

# ARKATI

THE VASSALLO GROUP PUBLICATION 2022



**UNITY IN  
DIVERSITY**



# Believe ACHIEVE

HILA believes in the concept of extended family to achieve our mission of empowering persons through choice and developing individual abilities towards an inclusive and fulfilling life.



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## EDITORIAL

Undoubtedly, 2022 was a special year for the Group as it marked the end of one era and the beginning of a new one as far as its leadership is concerned.

The year 2022 was also marked by the shift of the Covid-19 pandemic to an epidemic as the world started returning to normality after two years of turmoil created by the virus.

Unfortunately, the return to normality was met with the dawn of some ugly realities across the globe as a war broke out in Europe between Russia and Ukraine, cost of living soared and climate change became a stark reality.

Against this background our Group continued doing what it knows best – steadily moving on with an open mind to the emerging realities.

During this year, Vassallo Group brought two major projects to near completion – the Vassallo Business Park in Burmarrad and Campus Hub at the University of Malta, covering a footprint of 107,000 square meters between them. We look forward to seeing the works completed in 2023.

This year also saw the birth of another major project, the Mediterranean College of Sport, which when completed in 2024 will boast a state-of-art sport and education complex where future student athletes will be provided with quality education and training. We augur that this college will allow them to follow a dual career in life where they will not have to sacrifice sport at the expense of academia or vice versa.

After a two-year lull brought on by the pandemic, the Group went into overdrive in 2022 and earlier this month opened a new HILA home – Santa Rosa – in Mosta, while in 2023 a new mixed development project, Aqua, will start taking shape.

In this edition, our new chairperson, as well as the CEOs and other shareholders, speak about the direction the Group will be taking in the years to come, as well as giving more details about the projects embarked on by the different companies. The interviews with the CEOs will also shed light on each company's plans for the future.

In this *Arkati*, we also hear from a number of key persons within the Group who work in specific areas, such as corporate services, logistics, catering, finance, health and safety and security among others.

For the first time in this edition, we also meet employees, supervisors and managers who in the last edition of *The Shine Awards* won an award in their respective categories.

While hoping that you enjoy reading *Arkati*, we would like to wish you all a very Happy Christmas and a serene New Year.

We also want to take this occasion to wish Group founder Nazzareno Vassallo a Happy Birthday as he turns 71 on Boxing Day.

### The Editorial Team

## ON THE COVER

Taken at Campus Hub, this photo celebrates Vassallo Group's philosophy of inclusivity and diversity. *Photo: Daniel Cilia.*

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# Building our future

NATALIE BRIFFA FARRUGIA

CHAIRPERSON, VASSALLO GROUP





**N**atalie Briffa Farrugia may have taken on the role immortalised in the company's annals by her father, Nazzareno, but she has placed his big shoes high up on a shelf. As the Vassallo Group's chairperson for the modern era, she is much more comfortable wearing her own.

"It is impossible to replicate what my dad did and I have no intention of trying. He was the founder. The be-all and end-all. My aim will be to ensure our people live up to the roles they have been empowered to perform."

Her quietly assured presence contrasts sharply with the hustle and bustle of the University of Malta's vibrant Campus Hub – where this interview took place – but the premises, built and managed by the Group, are a glowing reflection of the present and future.

"We are a very well structured organisation, so I'm concentrating on being forward-looking and ensuring each company's risk appetite is aligned with the Group as a whole. This is more and more important the bigger we grow. The company's success no longer boils down to one person but on everyone fulfilling their potential."

She expresses surprise "at how much I'm enjoying my new position" given that practically her entire working life to date was dedicated to the care sector, though an element of this may be down to the diversity she experiences through person to person contact. Marking out another difference from her father, she says with a sense of steely determination that she "is not an email person" but one who has always "loved the human element".

While that approach is clearly reaping dividends, Natalie is also a realist who freely acknowledges the "hard times" caused by the Covid pandemic and war in Ukraine.

"There have obviously been repercussions. On the property side, no one imagined that certain office tenants would suddenly downscale – taking one floor instead of four, for example – while staff turnover and burnout has been another issue especially in the hospitality, construction and care sectors where our colleagues were stretched to the absolute limit."

However, her make-up ensures she will not shy away from difficulties. Quite the contrary, she is quick to point out the great feats performed during this period – such as setting up a care facility within just three days and moving office life online – and insists that in a climate of increased costs people need to continue challenging themselves to rethink how they operate.

"Instead of raising prices for example, we should look at how to better monitor our consumption and wastage. I know this is possible because we have practised such a philosophy in the care sector for years."

"The company's success no longer boils down to one person but on everyone fulfilling their potential"

Natalie is also swift to recognise that opportunities present themselves in times of flux. "I see scope for exponential growth in all areas of the Group. The Campus Hub – a novel concept that brings together the academic and entrepreneurial worlds – is a prime example when you see all the potential here and it is now up to my siblings and I to develop these new concepts."

She is mindful, however, that whatever direction the company takes, it must embrace a caring approach to the environment and refers to a famous line often quoted by her father – 'ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country' – to make her point.

"It shouldn't be about maximum gain or the businessman 'winning' but about how we can contribute to the environment and the country at large. I don't believe I'm being utopian when I say that I see this as the perfect scenario for businesses to flourish because I'm a strong believer in the win-win scenario. It's up to us to change things for the better."

The Group will seek to continue that mission as a tightly-knit family concern, with each of the siblings – who have all been shareholders since the age of 18 – heavily involved. She is diplomatic when asked about the pros and cons of working with her brothers and sister, but at the same time candid: "I told a

family business conference that groups like ours need to have a 'family room' where certain issues are thrashed out. Emotions can get in the way obviously, but that can also be an advantage."

A competitive streak is a quality all of them share, and Natalie herself intends to continue

indulging in physical challenges for good causes by raising money for a set of young twins with Zellweger Syndrome, a serious but rare genetic disorder.

Last year her exploits involved running from Marsaxlokk to Ghajn Tuffieħa, swimming to Gozo and then pounding concrete again to finish at Ta' Pinu Sanctuary. The next effort will have the same destination but this time setting off from Valletta. "I always need a target and once that's established I work towards achieving it."

One achievement she did notch up last summer was avoiding talking to her dad about work during their family holiday. "I believe in working hard but place a lot of emphasis on work-life balance, so not having this conversation – even more challenging this year because he hasn't been around – was special. Away from the office I see myself as just a daughter, a mother to my daughters and my husband's wife."

