but with many years' experience of construction in Dubai, founded the company as a concrete fabrication supplier in 1976. He has grown it into the general construction company it is today and now leads it as its very hands-on managing director. His brother Jamal is deputy MD and another brother, Abdullah, is general manager of the Abu Dhabi branch. Family members occupy other key roles and head up the subsidiary companies such as Safemix, a ready mix and concrete block supplier, and the UNEC carpentry factory.

As in most successful family businesses, professionalism comes first above all else, and every manager is a qualified engineer, explains contracts manager Robert Hartle. The advantage is seen in a sense of shared purpose, the ability to make fast decisions and shared loyalty. "Everyone who works for UNEC is treated like a member of the family," he says.

Hartle, a UK citizen, is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Building and has been in Dubai for three years, heading UNEC's tenders and contracts department which manages anything from industrial buildings, showrooms, low cost housing and villas through multi-storey residential and office buildings, hospitals and schools to high specification hotels, mosques and military installations.

Oil revenues have not shielded the Emirates or their neighbours from economic pain. Construction





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We devote ourselves to providing our client with quality, and personalized incomparable service to others. We strive towards our business methodology, which is to create a unique business partnership with our client with an answering view to achieve absolute client satisfaction.

Current Major Projects:

- Capital Tower (ADNEC)
- Sheikh Zayed Military City @ Sweihan, Abu Dhabi
- Union Cooperative Shopping Mall @ Al Barsha
- Yaquob Tower
- International City, Package 15 (Emirates Cluster)

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projects need the support of governments and they need inward investment too. A number of projects have been mothballed—including some of UNEC’s—and Hartle believes this situation will persist until the banks become willing to get behind large projects again. “Investors from every part of the world have been putting their money into the UAE so when Europe or Australia is hit by recession it affects Dubai too.” It is not all about oil, he says.

From having a turnover of some \$38 million and employing 10,000 people, UNEC has reduced its workforce to around 5,000; but it is still a very busy company, having just handed over to its client Nakheel the 26 apartment blocks that form the Emirates cluster of International City, that



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remarkable and visionary development over 800 hectares. The \$170 million contract covered the construction work only—external services and infrastructure work is being carried out by other firms for the developer, M/s Nakheel. “Though we have our own joinery and concrete companies we use subcontractors for electrical work, heating and air conditioning, and plumbing,” says Hartle. UNEC generally commits its own workforce of labourers and tradesmen, including qualified carpenters, masons, plasterers, tilers and other structural trades.

Other current projects include the five-star Bab Al Bahr hotel in Ajman, due to be completed in mid-2012. The 202 room luxury hotel for the Ajman Ministry of Public Works is worth AED 250 million to UNEC (around \$68 million) and is just one of a number of such projects that are still being pursued in the region. Another with a similar value and to a similar timescale, this time in Abu Dhabi, is the 450,000 square foot Al



Rawda Arjaan for Rotana Hotels.

In the Muwahids' native Jordan there's a five-star Hilton Hotel Resort and Spa, due to be handed over in July 2013. Unlike the luxury hotels this is a sprawling development rising to five or six storeys at the most over a large footprint and including swimming pools, spas, restaurants and other facilities as well as access roads. One of UNEC's great strengths is its versatility, though the essential common denominator is a commitment to quality, says Hartle. "The level of finish demanded in these luxury projects may be very high, but it is even higher when it comes to building mosques and Islamic centres."

Not surprisingly, the Emirates do commission a lot of mosques—every residential development needs one, just as you might include a church

UNEC still has a healthy cash flow. It retains a good pipeline of projects and looks forward to some excellent opportunities in neighbouring Arab states. Since it won the 2022 World Cup, there is an air of expectancy about Qatar. "We have nothing there at present but they are still working on the infrastructure," he explains. "I don't see any construction tenders coming out of Qatar for 12 months—then, I'd expect to see a lot coming in a short period of time. All the regional contractors will be looking at Qatar over the next few years."

There is no lack of emerging markets in the region. Syria may not seem much of a prospect at the moment but UNEC has a shrewd eye on that market. And though he admits there's a lot of dust still to settle in Libya, Hartle is enthusiastic about

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in the UK, and the requirements are not very different in that they tend to be idiosyncratic in design and call for specialist decoration. One such is the magnificent AED 200 million (\$544,500) Sheikh Zayed mosque in construction on a greenfield site in Fujairah. It will be the second largest mosque in the country when completed in July 2012. "The Fujairah mosque has some very elaborate ornamentation with a lot of stone outside, and marble and granite finishes inside," says Hartle. The new mosque will be a contrast to the small neighbourhood mosques that characterise the northern Emirates. Set among fountains and palm-dotted gardens on a large site in the heart of Fujairah city, the mosque will be roughly the size of three football pitches and hold 13,500 people in its prayer hall.

While work in the UAE has dwindled, big civic projects like the Fujairah mosque ensure that

Libya's potential. "Just look at how Libya lies: it has the longest coast on the African Mediterranean, faces across to France, Italy and Greece, and it just has to be a huge holiday area for the future."

Egypt is marking time, but once it has an elected government it will also start to attract major investment, Hartle believes. UNEC has built up an amazing track record since 1976, he points out. It built the exquisite Sharjah Chamber of Commerce building, the palace of Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al-Qasimi ruler of Sharjah, and the remarkable 'pineapple' tower at Dubai Silicon Oasis. Its most recent contract win, a \$24 million Islamic centre in Sharjah, proves that it is the first choice for new public works in the Emirates, with the critical mass needed to cope with the volume increase that is likely once short term austerities have run their course.

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