



Real tanneries, real life

The fourth Tannery of the Year Global Awards programme is about to start; the first of the new reports will appear in the next issue of World Leather (December 2013-January 2014). During the first three editions, we have had the privilege of seeing at very close hand the life and work of the 29 finalist tanneries in all parts of the world. This paper highlights just one example from each of their many initiatives showing corporate social responsibility (CSR) in action.

The global Tannery of the Year Award was initiated in 2009 by this magazine and has drawn support from ICT, the International Council of Tanners, IULTCS, the International Union of Leather Technologists and Chemists Societies, and UNIDO. The first awards ceremony took place in Hong Kong, during APLE, in March 2010. Each of the 29 finalist tanneries to date has been featured in special eight-page profiles in *World Leather*, covering five geographic regions: Africa, the Americas, Asia (excluding China), China and Europe. The principal focus of these reports is corporate social responsibility and, time after time, they have provided proof that good tanners in all parts of the world know how to look after the environment, care for their workforces and fulfill their obligations as good corporate citizens, all while producing beautiful leather. They also show a commitment to innovation and to maintaining excellent relationships with customers and suppliers, and their local communities.

Technical aspects of these profiles have been analysed and featured separately in *World Leather* in a series of four papers entitled Innovation - Part 1: Recycling and regeneration (Oct-Nov 2012), Part 2: Co-products and solids management (Dec-Jan 2012-13), Part 3: Movement of Materials (Feb-March 2013), and Part 4: Making the most of resources (April-May 2013). Much of the content from these studies has been included in the recently published book *"The Framework for Leather Manufacture"*.

In this paper, we wish to emphasise the environmental and social aspects of corporate social responsibility by selecting one highlight from each of the 29 reports completed thus far. The list of examples to choose from is very extensive, and could have included aspects of health and safety, the responsible use of chemicals and machinery, matters that are subject to legislation, as well as issues that might simply be covered by the terms "common sense" and respect for people. In this instance, however, the chosen examples go beyond these limits. They are further examples of good practice and appear in tannery alphabetical order.

Artículos de Piel Los Favoritos (B'Leather), Dominican Republic, Highly Commended, the Americas, 2011

Situated in the city of Santiago in the Dominican Republic, the Artículos de Piel tannery has been run by the Bermúdez family since the 1940s. Company president, Aquiles Bermúdez, talks modestly about the work the company has done to help families who come to the city from the countryside in search of work and a better life. Artículos de Piel has bought plots of land and gifted them to these families to help them move away from shacks by the river to a safer environment. He doesn't mention a plaque on the wall of his office presented to him by a social services organisation in Santiago in recognition of his contribution to the development of communities, calling him "a tireless fighter in the defence of the most needy".

Bridge of Weir Leather Company, Scotland, Tannery of the Year, Europe, 2010

When changes are in the planning stage that might affect the local community, full discussions take place. New ideas are discussed with local representatives first, then, taking their reactions into account, the message is presented to the wider community. When screening was required in one situation, the choice of trees was made according to the suggestion of a local resident.

Coming, Brazil, Tannery of the Year, the Americas, 2011

Brazilian tannery Coming's efforts to do good in its local community, near Trindade, in the state of Goiás, include setting up an early learning and children's day centre in Mariópolis, a favela that grew up around a local rubbish dump. Social problems remain in Mariópolis, but children there now receive expert professional care, meals, a safe place to play, and a head start in their education, while their parents have access to excellent childcare and, as a result, are able to go to the city to find work, all thanks to the tannery.

Curtiembres Fonseca, Argentina, Tannery of the Year, the Americas, 2010

Among many social projects, the company has made some staff available to help local entrepreneurs set up viable micro-businesses. Typically this includes help in securing necessary funding, setting up small but formal companies, and guidance in how to go about billing customers.

Elico, Ethiopia, Highly Commended, Africa, 2011

As a result of earlier restructuring, 200 of the workforce were laid off. One of the first actions taken by a new management team following the restructuring was to re-employ all of these people before an increase in production could financially justify this action. The management team decided to take this unusual step because it felt allowing people to get back into work should be the priority.