As if to prove the point, at the end of the interview she dashed off for an important appointment... to pick up her children from swimming lessons. ■





# The power of five

PIO VASSALLO  
CEO, VASSALLO GROUP





Cycling and running get Pio fired up for the day ahead, psyching him for the endless demands and decisions that await him the minute he steps into his office.

Although half the day has passed, Pio still seems to be riding on the feel-good endorphins as he settles behind his desk and discusses the milestones of 2022 and the aspirations for the next five years with a fiery energy.

"I admit I need intense training in my life for my health and my sanity," he says, sporting a tan acquired from a recent sailing trip that served as a bonding holiday with his father, Nazzareno, who last year stepped down as Vassallo Group chairman after more than half a century at the helm.

This year, he says, has given birth to a new era for the Vassallo empire and Pio says the focus is now on strengthening the foundations through the Power of Five; the five children who are shareholders and are now entrusted with navigating the future.

"Thankfully, my siblings are my best friends. We squabble and argue, but in the end we share the same values. Before, I used to work directly with my father, now it's about sharing the weight. Thankfully, we have a team around us that understands this dynamic."

This power of five is a thread throughout Pio's narrative for the Group's vision, as together they build on the lessons learnt over the past years to forge the future.

"Working together was the first challenge to strengthen the core of what our father worked so hard to build," he adds.

As CEO, Pio has a helicopter view of the Group's overall operations and the decisions of the past years to tap different markets has helped soften the blows dealt by the pandemic, the war on Ukraine and other international forces that drove prices up.

On a positive front, 2022 has seen the tourism sector witness a 90 per cent recovery to pre-Covid figures, leading to a successful opening of its latest hotel, Land's End, located along Sliema's Tigné Seafront.

The Group also delivered the first milestone of the Campus Hub, which saw 400, mostly international, students move in and the creation of an exciting space

that has sparked a new vibrant community on the university grounds.

"It's hard to explain the sensation of just sitting there watching how the plans have come to life and how people use the space we've designed... Freshers Week was the highlight for us; you can really feel the project."

By the end of this year the Campus Hub will be fully operational, followed by the new Medical School once discussions with the University of Malta are wrapped up.

This year has also seen the Mediterranean College of Sport start to rise from the ground on the site of the St Aloysius College sports complex in Birkirkara. Pio smiles with pride as he delves into how the weeks ahead will see the completion and refurbishment of the new indoor pavilion.

The school, which will take in students from Form 1 to Form VI, will be officially opened within two years, and works are under way to strengthen connections with international universities to cultivate knowledge sharing and exchanges.

"The Group is working to establish the College as a microcosm for sports science, research and development; it'll provide a lot of value added for the island, which has plenty to offer in terms of sports tourism and education."

The Group is viewing the College as a springboard to expand its educational arm, and it is working to cast its net in other areas it views as

growth opportunities, such as alternative energy and offshore electricity.

"There is plenty to explore in the sphere of offshore electricity and as a Group we have always been agile and forward-looking by striking partnerships with others... we're always on the lookout to explore new opportunities."

Looking ahead, Pio believes one of the challenges they face is human capital, since hundreds of expats left the island in droves when the pandemic hit and recruiting comes with its own struggles of finding the right people and then obtaining visas.

But no challenge is insurmountable with a strong team.

"Unity is the message we want to continue reinforcing within the Group... we are much more stronger together." ■

Unity is the message  
we want to continue  
reinforcing within  
the group





# Delivering what we promised

CHRIS VASSALLO  
CEO, CAMPUS HUB

**V**assallo Group means two words to Christian Vassallo: family business. “I truly believe that ‘family’ is the crux of our Group. We are proud to be able to work as a family with all the ups and downs that come with it,” he says.

According to Christian, another thing that gives the Group an edge is the strong sense of corporate responsibility it has at its core.

“It’s something we take very seriously. Whatever we do, we feel the responsibility that we are doing things in the interest of society, while reaching our goals at the same time. All of Vassallo Group’s almost 2,000 employees are pulling the same rope and working towards a common goal, and as a director, I strive to work towards that every day.”

Over the past few years, Christian’s main focus has been the University of Malta’s Campus Hub – the Group’s biggest investment to date.

“What does it mean when we say it is the largest single investment? It is the largest construction project in one

location so far, and the largest single financial facility we’ve ever taken out,” he explains.

Here he takes the time to stress that the Group had huge support and great positive feedback from the banks, which was invaluable. The project would not have been possible without them, he emphasises.

Furthermore, he adds, without the synergies of all the companies that make up Vassallo Group, this project would not have been completed on time, or within budget, notwithstanding Covid and rising costs.

“From A to Z, it was a Vassallo Group project, during a very difficult and challenging time.”

The University wanted to attract more international students but needed accommodation on site to achieve this aim. The Campus Hub can take between 800 to 1,000 students to live on campus.

With Campus Hub, the intent was to allow the University of Malta to become more of an international university. Having accommodation on campus creates a lot of opportunities for the university to come alive after hours. Residents have access to a gym, laundry, and a swimming pool, as well as retail and food markets.

The actual site of Campus Hub is 12,500 sqm and the decision was made to only develop 10,000 of it to allow for 2,000 sqm of open space in a green area.

This big open space, the *Pjazza*, has been made available to all university students, as have the retail outlets, to allow a more complete student life.

“We went for an international system used in Malta for the first time on such a large scale known as ‘bubble deck’, which means we used bubbles in the structure to reduce the need for concrete by 40 per cent and decreased the CO<sup>2</sup> footprint. By using it, we saved over 1.5 million gallons of CO<sup>2</sup>. Even though it was more expensive, we opted for it, as it was important to us.”

They also decided to go for prefabricated bathrooms: everything was produced in one place in Milan, Italy, and it all came down to Malta together. This not only saved a large amount of money in transportation, but it also prevented a negative impact on the environment. All the stairs on site were also prefabricated off site.

“Additionally, we used insulation on all the facades to reduce heat loss. We also invested heavily in huge water tanks – even bigger than what was requested by the Planning Authority – to capture all the water coming on site, including air conditioning water. It will then go to reservoirs to water plants and so on. Of course, we also invested in trees and vegetation as well,” he says.


In Christian’s opinion, environmental practices are essential for the industry: “They are also value for money... and this is the standard we will be using going forward. Our intention is to have the first carbon neutral building on the island as a Group.”

Does he see the Campus Hub as the ‘jewel in the crown’ of the Vassallo Group?

