

These words, by Henry W. Longfellow, signify construction project management leader, Betts Townsend's philosophy of striving towards excellence by utilising an entrepreneurial and results orientated culture and developing their relationships based on a foundation of honesty, dedication and accountability.

#### Expertise

Betts Townsend, which was established by Executive Director, Howard Betts, in 1995, offers superior project management services to an extensive client base. "Our specialised hands-on expertise ensures the successful and single-minded completion of projects according to proposed and agreed programmes, often reducing the duration of traditional construction period, resulting in savings on interest, escalation, resource costs and professional consultant fees, leading to additional profit for the client," explains Betts.

# Vision made real

by Ronel Nel

"For the structure that we raise, Time is with material filled. Our today's and yesterday's are the blocks with which we build."



“We do not market ourselves as merely a project management company, but as a construction project management company, because of the high value we place on fast-tracking construction,” he says. “But by fast-tracking we do not mean sacrificing quality. Our speed is the consequence of our obsessive attention to detail and the fact that we can identify and pre-empt problems long before they could disrupt production flow,” he emphasises.

### Need for management

According to Betts, by either maintaining an agreed programme or reducing the traditional construction programme, the owner of a commercial development enjoys a direct saving. “Issues that we handle under project management include identifying key milestones within the programme to ensure that the entire team focuses on achieving these, identifying and rectifying poor quality early and maintaining a healthy team relationship,” he explains.

The company has distinguished itself thanks to a directorship of individuals who gained their initial experience in the construction industry, giving them the edge in construction project management.

### Biggest challenge

Betts identifies the closing out of a construction

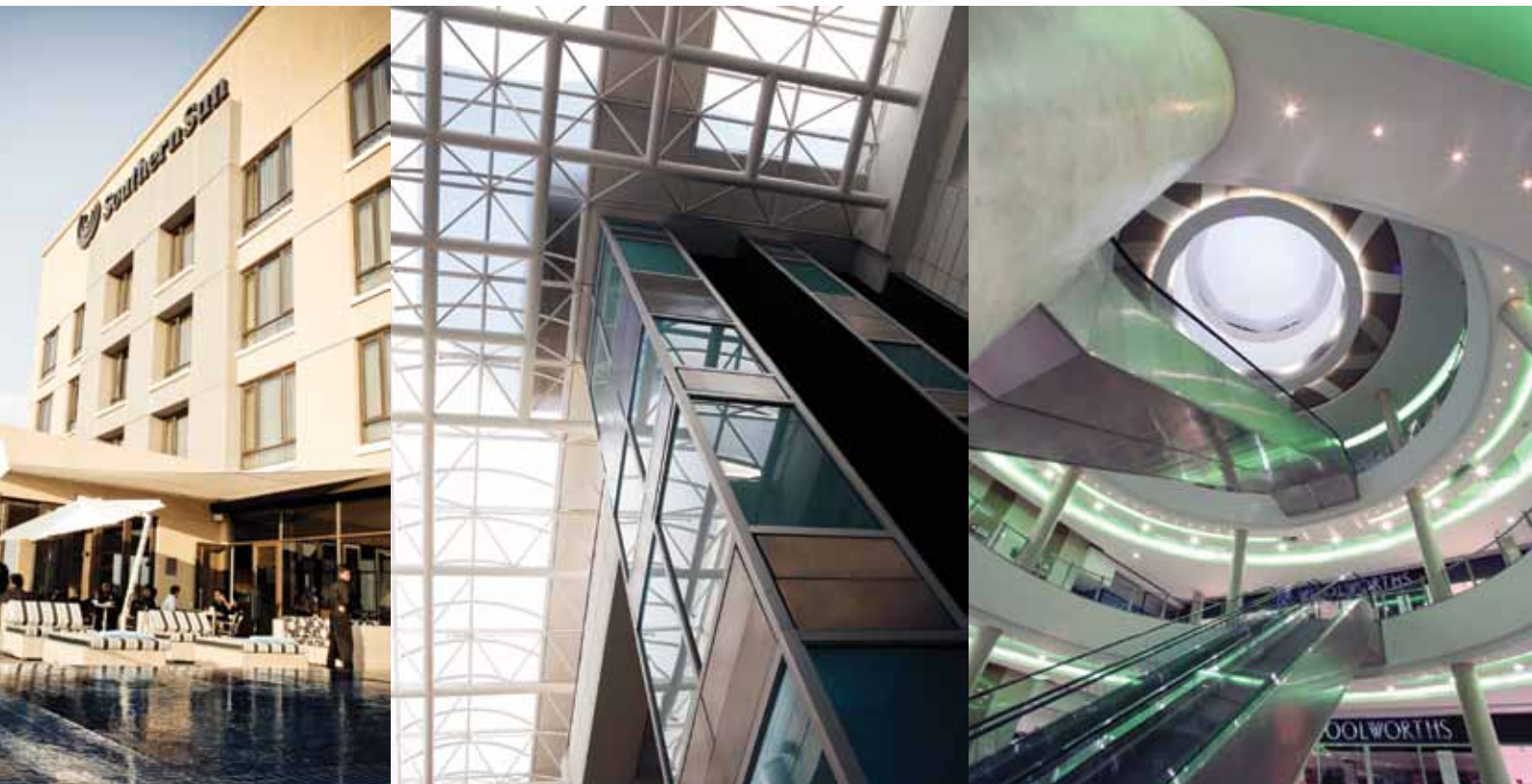
project as one of the biggest challenges that they face. “I have faced many such projects, but the biggest one yet was probably our Oprah Winfrey Academy for Girls project. A month before the Academy was about to open, the contractor disappeared and we were faced with huge embarrassment, as we knew CNN was broadcasting and Oprah was attending the opening.

