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LEMCO

The Laubscher Brothers Are Men of Steel

PRODUCTION: **William Denstone**

LEMCO's steel fabrication expertise has been honed by decades of experience, and driven by the unerring ambition of a business where everything is very much in the family. Owned today by the Laubscher brothers, Pieter and Andries, the latter brought us up to speed on LEMCO's outstanding recent work and the ever-growing demand for its services far and wide.

INDUSTRY FOCUS: FABRICATION

The LEMCO story dates back to 1967, when the senior Pieter Laubscher began designing and manufacturing steel products and buildings in the Northern Cape. "It was your typical family business start-up," begins LEMCO Managing Director and Owner, Andries Laubscher. "My father started in the general metals business in the late 60s, and from there the business grew and subsequently moved up to the Northern Cape of South Africa. Back then, the focus was predominantly on catering for the agricultural market which dominates that area."

A FAMILY AFFAIR

The quality and expertise which Pieter Laubscher Construction offered meant that rapid and sustained growth followed, paving the way for the junior Laubschers to get involved themselves in the industry much further down the line. "I finished my studies in 2005, and my brother in 2007, and we bought the premises just north of Cape Town in 2006. From then on, it just exploded," Laubscher says.

By 2008, Pieter Laubscher's two sons had both fully joined the family business, and with the setting up of offices in the Western Cape began trading as LEMCO - Laubscher's Engineering Manufacturing Company.

LEMCO Structural Steel CK was registered as a company in its own right in 2009, and by 2010, the company as a whole had established itself as one of the leading structural steel outfits in South Africa. Next year, LEMCO will celebrate its 50th year in business and will be able to look back over half a century of successful operations.

Executive Managing Director Pieter Laubscher offers his own take on what has bred LEMCO's undisputed success to date. "Quality, quality, quality. I believe this should be the most important aspect of any business," he enthuses, and this plainly runs through the entire company from



// LEMCO MUST BE A BYWORD FOR QUALITY OF WORK //

top to bottom. "Being in charge of all manufacturing, I personally try to produce as high a quality product as humanly possible.

"LEMCO must be a byword for quality of work."

Currently LEMCO's facilities include over 2000m² of production space, a 400m² painting bay and over 4000 m² of storage yard. The main facility is very well equipped to eliminate almost all labour-intensive processes, by using various manual and state-of-the-art CNC machines to produce a high-precision product in record time.

ADAPTABILITY AS STANDARD

Not only a staunchly family-run business, LEMCO also remains inextricably tied to its South African roots, according to Laubscher. "Our factory remains on the Northern Cape of the country, but as soon as we joined we set up a full-blown office here in Cape Town, where everything is managed and administrated." Built in 1990, this main factory has evolved substantially over the years, with continual investments in the latest technology meeting the needs of an industry which refuses to stand still.

Despite the unbreakable ties LEMCO maintains to its home terrain, however, it benefits from being extremely versatile in its operations. Not only in its specialising in all forms of structural steel buildings, able to design any form, shape or size required, but also its ability to simplify projects and roll out anywhere in sub-Saharan Africa, as Laubscher explains. "Five years ago, probably 90% of the work we were doing was in Cape Town, whereas currently, I would say that less than 20% of our business is in the Western Cape. It's almost seasonal, where we find ourselves employed - we

have a lot of demand in Namibia now, which has been a consistent rich vein for us over the past 18 months.

"Wherever we go, we tend to find that once we get into an area business takes off from there.

"Our adaptability is helped greatly because our product is very much like Lego, essentially, in the sense that if the design and management is done correctly then it really shouldn't matter where it is to be employed."

Despite LEMCO's widening appeal, Andries Laubscher is keen to clarify that South Africa will remain the company's sole home for the foreseeable future. "I don't think we'll ever put up another manufacturing facility outside of South Africa," he says. "The capital outlay and sourcing and training of new personnel, as well as managing them, will make it difficult to

be a worthwhile venture.

"We would rather ensure that our playing field is as wide as possible to allow us to handpick our jobs, ones that we can easily manage, rather than a situation whereby we would be forced to take on work to justify the presence of another full-blown office.

// THE PERSONNEL WE HAVE AT OUR DISPOSAL IS PERFECTLY PITCHED TO MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE AS WE GEAR UP FOR OUR NEXT PHASE //



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// CHALALA WAS AS CLOSE THE PERFECT PROJECT FOR US AS IS POSSIBLE TO GET //

The complexity of the 'model' we are building determines whether or not we are willing to work cross-border, which gives us great flexibility."