“This is a tough question,” he laughs, “As a group, the jewel in the crown is undoubtedly HILA, which offers a wide range of services to persons with disabilities, and which has a huge positive impact on people’s lives. I would say Campus Hub has been a very important step in the Group’s growth. It showed us what we can accomplish if we put all our energy into one project. Now, we are much more confident we can handle a project just as big in the future. ■






A man with a short haircut, wearing a dark grey suit, a light blue shirt, and a striped tie, stands in front of a large, ornate green door. He is leaning against a light-colored stone wall. The door has multiple panels and is set in a stone wall. The man is looking towards the camera with a slight smile.

Our  
intention is  
to have the  
first carbon  
neutral  
building on  
the island



A man with a beard and short hair, wearing a blue suit jacket over a light blue and white striped shirt, is smiling and looking towards the camera. He is standing in front of a modern building with large windows and a glass facade. The lighting is bright, suggesting it's daytime.

# Pushing architectural boundaries

RUBEN VASSALLO

CEO, VASSALLO GROUP REALTY





**S**itting back and reflecting on the past year, Ruben Vassallo admits that while the pandemic had come and gone, its repercussions were here to stay, especially in the real estate sector, which was turned on its head in just two years.

While this may sound alarming, he insists that not all consequences are devastating.

“We are working to try to turn our challenges into opportunities. Among these challenges is the shift in office culture. During the previous years, we had already experienced a change in tenants’ requests: rather than premises with singular offices, the office culture shifted to open plans. Some years later, their focus shifted to recreation and chillout spots,” he says.

“Following the pandemic, with several employees now working from home, workplaces have mostly become a place to socialise and hold meetings. Ultimately, the demand for office space remained – we just need to rethink the way the space is organised.

Ruben adds that similarly, the priorities for those in search of a home have also shifted.

“People are nowadays looking for bigger home spaces, most especially those working from home. They are after places with a view or a comfortable layout as they know they have to spend more time inside.”

Keeping all these shifts in mind, Vassallo Group Realty is currently studying the actual demand for real estate, while making the best use of its strategically placed premises across the island.

Among others, is the way a major supermarket chain has started renting out a large warehousing area – measuring some 15,000 square metres – at the Vassallo Business Park, in Burmarrad, which it has turned into its main distribution centre.

Ruben takes the challenge of maximising return from the company’s real estate investment in his stride. However, he is quick to point out that this was always in line with the company’s ethos that the Group is not there to simply make money.

“We try our best to preserve the Maltese architectural legacy by restoring some of the country’s historical gems, keeping in mind the needs of the clients who will eventually reside in this space, or make use of the building.”

One recent example of this is Santa Rosa in Mosta, which is made up of two houses previously owned by two siblings and their families.

“These two typical townhouses, built in the 1960s, are reminiscent of our grandparents’ houses. We have tried to retain as many of the features as possible, including the entrance hall, the façade and craftsmanship that cannot be easily replicated.

“A building does not have to be 100 years old to be of value. Over the past years we have conserved 50-year-old buildings that were not scheduled, because we value the architectural process of all eras.”

Ruben delights in finding these treasures across the island and focusing on preserving the fine craftsmanship, as they did with Santa Rosa.

“One such feature is the indoor decoration (*lavur*) in the entrance hall, which we will be replicating and reinterpreting in exposed concrete style in the remaining of the building, creating a contrast between the old and the new features.”

The rooms will also be painted in various vibrant colours, reminiscent of the time when the two houses – now one – were originally built.

Despite having one main entrance, each floor will have its own exclusive common area and semi-independent living spaces for clients.

“The project is exciting because while pushing architectural boundaries to blend the old with the new, we are, most importantly, creating an environment – away from institution-like settings – where residents can live independently and feel as comfortable as if they were at home.” ■



We try our best to preserve the Maltese architectural legacy by restoring some of the country’s historical gems





# A passion project: alternative care for children

CHARLENE VELLA VASSALLO

**DIRECTOR, CAREMALTA**

**F**amily is everything for Charlene Vella Vassallo. As she welcomes baby number five, she can't help feeling grateful to have been blessed with such bountiful fortune. Having grown up as the youngest of a large and very close-knit family she appreciates what it feels like to be raised within a supporting and loving community.

"Growing up in a big family like ours you're never alone. You get used to having everyone's opinion about everything. You learn a lot about sharing, even choosing what to watch on television. I am the youngest so my option was always the last," she says with a little chuckle.

"I grew up in a community. I have very protective brothers and they are still protective to this day. We have a very good rapport."

And having had this kind of upbringing, Charlene understands all too well its importance and how detrimental it can be to a child's development and mental well-being when the structure of a loving, caring and supportive family are missing.

A lawyer by profession, specialising in human rights of the child, it is with particular poignancy that Charlene talks about her "passion project", establishing a new format of alternative care for children where they can grow in as close to a family environment as possible.

"This project is so close to my heart that it sometimes scares me. I'd love, from the little I have, to be able to change somebody else's situation for the better," she says.

Having established itself as a market leader in the care of the elderly, it felt only natural for CareMalta to extend its services within the social care sector to include children. The new alternative care project will further complement the Group's successful experience with HILA.



The latest available statistics show that in Malta around 469 children live in alternative care, of whom 206 live in community/residential homes and 263 are in foster care. Through ongoing discussions with the Minister for Social Justice and Solidarity, the Family and Children's Rights, the Group has identified the need for a new format of residential arrangement with a more personal focus on each child.

"No one can replace their family but through our new concept for alternative care we hope to give children that same family atmosphere. We hope they won't feel any different from other children, addressing the stigma that still lingers around children brought up in institutions or other residences," explains Charlene.

"The idea is to try to reflect a normal family scenario and give carers the ability to focus on each individual child better," she adds.

It will be the first time that the private sector will be entering this field but Charlene hopes this would mean that CareMalta's proven standard of care will benefit children too.

"We want to treat these children like any other family would. We want to organise extracurricular activities and even attend parents' day. We hope to develop each child to their full



# re Malta Group



We want to treat these children like any other family would...  
We hope to develop each child to their full potential

potential," she says, adding that future discussions with the government will help identify the biggest needs in this sector.

While this may be a new venture for the Group, it is certainly nothing new for the Vassallo family who prove that charity begins at home.

"My mother would regularly entertain children residing with the Ursuline Sisters at our own house, inviting them to play in our swimming pool. When my children attended the Ursuline

Sisters' school we would take some of the children out with us on family excursions."

