Quick facts

- Fiji’s gross domestic product (GDP) projection for 2014 was revised by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) by half a per cent upward to 3.5 per cent. The majority of this growth can be attributed to tourism - Fiji’s highest income-generating sector.

- With the steady increase in the number of tourists visiting Fiji, the construction industry has also expanded. The total value of construction-related activities in 2013 and 2014 has risen from FJ$233.9 million to FJ$382.2 million. (Figure deleted. The projected value of construction activities in Fiji for 2015 in set at FJ$414.1 million according to the Fiji 2013 Budget.)

- In 2009, while they were still students at APTC, Abhinesh and Ravneesh registered their tiling company, Quality Tile Setters.

- Following their graduation in 2009, Abhinesh and Ravneesh invited another graduate of the Certificate III Wall and Floor Tiling program, Rajesh Kumar, to join them as a business partner.

- Quality Tile Setters now employs over 30 staff – all APTC graduates - on either a full-time or part-time basis.

- Quality Tile Setters now works on multimillion-dollar projects such as the recent Westin Denarau Resort and Spa refurbishment, which is run by the parent company, Shangri-La Hotels.

---

Expanding small business with Entrepreneurial spirit and key skills

APTC
Australia-Pacific Technical College
Creating skills for life

APTC Corporate and Student Services Office
PO Box 10885, Nadi Airport, Fiji Islands
13 Commercial Street, Namaka, Nadi

Phone: +679 672 8778
Fax: +679 672 8778
Email: enquiries@aptc.edu.au

www.aptc.edu.au
Entrepreneurial spirit and key skills help a small business expand

Brothers Abhinash and Ravinesh Kumar have successfully used the skills they learnt at Australia-Pacific Technical College (APTC) to run a thriving tiling company that is recognised across Fiji for its high standards and quality of work.

Fiji has enjoyed consistent economic growth over the last five years. The country’s gross domestic product (GDP) projections for 2014 was revised by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) by half a per cent upward to 3.3 per cent. The major contributors to this growth are attributed to Fiji’s highest income-generating sector.

With the steady increase in the number of tourists visiting Fiji, the construction industry has also expanded. The total value of construction-related activities in 2013 and 2014 has risen from F$313.9 million to F$313.8 million (“Fijian dollars.” The projected value of construction activities in Fiji for 2015 is set at F$314.1 million according to Fiji’s 2013 Budget.

This growth has led to an increased demand for construction services from both local and multinational corporations, including large global hotel chains. More work also requires more construction workers who are able to meet the industry standards that these companies expect.

To help fill this gap for more skilled workers, Abhinash Kumar and his brother, Ravinesh Kumar, were graduated from APTC in 2009 with a Certificate III in Wall and Floor Tiling. Combined their skills and knowledge to expand their small tiling business into a thriving company.

Abhinash was first to recognise that a growing construction industry would need qualified tiler. He was aware that the tiler that were working in the industry were previously were usually unskilled and unfamiliar with working to international industry standards. Abhinash clearly saw that there was a lot to be gained by studying at APTC and gaining a qualification.

In 2008, while they were still students at APTC, Abhinash and Ravinesh explained their training to the Quality Tile Setters. With the money from their first contract and their savings, they were able to buy more tools. Their first contract was only worth $4,000, but they were impressed with the skills that we learnt from APTC that lead to more contracts,” says Abhinash.

According to Neil Atkinson, APTC trainer in wall and floor tiling, Ravinesh excelled in the practical side of the course, while Abhinash was always the entrepreneurial one who combined practical skills with his business flair to build their company. “Abhinash is a charismatic communicator and was always a natural as an entrepreneur”, explains Neil. “And his brother Ravinesh is the exceptional tile.”

According to Abhinash, in addition to the technical skills he learnt at APTC, he also gained invaluable of work and tiling management skills and how to work with new technologies, in particular the latest tools of the trade.

The APTC Certificate III in Wall and Floor Tiling is an Australian accredited qualification. The Australian wall and floor tiling industry has the advantage of being able to follow standards set by the Australian Standards (AS). Qualified and licensed tilers have access to the APTC’s Tile Reference Manual to support them with their work.

In Fiji and across the Pacific, there is currently no industry body that oversees the standard of tiling across provided by individual installers. Constructions contracts regarding quality of work, safety standards and timeliness of construction work are not clearly defined and can vary widely from project to project.

Neil recognises that one of the main areas lacking in the local tiling industry is apprenticeship programs, which are a fundamental component in trade training in Australia. Industry bodies such as the ATC and the Australian Master (Tilers) Association also regulate apprenticeships in the tiling industry.

Neil also believes that the confidence that employers across the Pacific-APTC graduates have is down to the fact that the training is aligned with their expectations and addresses the training gaps in the relevant industries.

“Employers approach us to hire our graduates or students for their jobs because they recognise the quality of training provided by APTC,” says Neil. “One of the most significant aspects of the training program that appeals to employers is the focus we have on occupational health and safety, which is now a growing area of concern in aligning local tiling standards with global standards.”

