

SUPPORTING OTHERS

cultural cooperation

Story by Lou Fioto
Photos by Brian H. Temple

Sababa!

One of its meanings is akin to Swahili's "hakuna matada," made popular by Timon, the worry-free meerkat in Disney's *The Lion King*.

However, this modern-day Hebrew slang, ranging in meaning from "excellent" to "no worries," was not borrowed from Swahili lingo; it was borrowed from Arabic.

Language is a reflection of culture and an exchange among cultures can bring people together. It did just that for many of Europe District's employees in Israel.

"Best office I've ever worked in," said Bob Sommer, project engineer, who has 35 years in government service. "We're learning how to improve. The trick here is that the Israeli construction and business model is different (but) the teamwork has been phenomenal."

Sommer and his colleagues managed 40 projects on 13 installations and placed \$37.5 million in construction in fiscal year 2005. From construction on a Black Hawk hangar to a high-tech flight squadron command facility, he said this tempo was sustained, in part, because of his Israeli colleagues.

Sommer said success lies in the ability of Corps employees and their Israeli partners to see eye-to-eye on a common mission, despite different business cultures.

"We are a warm people, and we are open, but not in conducting

business," said Ofer Davidi, project engineer, Southern Resident Office.

Davidi, who once worked for the Israeli Ministry of Defence, said it is stressful working on larger projects because one needs to ensure time and energy are not wasted. He said with his countrymen, emotions sometime trump processes, and people challenge each other. However, the Corps lends business procedures that help keep projects in check, he added.

Michael "Miki" Goldstein, electrical engineer, Israeli Ministry of Defence, has worked with the Corps for four years, and began his tenure on a two-year base project for Israeli paratroopers. "I

enjoy every day of my life working with the Corps because their way of thinking and ... way of doing business is the way that I like to do business," he said.

Goldstein said his colleagues were initially hesitant to volunteer to work with the Corps, but he said he volunteered without reservation. Ironically, it is the Corps' structured approach toward business that appeals to Goldstein.

"Their standards are very clear," he said. "There is a lot of bureaucracy, but I think it's the right way to do the job because ... without all the paperwork, big projects ... you never will do right. No one can remember things that were agreed to two years ago on multimillion dollar projects. It is impossible."

Goldstein said he knows it's the open exchange that translates

into reliable, relevant and responsive professionalism; ideals that most Corps customers value and appreciate.

Mutual respect is also appreciated, and Davidi said he certainly respects his Corps colleagues.

"Corps of Engineers people mingle with the locals and get involved with the local culture," he said. "(For Europe District employees) coming from the streets of Germany, this is a culture shock. ... They choose to live among the locals. They invite their neighbors over. We are one."

This camaraderie, mutual respect, and dedication toward achieving the same end state bring people together.

Approximately a two-hour drive north of the Southern Program Office lies the Nachshonim Storage Base, a \$125-million base 40 minutes east of Tel Aviv.

A small city in the desert, it consists of 210 buildings sitting on 400 acres of land connected by 23 kilometers (14 miles) of asphalt. It took four years to construct and was turned over to the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) during a December ribbon cutting ceremony.

It is the largest project in the Corps' Wye River Program (an outgrowth of the 1998 Wye River Memorandum between the Palestinian Authority and Israel) and aids the IDF's relocation of troops out of the West Bank with the continued hope in stabilizing the region.

The base is designed to help store military equipment for decades. With specialized storage units keeping control of humidity and dust levels, this base stores supplies, vehicles, and other equipment for reserve artillery, infantry and armored brigades that will fall in on their equipment in the event of a rapid deployment.

Michael Roach, originally from the Norfolk District, serves as resident engineer for Nachshonim. He said he and his family moved to Israel four years ago and feel a deep sense of community; although it took some adjusting. It was a difficult move for the Roach family, traveling 6,000 miles to a totally different culture.

"This was our first overseas assignment, so it was especially difficult for us," he said. "Then, adjusting to the new culture and all the ... things associated with that. That took a while."

Roach said the project delivery team was "varied" with many Corps employees coming from the East Coast, and from Germany, to work with the Israeli construction team.

"As far as teamwork," he said, "I think we've meshed together very well. We've had our struggles like any family. ... We have our internal squabbles back and forth, but in the end I say we did come together."

People came together to make the facility a reality, overcoming language barriers, cultural differences, engineering and construction challenges, you name it.

The Corps has a long history of service in the Middle East. It oversaw billions of dollars of work in Saudi Arabia in the 1960s and early 1970s, and has been working in Israel since the Camp David Peace Accords in 1979. That's nearly three decades of supporting our allies while working to secure international peace and helping to increase their quality of life.

The Corps has done its job too, according to Miki Eari, an Israeli Army sergeant and Nachshonim dining facility manager. His new kitchen features state-of-the-art equipment that allows him to prepare a greater variety of food and meals quicker and easier.

Eari, who runs the dining facility to feed a small contingent of garrison Soldiers operating the base, said cooking will be much more enjoyable for him now as preparing meals can be done in half the time.

"I now have time to prepare seven types of salads," he said. "I can now prepare more food, because I have more equipment and facilities. The customer gets a much better quality of food."

During the interview with Eari an Israeli Soldier came into the kitchen and spoke to Eari in Hebrew. "There is your answer," Eari said. "This is a guy that came in and shook my hand and said 'thank you so much for the excellent food'. He was not invited to do so." It was an appropriate example of customer satisfaction.

Roach summed up the feelings of just about everyone involved in the Corps' efforts in Israel. "I'm awfully proud of what we've done here," he said. "I'm not a politician. I'm not sure how this base will fit into the greater picture, but the Corps has done a great job here. And, I'm proud to be a part of this organization."



Gary Segal, project manager, M. Gordon Construction (right), shows Col. Margaret Burcham, commander, Europe District (center), Ofer Davidi (far left) and Bob Sommer, a blueprint of the flight squadron building on Hazerim Air Base, Israel.



Construction continues on the Black Hawk hangar on Hazerim Air Base. The Southern Resident Office staff worked 40 projects on 13 installations, placing \$37.5 million in construction in fiscal year 2005.

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