"We want to take a holistic approach in the care of children and help them take the right step into adulthood. This is the Group's contribution to society," says Charlene. "Just as CareMalta has done in the field of care for the elderly, we hope to aim for the same high standards and stability in this new sector and hopefully touch a lot of other lives." ■





# Raising the bar in all areas

STEPHEN BORG  
FINANCE DIRECTOR, VASSALLO GROUP

**F**rom care to construction, and catering to education, for the past decades the Group has been a trendsetter in all sectors it ventured into. And despite the ongoing worldwide financial challenges, Stephen Borg believes the company will now similarly fill a gap in the sports sector with a secondary and tertiary education college.

The Mediterranean College of Sports in Birkirkara, which is expected to be ready by the beginning of 2024, will among others, host a heated swimming pool, sports science centre and five-a-side football pitch.

If all goes as planned, the college will welcome the first cohort of students for the 2024-2025 scholastic year. While the focus for the student-athletes will remain academia, they would be able to train at the same campus.

The project comes on the heels of a pandemic that saw the world coming to a halt. Stephen believes it was the diversity of the Group, built over the past decades, that allowed the business to keep up with its committed projects and launch new ones.

“Throughout 2020 and 2021 there were areas where we suffered, areas where we suffered less and still other areas where we did well. Ultimately, we managed to absorb most of the increased costs because the diversification of our portfolio

helped one area compensate for the other. Overall, our financial results for 2021 don’t bear a major difference from those of the previous year.”

What about 2022?

“I’d compare the effect of the pandemic to leaving one’s car in the garage for some time, and then having to try restart it. Post-Covid there is an element of rethinking and re-engineering, but we have managed to successfully ‘restart’.”

While some sectors’ operations, such as construction, returned to how they were pre-pandemic, some practices within other sectors, such as the wearing of masks and hand sanitisation within the care scenario will be retained for the foreseeable future. The retail sector has also seen some huge adjustments with some clients renting much smaller office spaces as employees are now working from home.

“However, all sectors have been impacted by a shortage of labour. Whether

they worked as a bartender, a cook, steel fixer or a quantity surveyor, a lot of foreign workers returned home during the pandemic as they were not earning an income and still had to pay rent.

“So, while training at Learning Works picked up after the pandemic, at the beginning of 2022 we also kicked off a process

The pandemic tested our business model’s resilience: we survived and came out ready for business





to recruit people from abroad. However, the process is taking longer than expected – in some cases we are still waiting for some work permits to be finalised.”

To make things even more complicated for the Group, the world is also experiencing a shortage of supplies and, consequently, the price of raw material continues increasing.

“The spike in prices started before the invasion of Ukraine. Around October 2021 we started noticing an increase in the price of flour and sugar and eventually prices increased across the board. Among the worst hit, the price of steel reinforcement increased to \$700 per tonne from \$200 per tonne by the beginning of this year.”

Stephen, who remembers the 2008 recession that followed a market crash, believes the current financial situation is unprecedented. Hopefully, the worst is over as the increase in prices seems to be slowing down.

“In some way or another, in 2023 we will have to manage the after-effect of all these challenges, whether

through inflation mechanisms or adjusted prices for our products and services.”

Is there a silver lining?

“A positive that we can extract from the pandemic is that we are now better able to understand the extent of our business model’s resilience: we survived and came out ready for business. We have also been afforded the opportunity to rethink aspects of our business model that did not perform as well as we had hoped.”

Considering the past three years were unpredictable, can one forecast the next five years?

“Notwithstanding all it went through, over the past three years the Group actually completed some of its major investments ever, including Campus Hub and the Vassallo Business Park. The first goal for the next five years will be to see those projects in full operation.

“But we won’t be resting on our laurels and we hope to continue developing in the education and sports sectors.” ■



# The long-term view has to have a very wide angle

TONIO DEPASQUALE  
NON-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



There isn't much that would "amaze" someone with the kind of experience as former Bank of Valletta CEO Tonio Depasquale, but the shareholders of Vassallo Group still manage it.

"Their eagerness to grow amazes me," he says with a proud fatherly smile. "It is interesting for me to see these five young people all extremely eager to grow further, to look for new opportunities, and I have to calm them down very often."

It is this eagerness that will steer the Group through current instability in world economic affairs and ensure it continues to prosper. After a pandemic and with the war in Ukraine still raging, Tonio reflects that Europe may never return to what it was like pre-2020, but it is still unclear how it will change.

"Are we going to split into separate economic zones? Nobody can answer this question. Instability could be worse if we are divided. We need to find other ways to create energy. The long-term view has to have a very wide angle."

He adds that while it is impossible to come up with solutions on a macro level, on a micro level "every business has to monitor

the situation and take short-term opportunities" without focusing on long-term scenarios.

On a more optimistic note, Tonio points out the Group is "solid enough financially to take on a number of challenges and to grow even further". And that future is heading in the direction of AI as a smart management solution within an ESG framework and as an investment opportunity.

"The prospects for the economy in Malta are looking good," he says, adding that Malta should take advantage of its small size to be more agile in overcoming challenges.

On a national level, he warns that the challenge of finding adequate human resources needs to be addressed before further growth in any sector.

"We keep on growing sectors without having enough employees and thus have to import. If we grow we should have an

indication where we want to be in three, five or even 10 years' time, both with regards to population and the economic sectors we intend to develop further.

"We can't just say let's get more people to satisfy a sector if infrastructure will suffer and the economy will be affected negatively to satisfy just one economic sector." ■

It is interesting for me to see these five young people all extremely eager to grow further



# Life is so much more than money

JOE SALIBA

CHAIRMAN, ARKATI FOUNDATION



Sometimes life has a cruel way of springing the most unexpected surprises that temporarily throw you off kilter. You try your best to overcome these challenges but you know you cannot succeed without an extra helping hand.

And that is exactly why Arkati Foundation exists. Established by the Vassallo family in 1991 on the initiative of Nazzareno Vassallo, the foundation was set up to support any Group employees who might suddenly find themselves in difficult circumstances that are beyond their control and means.

Over the past five years the Foundation has helped 83 individuals giving them a total of €80,000 worth of assistance in cash or kind. This year, the Foundation has already handed out €15,000 worth of support to 15 employees, members of the Foundation. However, for Arkati Foundation chairman Joe Saliba, he would rather say they have helped no one.

"I would like to boast that we have helped no one because that would mean everyone is doing fine. But reality is another story," says Joe, who has been at the helm of the Foundation for the past eight years.

Around 90 per cent of Vassallo Group employees are voluntary contributors to the Foundation donating a day of leave or €2.33 per payroll or €30 annually, which is then matched by another amount provided by the Group.