Following their graduation in 2009, Abhinash and Ravinesh joined another graduate of the Certificate III in Wall and Floor Tiling program, Rajesh Kumar, to join them as a business partner. “Because Rajesh also went to APTC, I recognised that he had the same technical skills and unique skills to help our business grow,” says Abhinash.

Quality Tile Setters has grown from three business partners, who also carried out all the work on the contracts, to employing 20 staff, all of whom are APTC graduates. “Out of these 20, 15 are full-time and 5 is part time. As our business grows, more are employed when we need them,” says Abhinash.

Quality Tile Setters is now involved in multimillion dollar projects, including the recent Westin Denarau Resort and Spa refurbishment. It completed this work under the resort’s parent company, Starwood Hotels. Starwood Hotels is an international company that oversees a portfolio of more than 1,200 hotels, including the Westin. With these recognised global brands, maintaining the high standard of their hotels and resorts is essential to their business operations and services, as well as their reputation in the industry.

“One of our first major projects was the Westin refurbishment,” says Abhinash. “We finished 125 rooms on time and exceeded the expectations of the client. This led to the Starwood Hotels management giving us with more tiling and waterproofing contracts at both the Westin and its other resorts such as the Sheraton Fiji Resort.”

Recognising the skills of APTC graduates

A significant aspect of the delivery of the APTC-CNOC Community Positive feedback from employers of APTC graduates has led to recognition across the Fijian tiling industry of the quality of the APTC training.

Neil Atkinson, APTC trainer in the Certificate III in Wall and Floor Tiling, has noticed an increased focus on safety standards in workplaces across the Pacific, including those in Fiji. “Given that occupational health and safety is a key competency in APTC training, this increase can be attributed in part to APTC graduates working in the industry.”

APTC graduates are in great demand across the building industry, especially for large companies, such as those in the luxury resort and hotel industry where construction and quality standards cannot be compromised.

Abhinash Kumar, founder and co-owner of Quality Tile Setters and APTC graduate, has capitalised on this demand by employing other APTC graduates in his business.

“I now have over 20 staff on either a full-time or part-time basis that have all graduated from APTC,” says Abhinash.

As an entrepreneur, Abhinash understands that maintaining consistency in service quality ensures that clients continue to provide his business with opportunities for larger projects.

“We now work on several large contracts for Fiji’s top resorts including the Tanoa Waterfront in Laukoua and other big resorts on Denarau and the Mamanuca Islands.”

He has confidence in his employees’ ability to maintain the standard and quality of work that is significant to these large clients.

“We spent around $10,000 on purchasing new tools and equipment from Australia so our workers are always using the most up-to-date equipment, explains Abhinash. “This also means that we are able to finish our jobs more efficiently and on time.”

He is also aware that having adequately trained workers ensures that equipment is used effectively and correctly and that safety standards are not compromised.

Abhinash also utilises other skills he picked up during his APTC studies to help him effectively manage his business operations, including time management and procurement best practices. These skills ensured that he is independent when sourcing quotes for subcontracted work and that his quotations are consistent with the level of work required and standard of work expected.

Giving back to the community

“One of the things I learnt from APTC and my trainer, aside from the technical skills, is the importance of回馈the community,” says Abhinash Kumar, founder and co-owner of Quality Tile Setters and APTC graduate.

Abhinash’s brother, Ravinesh, and Rajesh Kumar, both also APTC graduates, are the other partners in the business. “APTC has given so much to the Pacific. For many of us, we were not skilled and could never disband the age of contracts that we now have and the confidence of employers in our work until now,” says Abhinash.

Abhinash is a strong believer in the flow-on impact that APTC can have at the community level. This belief has encouraged him to actively give back to his local community through his business.

As well as giving his Certificate III in Wall and Floor Tiling at APTC, Abhinash is also a graduate of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. In addition to the lucrative projects that they work on, including for large resort chain Stays, Tostos Hotels and London-based Ramada, the three graduates also share their APTC skills with unemployed and young people who employ on a casual basis when required by their clients.

Quality Tile Setters, who also employ 20 APTC graduates, are committed to teaching their causal employees basic tiling skills and provide the opportunity for them to work in a trade and choose tiling as a career.

Quality Tile Setlers is also the major sponsor of the Fiji Business Club - a not-for-profit business club based in Nadi that promotes the health and fitness of the community. The business contributes 2 per cent of its profits to related community-based projects.

Abhinash, Ravinesh and Rajesh also regularly give small tiling jobs for community churches and schools free of charge. “This not only promotes APTC and tiling as a career, but people remain at the standard of our work and this then leads to word-of-mouth recommendations to other bigger clients,” says Abhinash.

“Large clients also see that we are trustworthy and they are happy to help us believe in us, to view more in us, on top of the fact that we are associated with APTC.”