Ethiopia Tannery Share Company, Ethiopia, Tannery of the Year, Africa and Global

The company has planted 1,500 mango trees and 600 for avocados on surrounding land, as well as 300 coffee plants and established 35 beehives. The produce from the estate will benefit the 630 people who work in the tannery, either through the crops going directly into the canteen, or through their sale, with the money going to local labour unions.

Gansu Hongliang, Highly Commended, China, 2011

The tannery has a fully comprehensive effluent treatment



plant. Having set a standard for local industry, the company is building a second effluent treatment plant. This will be used to treat effluent from adjacent manufacturers who concentrate not on leather but on dyeing, cotton, agriculture and food processing.

Gruppo Dani, Italy, Highly Commended, Europe, 2013

Thanks to its willingness to take part in a wider event called Fabbriche Aperte (Open Factories) in 2012, Gruppo Dani gave many people in the famous Italian tanning town of Arzignano their first look inside a tannery. Families with children, sometimes people who had lived in the area for years, came for the day and compared the tannery's automotive production line to an operating theatre because it was so clean. The experience shattered some of the stereotypes the public can sometimes be inclined to apply to tanneries. Managing director, Giancarlo Dani, believes that "excellence" sums up the Italian tanning sector in general, but he says that tanners were reluctant for years to open their doors and let people see inside. He now wants to share his pride in the product with his neighbours, saying: "Italian leather is a luxury product; we are proud to show it to people."

Heller-Leder, Germany, Tannery of the Year, Europe and Global, 2011

Automotive and furniture upholstery specialist Heller-Leder began encouraging its 165 employees to sign up to take part in an international bone-marrow donor-matching initiative following the death from leukemia of a senior member of the company's sales team. It was overwhelmed by the response and is pleased that Heller-Leder employees have, to date, been able to help save the lives of leukemia sufferers in the US and the UK.

Hulshof Royal Dutch Tanneries, the Netherlands, Highly Commended, Europe

This tannery has relocated several times as the town of Lichtenvoorde has grown and enclosed the previous sites. Yet again the current tannery site has become surrounded by housing, and some directly overlooks the tannery. The site is maintained odour free, and the noise levels are minimised to standards set at one metre from the site perimeter.

ISA TanTec, Highly Commended, China, 2010

The company works closely with the city of Guangzhou, and maintains an 'A' grade rating track-record on paying taxes. The authorities also keep tabs on how much revenue is contributed to the local area. Constant communications with the community are seen as essential for the tannery to be viewed as an attractive neighbour and an interesting company to relate to.

Josef Heinen, Germany, Highly Commended, Europe, 2010

This tannery is in the middle of the town of Wegberg. There has been considerable reconstruction within the buildings over the years, but this has been within strict guidelines so that the character of the neighbourhood is maintained. In particular the neighbours have been taken into full account as housing is built against the side of the main offices, and light industrial buildings set against the exterior walls of the tannery. Moreover, the height of the adjacent building has set limits on the height of any modifications to tannery structures. "Our neighbours know that if there is a problem, they can come through the door any time, and they know whom to talk to," says managing director Thomas Heinen.



Many of the workforce at PrimeAsia China live in on-site accommodation. In addition to full canteen facilities within this complex, there is a comprehensive shop and a small library, and rest and recreation areas set in front of these buildings.



Hulshof tannery is located within a town, and there is housing on the other side of the wall which overlooks this garden that has been set in a corner of the tannery site. There is no odour and the noise levels are very low.

Lefarc, Mexico, Highly Commended, the Americas, 2013

The effluent from approximately 500 tanneries after primary treatment is treated in the León Common Effluent Treatment Plant. Although chrome removal is not required by the CETP, all of the chrome wastewaters from the Lefarc wet blue facility are collected and treated on site. The company believes that if other tanners followed this example, the sludge from the CEPT could be used for purposes other than controlled land deposit.

