

Cultural Celebration Award Entrant:

Thomas Civil and Environmental Consultants

Multi-cultural Environment

Thomas Civil & Environmental Consultants Ltd (TCEC) is a multidisciplinary consultancy providing civil and environmental engineering, ecological and environmental services, property services and GIS services for infrastructure management and projects.

TCEC started in 2000 in Waitakere, West Auckland, and their clients include local and regional government, developers, industry and private clients. The company mission is "To contribute to our community, region and internationally through projects that enhance the built and natural environment, considering social responsibility and economic benefit."

Over the years as the business has developed, TCEC has recognised that providing a multi-cultural team of experts for their clients has helped to boost industry competitiveness and provided a more flexible and helpful range of services. The company currently has nearly 40 staff from 11 different countries who speak a range of languages such as French, Swahili, Mandarin, Cantonese, Philipino, Hakka, Malay, Hindi, Urdu, Telugu, Russian and Afrikaans.

Many of the current landowners and developers in New Zealand that TCEC work with are born overseas, or reside overseas and run businesses here. Responding to a client's cultural needs is imperative to TCEC's business success, and it couldn't be done without key members of staff.

Danielle Hancock gives the example of Senior Engineer Jackson Zhou whose Mandarin language skills and knowledge of Chinese culture have been a real advantage to the organisation.

"Jackson's skill as an engineer and knowledge of Mandarin has been an asset when dealing with Chinese clients on various property and engineering jobs. He has also acted as interpreter on several company projects. Jackson has also provided all the translation for our new Mandarin webpage, is our lead for all Mandarin speaking clients and has generated a blog on www.skykiwi.com for the company that is bringing us many clients.

"Jackson has now been recognised as a senior engineer and we hope he will move into leadership within the company."

TCEC's Property Consultancy team, headed by Edward Leong, works closely with landowners on behalf of Auckland Council Property Ltd undertaking property purchases through the Public Works Act. The team often deal with Asian landowners and due to the multicultural nature of the team, they are able to provide a reassuring face to the landowners. TCEC also offers a dedicated Mandarin webpage, marketing Mandarin and Cantonese speaking staff if required by the client.

It is not only knowledge of Asian languages and cultures which give TCEC a competitive edge. TCEC receives enquiries from new clients every day, each with a unique set of needs. Administrators are able to establish language requirements and forward the enquiry to the member of staff who has the appropriate skills to help.

Lidiya Filippova, for example, is often called upon to advise Russian speaking clients.

"Despite my Auckland University Master's degree, I struggled to find any job because I didn't have any local work experience," recalls Lidiya.

"What helped the most was volunteering for Project Twin Streams, where I was noticed by a manager there and my CV was forwarded to Richard Thomas, Director of TCEC ...I fell in love with my engineering role from the first day. Not only did it help my family to survive and thrive, but I also met lots of interesting people, and I have a continuous opportunity for further development."

There are times when a new employee may need additional training or support to enable them to succeed. For example, a staff member whose first language is not English, may struggle when dealing with technical and legal terms. To address these development needs, any new staff to the company are embedded into a peer review process and a buddy support system. This allows TCEC to bring on board the right people for the job, whilst supporting staff as they adjust to working in the company and in New Zealand.

Richard Thomas, Director of TCEC understands how to get the best out of his team.

"A happy and prosperous staff help build a happy and prosperous company," says Richard.

To this end, staff attend monthly company-wide lunches, where everyone brings along a plate to share. This is an opportunity for staff to share their culture with others, in order to foster better working relationships and a more collaborative and supportive work place.

TCEC recognise that New Zealand has a changing cultural landscape. There are many people from different cultures living and doing business in New Zealand and the only way to provide a comprehensive service to them is by having a multicultural team of experts.