Well, we did not have much sleep nor see much of our families, but at the end everybody was hugely impressed. We made it work,” he says proudly.

“We have developed mechanisms to cope with that such as the builders’ deadlines, according to the deadlines which were set by the contract in question. This has helped us significantly, in as far as we have recently built two shopping centres which were completed and opened a month ahead of schedule. This is a major accomplishment in terms of construction,” he boasts.

### Humble beginnings

Another aspect Betts is proud of is the amount of success the level 2-BBBEE-rated Betts Townsend has achieved over the last few years. “Back then – in 1995 – I started the business, with my mother as my personal assistant, in my garage. Since then the company has grown to a staff complement of 50, with offices in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban,” he says.







"Our successful track record over the past 15 years, along with good client relations is the main reason for our success, as well as our 'survival' of the recent recession, despite a slump in the construction industry. We have set out to gain at least one new client per year and we have achieved that. We also set out to not retrench any staff, despite difficult economic conditions, and have done so."

### Successes

"The personal relations we have been able to build with our clients have resulted in repeat commissions from several clients, which were of course boosted by the fact that we have successfully completed every project that we have started," he says proudly.

"Something that might have given us the edge over our competition was the fact that we did not, unlike many of our competitors, start to focus heavily on the Dubai property market. This allowed us to give our full attention to the local market, applying our premier expertise to the market in order to cut our clients' costs," Betts adds.

According to Betts, companies in South Africa can save about 10% of construction costs if projects are professionally managed. "To add to this the country can benefit in the long run by investing in companies, like Betts Townsend, who apply 'green' principles and belong to the Green Building Council. We have recently managed one such project for Pick 'n Pay – a star-rated 35 000m<sup>2</sup> warehouse extension in Gauteng. We, as a company, believe in environmental management and always insist that a client considers such a plan, especially when looking at factors like oil spills, waste disposals, sewerage works, water usage and even as far as which paint they use," he explains.

### Skills Development

"Regulation does not pose such a big problem to the local construction industry, but we regard skills development as the single biggest threat to the industry," he says. "In the industry we don't train and develop enough people adequately. In the past there used to be industrial councils through which artisans could complete a thorough five-year training course. This qualification enabled such artisans to basically do everything an artisan could possibly do, properly. Government should scrap concepts

like skills development and oblige companies to spend an amount up to 20% of their total salaries on the proper training of required staff.

That will have a much better effect than what is currently happening with the SETAs," he says strongly. Betts Townsend is extremely passionate about the development of people. As an example Betts saw one of his current contractors 14 years ago at an intersection close to the Welgevonden project the company was working on at that stage, with a signboard 'looking for work'. Betts started talking to the man and eventually asked him to assist him at Welgevonden as a painter. Today that same man has a fleet of vehicles and manages the painting at most of Betts Townsend's Gauteng-based projects.

### Staff-owned

Evident of its commitment to its staff, the company is in the process of setting up a staff trust, this means that 20% of Betts Townsend's shares will be allocated to staff in the near future. Staff members are also encouraged to work hard during the week, but Betts suggests that he does not want to see them at the office over weekends. "Obviously when there is a big problem all staff will come to the party, but I value the family life of staff as crucial to their eventual work performance and productivity," he exclaims.

The production at Betts Townsend project sites, as well as staff production, is of crucial importance to Betts, as it also emphasises the need for project management. "We recently had a problem with the productivity of bricklayers in the construction of a shopping centre in the Eastern Cape. We sat down and discussed the matter with them. It then became apparent that a lot of time was wasted as a result of improper planning, we rectified the matter and productivity changed swiftly," he says.

### Productivity

Betts does, however, emphasise that productivity in the country has generally dropped during the last few years. According to him (and he apologises for using bricklayers as an example again) in the past, bricklayers tendered for about 1000 bricks per day, but this has dropped substantially to almost 300 per day.

"This is where the role of a construction project management company like Betts Townsend is of crucial importance. We plan in order to manage the 'less productive contractors' to achieve the same end goal we have in mind: the final completion date," he says firmly. □

## Betts Townsend's current and recently completed projects:

### Gauteng/Limpopo

Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls  
Southern Sun Hyde Park Shopping Centre  
Horizon View Shopping Centre  
Golden Walk Shopping Centre  
Pick 'n Pay Central Distribution Centre  
British High Commission (Pretoria and Harare)  
Peter Mokaba Football Stadium

### KwaZulu-Natal/Eastern Cape

Bridge City Shopping Centre (Retail Tenants)  
Arlington Mall  
La Mercy Airport (Tenant Installations)  
Elangeni Hotel Refurbishment  
La Lucia Mall  
Mystique Residential Development  
South Coast Mall  
Sabuti Residential Development  
Century Casino – Newcastle  
Mdantsane Shopping Centre  
Hemmingways Shopping Centre  
Cleary Park Shopping Centre

### Western Cape/ Northern Cape

Canal Walk Shopping Centre Retail Pods Extension  
Coronation Fund Managers Offices  
Canal Walk Shopping Centre Mr. Price Home  
Hotazel Town Development  
Canal Walk Shopping Centre Food Court Refurbishment