Midori Hokuyo, Japan, Tannery of the Year, Asia excluding China, 2013

The entire site is surrounded by trees, with a variety of species to produce a sensitive diversity of heights and colours. The company's policy is that this is nature's own defence because problems of disease or infestations of insects are far less likely to spread from one species to another. It is proud of having chosen this way to mark its boundaries, rather than use a fence or a wall.

Nakara, Namibia, Tannery of the Year, Africa, 2011

A pension fund has been set up for all employees, and people can use this as a base for a home-building project. Employees at



all levels are entitled to ask for smaller loans, typically motivated by immediate needs to cover events such as funeral expenses, or perhaps clothes for children.

PrimeAsia China, Tannery of the Year, China and Global, 2013

In common with many manufacturing companies in China, the PrimeAsia tannery in Huangjiang has the majority of its employees living on site. Around 900 people live on the tannery campus. To help look after their needs, PrimeAsia provides free annual health-checks, sports facilities and regular visits from a wide range of service providers offering haircuts, shoe and mobile phone repairs and other forms of assistance. Taking this concept of care into the wider community, the tannery arranges for groups of employees to visit care homes for the elderly in the local area and to help keep local parks litter-free.

PrimeAsia Vietnam, Vietnam, Tannery of the Year, Asia excluding China, 2010

Around 55% of the workforce are women, which is in keeping with the government's ambition to empower women as an important means of alleviating poverty. All of the employees work six days a week if they wish, with a minimum of eight hours a day, and, in addition to the important public holidays get 12 days annual leave. The government plays a role in determining the wage levels, but the company also negotiates directly with trade unions. The company does much more than the minimum for the workforce, and this is reflected in a turnover of just 5% per month which is unheard of in similar comparisons.

Procesos Húmedos de León, Mexico, Highly Commended, the Americas, 2010

The company engenders the spirit of team-work by organising the workforce into teams of six, with workers regularly changing posts to keep their levels of interest and concentration high. They come in six days a week and the demands of the job are high. A fair salary leaves little spare money for luxuries, but workers are glad to be there and give their best.

PT Budi Makmur, Indonesia, Highly Commended, Asia excluding China, 2011

The support of cultural activities is encouraged, including dancers and a workers' orchestra of up to 20 members, mixing electric guitars and drums with traditional Javanese instruments provided by the company. This orchestra plays at family celebrations and often at company events. In addition, sporting activities and events are supported to help make good relationships both between individuals, and within the company.

Royal Leather Industries, Pakistan, Highly Commended, Asia excluding China, 2013

Lahore-based Royal Leather Industries is proud to have represented Pakistan's leather industry in the Tannery of the Year programme. Operations director, Agha Saiddain, believes that if you include farmers, abattoir workers, those who carry out the salting of hides, those involved in transportation and, of course, tanners and finished product manufacturers, this industry is responsible for a million jobs in Pakistan, which means it brings substantial benefits to the country as a whole. Even the relatively recent phenomenon of moving leather production to where labour is cheap is another way in which



The Pittard-Ethiopia Tannery Share Company site has been surrounded with 1,500 mango trees, 650 avocado trees and 300 coffee plants in addition to existing banana and lemon trees. Within these areas many beehives have been newly located for both pollination and honey.



PT Budi Makmur tannery is located in a residential area. Not only are the wastewaters treated to a high standard before discharge from the site, but the whole of the effluent plant and the walkways have been softened by extensive "greening".

the leather industry helps humanity, he says, bringing work to developing economies, putting food on families' tables, shoes on children's feet and schoolbooks in their hands. These are the things that really matter to most of the human race.

SB Foot, US, Tannery of the Year, the Americas, 2013

Most tanneries are small- or medium-sized operations, but if they operate in small communities, they can play a crucial role. SB Foot plays just such a role in Red Wing, Minnesota, where it has been based for 140 years. It's a place, according to company owner, Bill Sweasy, where actions mean much more than words. Actions the tannery has taken during its history include helping to fund the public library, which has an SB Foot room. But what excites Mr Sweasy the most is creating jobs for local people; 175 people currently work in the tannery, which he explains is doing its best to keep local families prosperous from one generation to the next. It's a long way from Red Wing to Wall Street.