Over the years, the Foundation has helped staff who may have required additional leave to support a family member undergoing medical treatment abroad or some other crisis, donating items such as furniture, nappies and baby formula milk,

The employees should be proud of what the Foundation does as they are the main actors who generously contribute towards it

clothes and even sending assistance to families of Indian staff affected by floods in Kerala.

"I was very proud to be entrusted, together with other members of the board, with running the Foundation. It gives me a different kind of fulfilment from my day job as a consultant and I have learnt a lot. We are all fragile and no one is more special than others. We are all here to help and support each other because we all need one another. Life is so much more than money."

"However, as proud as I may be in filling the role of the chairman of the Foundation, it is the employees themselves who should be proud of what the Foundation does as they are the main actors who generously contribute towards it. The board members and I simply oversee the administration of funds and assistance. The *prosit* and thanks should go to the employees," insists Joe.

He added that next year he hopes to recommence the Arkati Foundation visits to Group locations and ramp up fundraising activities. ■



# Pulling the same rope

JONATHAN BUTTIGIEG  
CEO, VASSALLO BUILDERS







**V**assallo Builders CEO Jonathan Buttigieg believes every year is a challenge for different reasons. However, 2022 was ‘something special’.

“This year we resumed normal operations after coming out of the pandemic, only to be faced with rising costs and shortages of resources. Seeing how our team came together to overcome these difficulties, which enabled us to achieve our targets, is by far the greatest reward,” he says.

Reflecting on the construction company’s challenges and rewards of the past year, Jonathan says the successes of the company lay squarely on the passion, hard work and dedication of its employees – each and every one of them.

During the past year, a large part of Jonathan’s focus was preparing the company’s strategy for the next five years. This involved consultations with the senior management team, board members, shareholders, and external consultants. A framework is now in place with several key objectives fully aligned with everyone’s views and the strategy ready to be implemented.

2023 will see the completion of two of the largest single projects ever carried out by Vassallo Builders – the 45,000 square metre Vassallo Business Park and the 62,000 square metre Campus Hub.

At the same time, the company will be ramping up works at the Mediterranean College of Sports and starting new

projects, such as a mixed-use development in Bugibba called Aqua, which was formerly known as the International Hotel. Next year will also see further investment in the scaffolding, rebar, plant, joinery, steel, and prefabricated building sections.

Jonathan stresses that the most important reason for the construction company’s successes over the years can be attributed to its team.

“Our team is composed of a variety of people with different skills and abilities, all coming together to act as one.

Each member plays a role, just like every ingredient in a recipe. From managers who began their career as masons or technicians, to university graduates, local and from abroad. Together these motivated people continuously strive to perform and deliver projects within the time, budget and quality as required.”

Vassallo Builders has always been the vehicle which propelled the growth of Vassallo Group, be it the construction of residential and commercial developments, or care homes and hotels.

“This shall continue over the next five years and will also see the Group addressing issues such as decarbonisation and energy efficiency in operations. Furthermore, and in line with one of our mission statements, we shall continue offering every opportunity to our team, be it training to obtain their skill cards, or sponsorship programmes for higher education.”

Each member plays a role, just like every ingredient in a recipe





# Riding the storm

ALEX TRANTER  
CEO, CATERESSENCE, POWEREZI



This year kicked off in the most auspicious way for CaterEssence as it marked its post-pandemic “rebirth” with the opening of its third The Cake Box retail outlet at Campus Hub in January.

“This outlet is our first new operation and expansion after the pandemic,” says Alex Tranter, chief executive officer of CaterEssence.

“The Cake Box has had a very positive story. The growth in the local economy last year has had a positive effect on our retail food section. People are going out again and are buying again.”

CaterEssence was the Group’s “most injured party” during the

pandemic, as catering and hospitality were the hardest hit sectors. But with tourism now picking up business is showing a healthy revival, albeit stunted by the challenge of sourcing staff.

CaterEssence now services two hotels, down from the seven it used to service pre-pandemic, “as we build up and find our feet again”. It has also started catering for TEFL students after a two-year break.

Alex paid tribute to all the people who remained in the sector and stayed loyal to the company after the terrible Covid storm. “I am very grateful for their determination, dedication and loyalty.”

The war in Ukraine has led to an increase in the cost of raw materials and

difficulties in securing adequate supply of grain and other food.

“It doesn’t necessarily mean you increase prices overnight. We had to adjust all our pricing ranges to ensure we remain cost conscious and competitive.





We are operating in a very dynamic environment where the unexpected can happen overnight.



## Harnessing Green Power

Powerzi is looking at energy storage solutions after assessing the first full year of operation of the 1.3MW plant on the roofs of the Vassallo Business Park in Burmarrad.

It is also monitoring developments in offshore wind turbines and studying innovations in drinking water production.

“There is so much roof space in Malta which remains untapped,” Alex says, adding Malta should adopt a national policy to maximise its location and use any form of renewable source of energy.



Despite all this, we still registered growth, which shows we have managed to ride the storm. We did not sink.”

“We’re not back to full normality. We probably have to live with this situation for many years. We are operating in a very dynamic environment where the unexpected can happen overnight. It is all about being agile enough and having a team who is loyal and capable that can adjust and help the whole company move on.”

Alex concedes he is only “cautiously optimistic” about the future, as the current price hike on food is slowing growth prospects.

“We are always driven to grow but we are being very selective. There could be changes in our sector which could give rise to opportunities. We would only look at opportunities which are close to our core competencies and strengths.”

CaterEssence is planning to seek more high-volume food production opportunities for its central food production unit and to expand its retail food activity through the Cake Box brand. It will also adapt to increasing demand for healthy meals, vegan, lactose and gluten-free food. ■



# MCS is shaping up

CHARLO BONNICI

CEO, LEARNING WORKS, MEDITERRANEAN COLLEGE OF SPORT

It's been a year of juggling for Charlo Bonnici, between the steadily progressing preparations for the Mediterranean College of Sport (MCS) – due to open in 2024 – and Vassallo Group's educational arm, Learning Works. He is CEO of both entities.

The first phase of MCS – being developed in collaboration with St Aloysius College in Birkirkara – has just been completed, with the impressive new 200-seater pavilion already being used by the Jesuits' school for a variety of indoor pursuits and operated by MCS for external users after school hours.

A car park for 200 vehicles will also form part of the facility, while the next phase will focus on the new canteen/catering facility, PE rooms, dance studio and state-of-the-art fitness centre which are all due to open in the coming months.

