For Engineering News

Innovation driving FFS ahead

Innovation has been the driving force behind FFS Refiners (FFS), a Durban company that was started from scratch in 1974 in response to the fuel crisis of that time. And as managing director Don Hunter hands over the leadership role to Andrew Canning at the end of February, that spirit of ingenuity combined with a 'can do' attitude will be taking FFS and its 540 staff to greater heights.

FFS Refiners is the largest supplier of industrial heating fuels in South Africa. The company's fuels have a wide variety of uses, including glass making, brick making, steam raising in boilers, billet re-heating, baking, incineration, laundry, road-mix heating, lime kilns, and sand and stone drying. FFS currently has more than 250 customers who collectively consume more than 300 000 tons of fuel oil per year, safely delivered in its fleet of more than 70 road tankers.

A good example of FFS's culture of creativity is the hydrotreating technology they devised for recycling used engine oil. The resulting plant in Pietermaritzburg was so successful that the company was soon able to fabricate another plant at its Umhlatuzana workshops, ship it to Newcastle, Australia, and assemble and commission it. The purchaser later said the plant, unique in the southern hemisphere, had paid for itself within four years.

Says Andrew, a chemical engineer with experience both in the UK and at the Engen refinery in Durban, "We continue to grow apace, for example with new tank farms in Cape Town harbour and at Evander (Mpumalanga), but I am equally excited about our in-house technological prowess – for example, we have just designed, built and commissioned scrubbers that make our plants more than compliant with the new environmental legislation that requires Volatile Organic Compound emissions to be less than 90 mg/Nm^3, and in addition they reduce odours."

Says retiring MD Don Hunter, "The breadth of our engineering never ceases to astound me – we have conceived, designed, detailed, fabricated, constructed, commissioned and operated a startling number of complex and diverse projects. I am particularly proud, for example, that we were able to remove several million tons of liquid waste hydrocarbons from the environment and through ingenuity re-refine this into valuable energy products, utilised in many niche and specialised applications."

FFS was started by a mechanical engineer, Tony Hurter, and his wife Diane, under the name Fuel Firing Systems. In 1986 the name changed to FFS Refiners when Sasol Oil acquired a 49% stake; during this time FFS actively sought innovative uses for Sasol Synfuel's unused hydrocarbons, recovering for example 420 000 tons of pitch that was filtered, transported and used as a blast furnace injection fuel at Iscor.

Today Calulo Investments, FFS's original BEE partner, has a majority share in FFS, with Investec and FFS management as minority partners. The company chairman is Mkhuseli Faku.

FFS has refineries in Durban (Jacobs), Chloorkop (Gauteng), Evander, Pietermaritzburg, Cape Town and and seven storage depots.

Ends.
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Caption:

Don Hunter, right, hands over the reins of FFS Refiners to the new managing director, Andrew Canning.

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