SCOT, South Africa, Highly Commended, Africa, 2010

Specialist exotic leather producer South Cape Ostrich Tannery (SCOT) invests in the pleasant aspects of community life in and around its base in Mossel Bay, sponsoring an employees' soccer



team and funding places for disadvantaged young people at a variety of local schools and at a specialist agriculture college nearby. However, like all employers in South Africa, SCOT has also had to address the subject of HIV and AIDS. It has worked hard to raise HIV-AIDS awareness among its 86 employees, always emphasising the importance of people knowing their own status. Feedback from the tannery floor suggests the workers value very highly information and training on this subject.

Sepici Grubu, Turkey, Tannery of the Year, Europe, 2013

Respecting and collaborating with unions is an important part of the company policy. The senior management team wears overalls as its members are constantly on the shop floor, discussing and helping to solve problems. "We cannot be away from our tannery workers," says chairman Mehmet Sepici. "We are always working together, making leather together."

Seton AutoLeather, South Africa, Tannery of the Year, Africa, 2013

In South Africa, all businesses have to comply with the Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) legislation, promulgated with the aim of redistributing wealth across a broad spectrum of South Africans, primarily focusing on the previously disadvantaged ethnic groups. Seton AutoLeather leads the way among its competitors with a BBBEE compliance rating of level six but is working to achieve a lower (better) score. "The company has a defined employment equity plan to develop black and female employees though the ranks of senior, middle and junior management," says Seton's managing director, Shalen Sewnandan. "Our efforts are clearly visible in our management structure and shop floor control. Training plans are centred on elementary skills development and the development of core business skills in the areas of general management, safety, health, environment and quality, leather technology and operations management."

Simona Tanning, China, Tannery of the Year China, 2010

Simona Tanning has what it calls a social contract with its Chinese employees. It provides food, housing and transportation, as well as health insurance and pension benefits. There are also plenty of social events, including an annual internal basketball tournament, dinners for western and Chinese New Year holidays, and monthly dinners to celebrate employees' birthdays. In the wider community, the company also distributes food, drink and cooking ingredients before three of the major Chinese festivals.

Tata International, India, Highly Commended, Asia excluding China, 2010

It is not unusual for tanneries to collect and use rainwater, and in this example the rainwater collected from the roof is stored in a series of ponds. After effluent treatment including reverse osmosis, 75% of this water is recycled for reuse, with the remaining 25% concentrated as effluent being evaporated to dryness. The tannery does not abstract water, neither does it discharge effluent.

TehChang, Taiwan, Tannery of the Year, Asia excluding China, 2011

Many examples of different adult education can be found in the leather industry. In this situation there is a scholarship



Over the years, Sepiciler has created a very significant collection of historic leather bags, shoes, saddles, mouldings and hand tools used in leather manufacture. This prime example shows a set of Turkish horse blinkers.



One of the four treatment rooms in the extensive on-site medical facility at Seton Tannery.

programme for workers to complete adult learning courses, and a separate education assistance scheme for the children of employees who are performing well academically. On-site there are courses in leather craft, and outside classes that focus on management skills.

Xingye Leather Technology, Tannery of the Year, China, 2011

This tannery is rapidly expanding and will double in production capacity. But a new wet processing department will not commence production until a new effluent treatment plant becomes fully operational.

Xuzhou Nanhai, Highly Commended, China 2013

The tannery operates a coal-fired steam-generating plant. To minimise air emissions, all of the exhaust gases are water-scrubbed before discharge. The water is recycled from a holding tank; the carbon particulates are settled for recovery and re-combustion, and the solution of acid gases (hydrogen chloride, nitrous oxides and sulphur dioxide) are neutralised as part of the tannery primary effluent treatment. ☉