Charlo explains that students of St Aloysius College and MCS will be making use of the new or refurbished facilities at different times of the day.

"We have issued calls for expressions of interest to run the various components making up the facility, which will include a swimming pool, as well as a childcare centre, and are encouraged by the level of interest."

Meanwhile, the MCS's new director of sport, George Micallef, is leading the process of recruiting coaches from Malta and abroad in a number of disciplines, including sports science which will feature prominently at MCS.

The college has also signed an agreement with the Malta Paralympic Committee to cater for paralympic athletes, as well as engaging six sports ambassadors to promote the initiatives and ethos being championed at MCS.

In a move bound to please the wider public, Charlo also says that the facilities, including a sports café, fitness centre and swimming pool will be made available to the wider sporting community in Malta.

However, MCS will have a very clear dual role philosophy: functioning as a centre of sporting excellence, as well as a reputable educational establishment.

"Both are equally important. Our students will need to show sporting potential to be selected but their academic record will also be taken into account. We want to ensure they are well prepared, both to further their sporting education at the UK universities with which we are developing partnerships, as well as for life after their sporting career comes to an end."

Education is, of course, an important aspect of Charlo's portfolio. Learning Works has increased its course offering this year, which now incorporates tourism management as well as acting classes given the growth of the local TV and film industry. A postgraduate course in Obesity and Eating Disorders also forms part of the healthy offering.

"The Group is always looking at niches where it can contribute to the community and there is naturally scope for synergy between Learning Works and the MCS," Charlo says. ■







Our students will need to show sporting potential to be selected but their academic record will also be taken into account





# Upholding the Group's social conscience

JAMES SCIRIHA  
CEO, CAREMALTA GROUP



**W**ith the elderly care sector becoming increasingly competitive and risking being turned solely into a money-making venture, CareMalta is focused on strengthening its social approach and continue providing a unique service to the community.

"We've always said CareMalta is the Group's social conscience and we plan on keeping it that way," James Sciriha says.

One way of doing this is by introducing the services of a social worker at homes for the elderly. The company will also continue harping on the importance of active ageing that involves the participation of bedridden residents. Among others, this is facilitated through the introduction of bedside activities that include the participation of children and animals.

And with the help of HILA, which provides specialised care in the disability and mental well-being sectors, CareMalta will continue to diversify its services, with future plans covering alternative care settings for children and end-of-life care. James even hopes CareMalta will eventually branch out and provide its services abroad.

James took over at the helm in February, following a worldwide pandemic that left the care sector's employees,

residents and their relatives reeling with emotional and psychological repercussions.

Despite this, the care sector grew at a rapid rate over the past couple of years, with several companies opening new homes for the elderly across the island. While competition is healthy, James fears the increase in residential homes could transform a sector that until recently prioritised the care of the elderly into one that is merely a business venture.

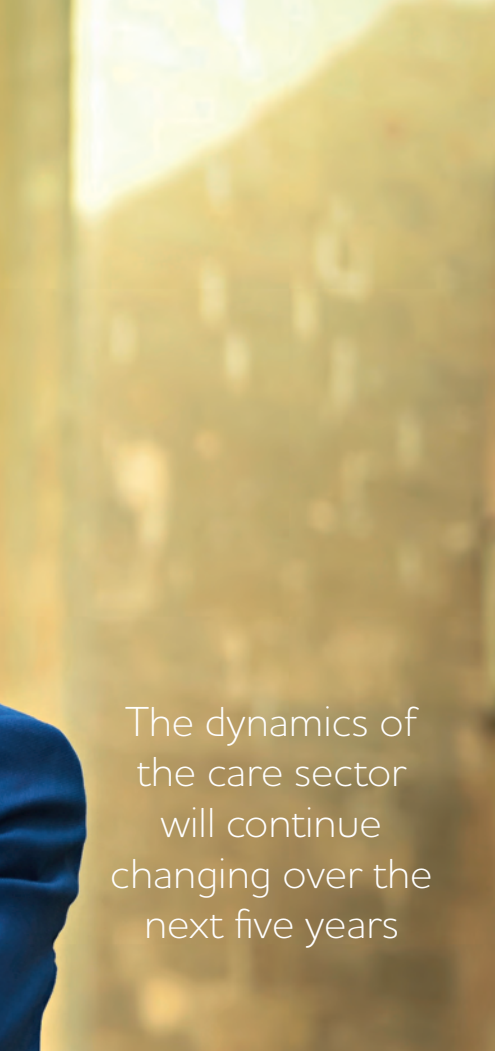
"For Vassallo Group, the care sector has always had minimal profit margins, and CareMalta managed to remain strong as it operates a good number of homes. I believe that focusing on strengthening the well-being of our residents, rather than being carried by the money-making currents, will help us retain our 'competitive' edge."

Where does he see the sector develop in the next five years?

"The dynamics of the care sector will continue changing over the next five years and more private businesses will probably open more care homes over the next five years," James notes.

"However, despite the increase in the number of homes by the private sector, it looks like people are becoming less willing to be admitted into private residential homes, and would rather stay in homes run by a private-public partnership." ■





The dynamics of the care sector will continue changing over the next five years







# ‘People are my fuel’

JANET SILVIO  
CEO, HILA HOMES





This year has been a whirlwind for Janet Silvio as she took on a new title and started to ween herself off handling the intense mental health operations of the new Casal Nuovo to refocus her energy on the strategy of HILA Homes.

“2022 was in acceleration mode as we emerged from the pandemic with renewed energy to try and achieve the time lost. It’s only now we’re starting to catch our breath,” she says.

This year also ushered in notable changes as CareMalta CEO Natalie Briffa Farrugia passed on the baton to James Scirha to become chairperson of Vassallo Group.

Reflecting on the past months, which were spent overseeing the smooth operations at Casal Nuovo – the residence in Paola, which forms part of a national strategy to deinstitutionalise mental health – Janet speaks of the “huge learning curve” she and her team experienced in understanding and adapting to residents’ needs.

“It was more challenging than we thought. It still is, but we’ve learnt a lot and it is so rewarding to witness the change in the way they have integrated, even within the community... It re-energises you to move forward.”

She now leaves the operations of the homes in the able hands of three female managers – Renata Zahra at Casal Nuovo, Nicolette Sant at Casa Apap Bologna, and Lara Grech at Dar Bjorn – which frees her up to focus on HILA’s vision

We are living in challenging times, so our vision needs to be stronger than ever

for the next years, even though she still pops round as “people are my fuel”.

