

Globe-Trotting Larnie Is Not About To Revamp His CV!

Given the amount of times that GCPP2 Factory Manager Larnie Boland has appeared in the pages of Tawasol showing yet another group of VIPs around the plant, it might come as a surprise that he is not always instantly recognised. But as he is the first to admit, most people look very different when not sporting a regulation blue factory 'hat'.

Larnie is responsible through his 400 staff for the smooth running of the factory, which produces both fresh and long life products. In his own words, he tries to be as hands on as possible and aims to keep meetings to an absolute minimum. "The Roman Empire wasn't built by having lots of meetings," he quips, adding that a habit that he picked up in Russia was to go around everywhere with his digital camera.

"I take pictures of anything and everything that gives me cause for concern," he explains. "It's much easier to explain with pictures to someone that perhaps a process could be tightened up, or hygiene improved. I'm fanatical about factory hygiene since this business depends absolutely on it. I often say, 'imagine your mother was in a hospital ward which was dirty. How would you feel about that?'. And

that seems to register with people. But having said that, I should stress that the workforce here is highly motivated and it's very unusual to pick someone up for dereliction. Most problems stem from a machine break down or something like that."

Larnie remarked on the many reports which have been developed to see at a glance the performance of the factory — everything from overtime to drains! "We have outstanding analytical resources and we use them fully!". A weekly review of these Key Performance Indicators is held in Head Office.



Perhaps surprisingly, Larnie started his working life as a marine engineer, and his subsequent travels might have sewn the seeds of the 'wander-lust' that appears evident in his subsequent working life.

Married in 1979 to Jackie, he had two children by 1983 (but subsequently

four in total) and this decided him to stop roaming the globe and to put down roots so that he could spend time with his growing family. But instead of settling in his native Ireland, he took a job as Marine Surveyor, based in the beautiful volcanic town of Rabaul, Papau New Guinea.

Three years later he took over the job of factory manager of a small Coca Cola bottling plant in the same town where he stayed for another three years, and this was the start of his subsequent career in the food industry.

By 1990 he had returned to Ireland as

Product Manager in the Irish division of Chivers, but it wasn't long before he was off on his travels again, this time to Saudi Arabia where he took his first job in Almarai, based in Jeddah.

"Things were very different in those days," he explained. "In the early '90s Almarai had four factories — in Al Kharj, Khamis, Dammam and Jeddah. We produced milk,

laban, zabadi and breakfast cream and my family loved their time in Jeddah. But plans were already underway for the construction of a central processing plant which opened in Al Kharj in 1996, signalling the closure of Almarai's four earlier sites.

"For family reasons, I decided it was

time to move on again, and responded to an advertisement in the Arab News which exhorted its readers to 'Join the Cola War' — in Russia! I flew to Dubai for an interview 'on the quiet' but as there were several Almarai staff on the flight, it did not remain quiet for long.

"The end result was a posting to Ekaterinburg / Sverdlovsk – an industrial city of 1½ million people two hours flying time from Moscow. At first I felt very isolated, especially when I first set eyes on the derelict site which was set to become a fully operational bottling plant within 18 months. But I had a wonderfully efficient team including a bi-lingual assistant, and I well remember the first bottles rolling down the line, on my birthday in December 1997!

"I stayed in Russia to see in the new millennium — primarily to be there in case of any computer problems associated with the Y2K 'bug' which everyone feared might cause world-wide havoc but which in the event caused almost no problems at all. And then it was back to Ireland and a job as production manager in a frozen pizza factory."

It turned out that Larnie didn't stay long in Ireland, as the expansion plans for building a new pizza factory were shelved in favour of an acquisition instead. But it so happened that in 2001, plans were underway for a new processing plant to be built for Almarai in Al Kharj and once again he set off for Saudi Arabia – this time returning to the Company as Project Manager of the new CPP2.

"Construction started in October 2002, and by June of 2005 the first product started rolling off the production lines. The four years of the project were a thoroughly enjoyable intellectual challenge," Larnie continued, "especially dealing with all the different companies involved— the



process engineers, the construction engineers, the surveyors and so on, all of whom were highly skilled professionals, from whom I learned a great deal.. And by using this project as my model, I was able to gain my Chartered Engineer status from the Institution of Engineers of Ireland."

Larnie jokes that a project manager should always know when the right moment has come to leave; but with this particular project he stayed on, becoming factory manager and using his vast knowledge of the construction of the plant to help him in his present role.

He has two homes in the Kingdom — one in Al Kharj and another in Riyadh, commuting between the two towns twice a week. What free time he has is often taken up catching up with the news over the internet and eMailing family and friends. But at weekends he can indulge in his pride and joy — a BMW R1200GS motorbike (he has a similar one back home in Dublin) which he rides with a group of friends most Friday mornings

for a round trip of about 250kms.

"It's so much nicer when the cooler weather arrives since the bike gear can be extremely hot to wear. But you know what we always say: 'It's better to sweat than to bleed'", adding as an aside that he despairs of the irresponsible riders in tee-shirts who take such enormous risks.

Other passions are reading — especially travel and history — and travelling. His latest travels took him to India with his wife and one of his daughters and he has obviously a very soft spot for the southern Indian state of Kerala.

Does Larnie have any plans for the future, Tawasol wondered? "Almarai is enjoying a meteoric rate of growth which looks set to continue. Who knows if there will be a CPP3, or new factories in Jeddah or the Emirates? I'm certainly not polishing up my CV at the moment!"