CHALALA TOPS THE BILL

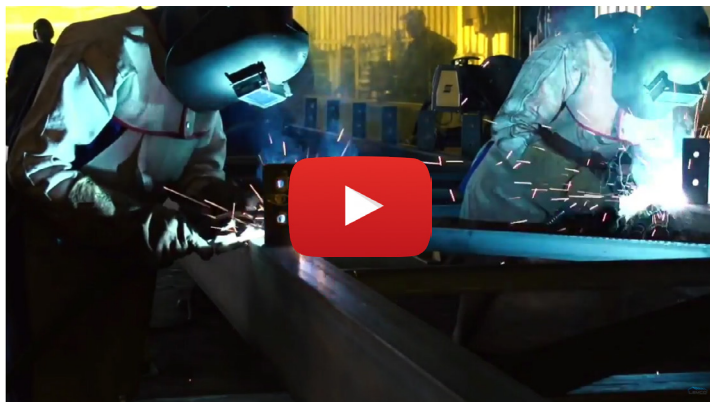
Take even the briefest of looks at LEMCO's project list and you will be struck by the breadth of the constructions undertaken in such a short operational lifetime, spanning packing sheds and warehouses through to solar plants and shopping malls. Arguably the pick of the recent bunch, however, is the sea of hybrid structures installed for Number Two Piggeries, Chalala Pig Farms, Malmesbury, the largest and most successful piggery business in Africa.

LEMCO's workshop hosts some of the most cutting-edge machinery in the industry, which made it a perfect match for fabricating the steel components needed for Chalala's high-

tech piggery, a multi-site production unit consisting of a breeding unit, a nursery and three growers sites.

"That was as close to the perfect project for us as is possible to get - the cream of the crop," Laubscher

begins, of a project clearly close to his heart, "where we have an excellent relationship with the client, who is the biggest in their industry. In this case, Chalala has in excess of 25% of the pigs in the country under their control. We were told what the requirements were and then handed a blank canvas on which to design the eventual project, which turned out to be incredibly



LEMCO Projects and Workshop



simple to realise. This was largely down to the efficiency with which the personnel on site carried out their duties, and the total control we had over all the variables which applied to its construction."

With 9,600 sows, Chalala Farms will soon produce more than 275,000 piglets per year. It is pioneering a stress-free approach to better satisfy both pigs and consumers. The animals are kept in a comfortable environment at temperatures between 18°C and 20°C and humidity levels of 60% to 80% to allow them to thrive. The facility also uses evaporative cooling pads to reduce the air temperature in the production units, while fans are used to disperse the air evenly throughout the building. "We were privileged to be able to continue our relationship with Number Two Piggeries, Chalala Farms as we respect their ethical business practices," Andries Laubscher noted, "and it is a relationship we hope to continue for many years to come."

Meanwhile Jeff van Zyl, General Manager, Number Two Piggeries,

Chalala Farms, was effusive in his praise for LEMCO's work on this historic development. "We were looking for somebody who was able to do a job of this size because it's not normal for a piggery or a farming enterprise building to be built to this scale," he explained.

"Building is not our trade and we needed guidance, information and assistance in planning this new process. It's always nice to work with LEMCO as they have very capable employees doing the erecting and sheeting, and offer valuable advice. I would say that they are honest people with a good product and a good price, who know what they are doing and I trust them absolutely."

STEELING ITSELF FOR ANOTHER PUSH

The nature and quality of LEMCO's business appears to be shielding it completely from the dour news which surrounds South Africa's steel industry, described as in constant decline since 2010 and suffering from weak demand. Indeed, Andries Laubscher

leaves us with LEMCO's intentions to ramp up dominance even further in the coming years.

"We as a company are blessed in many ways," he sums up. "For the past decade we have been growing year-on-year, which puts us in a very good position. We invest in state-of-the-art technology, equipment and hand-picked personnel, this way we are able to keep overheads low and ensure that we are still competitive at any pricing structure, no matter how competitive the market is out there."

"I think we work a lot more smartly than if you look back even just ten years. There is a young, vibrant team in our office set up for a good 15 or 20 year run with the people we have on board at the moment. The personnel we have at our disposal is perfectly pitched to make a real difference as we gear up for our next phase." **E!**