Her attention is now on Santa Rosa in Mosta, which will offer residential and respite services for children and adolescents with disabilities and challenging behaviour. This was born from the decision to split Casa Apap Bologna to offer more specialised services for the diverse needs of youngsters and adults.

Santa Rosa will have a soft opening this month and become fully operational in 2023, once the agreement with government has been formalised.

Once these two homes are up and running, attention will be on the Group’s plans to convert the old Ku Club disco in Gozo into a multipurpose centre for the community’s needs, where attitudes to care related to disability and mental health still differ wildly from those in Malta.

“Gozo is still at a planning stage and although we had commissioned a study, we felt we needed more information to understand the specific needs of this community, so James, a researcher and myself went to speak to those who deal with the issues first hand,” Janet says.

In between juggling all this, tapping new niches of care and ensuring existing levels of service are maintained, Janet has also started an MSc in Mental Health Sciences.

“Children remain my soft spot, but mental health issues are silent and affect so many of us... We are living in challenging times, so our vision needs to be stronger than ever to reach out to those in need.” ■







## Reflections from the pandemic

The Covid pandemic inspired Prof. Victor Mallia Milanés to write the book *My Residence at Pine Forest Lodge*. It tells the story of an 80-year-old citizen whose visits to see his wife – who suffered from dementia – at an elderly care home were interrupted, leading to her deterioration. The book was launched at Casa Arkati in Mosta, one of the facilities managed by CareMalta Group, which also serves as a home for Prof. Mallia Milanés and his wife.



## Exploring parents' offices

Children are always curious to learn about what their parents do, so Vassallo Group's HR Department decided to satisfy their interest by organising a Bring Your Child To Work Day. A number of events were organised for the children who also got to see the where their parents went to earn a living.



## A growing cake

CaterEssence has expanded its chain of The Cake Box to the Campus Hub, which is located strategically between the University of Malta and Mater Dei Hospital. If you are going to visit someone at hospital, this is the perfect spot to buy something special from the Fresh Eats healthy section, order a cake as a treat for the nursing staff, or celebrate a friend's birthday on campus.

## Campus Hub welcomes first students

Campus Hub, Malta's first student village offering accommodation on campus, this year welcomed its first students. In a bid to offer a variety of services, Campus Hub teamed up with The Cake Box, Starbucks, Café Cuba, Amami, Burger King, Pizza Hut, Ottoman by Posh Turkish, Boost Juice as well as Welbee's Express to offer a variety of food choices; as well as the pharmacy Remedies, Papier stationery, and Intercomp for technology-related goods. Portugues will be offering laundry services, while gym facilities will be available through Warehouse fitness studio.



## Breaking down barriers

Casal Nuovo, the new residence in Paola, which forms part of a national strategy to deinstitutionalise mental health, celebrated its first anniversary. During the event, HILA Homes CEO Janet Silvio explained that the significance of this anniversary was to remove barriers built in the past by society and to abolish the stigma connected to mental health.





## Faces of ageing

The role of the elderly in society, its responsibility towards them, and the need for more care and involvement from their families were the subjects discussed during CareMalta's symposium, Faces of Ageing: Lived Experiences of the Older Person.

Stakeholders attended the symposium, as well as Active Ageing Minister Jo Etienne Abela, Elderly Shadow Minister Paula Mifsud Bonnici, together with Vassallo Group chairperson, Natalie Briffa Farrugia, Group CEO Pio Vassallo, and CareMalta CEO James Sciriha.



## Aspiration for great athletes

A delegation from Vassallo Group and the Mediterranean College of Sport this year visited the facilities of the renowned Aspire Academy in Doha. This academy is considered to be the best in the world for the development of young athletes due to its state-of-the-art facilities, advanced technology, as well as their professional staff.

The Mediterranean College of Sport is establishing contacts and partnerships with reputable institutions specialising in sport and education in various part of the world as it prepares to open its doors in 2024.

## Nazzareno Vassallo steps down

Renowned entrepreneur Nazzareno Vassallo, stepped down as chairman of Vassallo Group after more than half a century at the helm.

He made his announcement during last December's annual event known as the Chairman's Lunch, where he also said the Group's leadership will be in the hands of his five children.

Vassallo said he strongly believed in the collective power of his five children working together in taking Vassallo Group forward in the years to come.

## Vassallo Group century ride for unity

To mark the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace in April, Vassallo Group CEO Pio Vassallo and CareMalta's CEO James Sciriha cycled to all 12 care homes and facilities, managed by CareMalta, in one race as a symbol of unity. Group chairperson Natalie Briffa Farrugia also took part, covering part of the 100km distance along with two of the Group directors Charlo Bonnici and Neville Calleja.



## Dressing down in aid of breast cancer

Employees across Vassallo Group dressed in pink for Dress Down Day to raise money for Europa Donna Malta, which supports women with breast cancer. The support group is dedicated to helping breast cancer survivors reclaim a positive body image and a healthy lifestyle.







## CaterEssence and CareMalta support Ukraine families

CaterEssence and CareMalta collaborated with another subsidiary of the Group, Vassallo Builders, to provide Ukrainian families arriving in Malta with mattresses, bedsheets, pillows and blankets for their temporary accommodation in Bighi, Kalkara.

The families arrived in Malta from Poland after they fled Ukraine where the war has forced more than one million people to flee their homes.

CaterEssence CEO and CareMalta Director Alexander Tranter said the Group was proud to support humanitarian initiative.

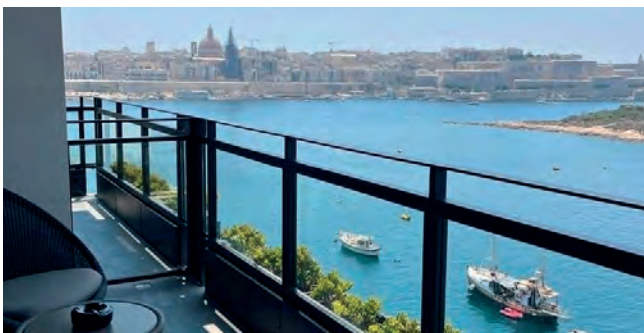


## Top appointments at CareMalta

James Sciriha has been appointed CEO of CareMalta, replacing Natalie Briffa Farrugia who took over the reins as Vassallo Group Chairperson.

James will be supported by Noel Borg, who is the new Chief Operating Officer after serving as the Senior Nursing Manager for several years.

Vassallo Group director and shareholder Charlene Vella Vassallo has been appointed director of the company with a focus on business development.



## Land's End boutique hotel opens its doors

The Land's End Boutique hotel, located on the Tigne seafront, officially opened last May.

The hotel, offering 75 rooms all with a private terrace, is the second joint venture between Vassallo Group and the Claret Group following the success of The George Urban Boutique Hotel.

Info about the hotel: <https://landsendmalta.com/>

## Thank you Robert Von Brockdorff

A lunch in honour of former CareMalta director Robert Von Brockdorff was held to thank him for his dedication and loyalty to the organisation for more than 30 years.



## Legacy publication for 75th anniversary

A special publication entitled *Legacy* was published to mark the Group's 75th anniversary.

Launched at the Casino Maltese in Valletta, the book focuses on an important aspect of the Group's ethos: giving a new lease of life to historical buildings through renovation and rehabilitation with a community purpose in mind.

The book also showcases a spectrum of projects that made a significant contribution to the economic and social development of Maltese society, some of which are urban and historic landmarks today.







## LGBTIQ+ & dementia: the lived experience

Villa Messina residents were treated to a caberet show by Australian entertainer Dolly Diamond who also took the opportunity to promote inclusivity within the home.

The Diamond show and a dialogue session at Casa Arkati by guest speaker Patrick Ettenes about the personal experiences of living with dementia as an LGBTIQ+ citizen were held during Malta Pride Week as a collaboration between CareMalta Group, the Malta Dementia Society, and the Allied Rainbow Communities.

## CareMalta residents attend Papal Mass

CareMalta residents were among the 20,000 people who attended the Mass by Pope Francis during his visit to Malta last April.

CareMalta residents had long been looking forward to the Pope's visit and, in line with its mission to deliver the best for residents, the CareMalta Group ensured their wishes were granted by making it possible for them to be part of this historical occasion.



## Need for more inclusive society

HILA Homes organised a walk in Valletta last May to tackle the stigma and raise awareness about disability issues.

Participants, who walked from Triton Fountain to St George's Square, included staff members and clients from Casal Nuovo in Paola and Casa Apap Bologna in Mosta, which are both managed by HILA, along with Dar Bjorn in Qormi.

Residents from CareMalta facilities Casa San Paolo and Casa Marija also took part.



## Ahead of the curve

One of the company's mottos is to get ahead of the curve and be proactive. In anticipation of the compulsory licensing of all employees in the construction industry, Vassallo Builders workers acquired the CISC cards. Employees involved in the biggest construction projects – Campus Hub and Vassallo Business Park – also received their health and safety cards.

## Our champions

The CareMalta Group and HILA organised a get-together for Special Olympics athletes residing at the homes who took part in The Special Olympics Invitational Games held in Malta.

Vassallo Group, together with HILA, were the gold sponsors of the first international Special Olympics event held in Europe since the pandemic.





## Topping Off Campus Hub

A topping off ceremony was held at the Group's Campus Hub last April to mark the completion of the residential phase of Campus Hub, involving the traditional smashing of a champagne bottle in the presence of University of Malta Rector Alfred Vella, Vassallo Group directors, as well as management and staff involved in the project.

Campus Hub, headed by Chris Vassallo, is the first purposely-built student accommodation on the island and one of the Group's largest single investments to date.



## Celebrating women's contribution

Women forming part of Vassallo Group were regaled with a flower and cupcake to mark International Women's Day. Chairperson Natalie Briffa Farrugia together with Group CEO Pio Vassallo expressed their gratitude towards women employees and said that during their upbringing the woman always had a crucial leading role in family and society.



## Topping off at Santa Rosa

HILA Homes reached another important milestone as along with Vassallo Builders and CareMalta it held a topping off ceremony at Santa Rosa, Mosta.

This new project at Santa Rosa will see HILA focus more on children and adolescents, offering an extension of what is already on offer at Casa Apap Bologna but with a more targeted focus.



## Realty supports book to raise money for Dar tal-Providenza

Vassallo Group Realty was one of the sponsors of the autobiography of Mosta actor and writer Joe Borg, who reminisced about his life and times in the theatre.

A Mosta resident for more than half a century, Mr Borg studied drama before getting into acting and becoming a household name in TV drama series.

Funds collected from the sales of the book are being donated to Dar tal-Providenza.

## Running for mental well-being

Vassallo Group Chairperson Natalie Briffa Farrugia and Learning Works CEO Charlo Bonnici took part in the sixth edition of the Eurosport Run for Mental Well-being together with managers from HILA and CareMalta.

HILA Homes was one of the main sponsors of the event which through sport aims to raise awareness about mental health.

Ms Briffa Farrugia placed first in the over-45 category.







## Academics from top UK university in Sport observe Maltese coaches in action

Maltese coaches in various disciplines following a Master's degree programme in international sports coaching had the opportunity to be observed by senior lecturers from one of the top universities in the UK for sport – Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU).

The MSc in International Sport Coaching, created and run by the University of Malta in conjunction with Learning Works, aims to allow students to explore a range of topics, including athlete learning, talent development processes, physical and psychological training programmes, performance analysis and social relationships.



## Seminary students visit Vassallo Business Park

Vassallo Group founder Nazzareno Vassallo treated around 60 students from The Archbishop's Seminary to a tour of the new Vassallo Business Park in Burmarrad.

The students were also given a tour of the PV panels on the roof, a €1 million investment which generates 1.3MW of renewable solar energy supplied by Powerezi, a Vassallo Group subsidiary. After the visit, the students got the unique opportunity to hear Mr Vassallo recount his experiences and business decisions.

# The Arkati Foundation Financial Statements 30 November 2021

## Income and Expenditure Account

Year ended 30 November 2021

	Note	2021 €	2020 €
<b>Income</b>			
Investment gains		14,739	14,739
Donations		59,926	59,926
<b>Gross income</b>		72,772	74,665
Fees and charges		(4,525)	(118)
Tax at source		(2,126)	(1,997)
<b>Excess of income over expenditure</b>		66,121	72,550

Allocated to:

<b>Accumulated funds</b>		33,061	36,275
<b>Distributable fund</b>	4	33,060	36,275
		66,121	72,550

## Statement of Affairs

30 November 2021

	Note	2021 €	2020 €
<b>ASSETS AND LIABILITIES</b>			
<b>Non-current assets</b>			
Financial assets	5	313,534	329,822
<b>Current assets</b>			
Loans receivable	9	165,000	100,000
Other receivables		7,115	6,294
Cash and cash equivalents	6	48,364	45,049
		220,479	151,343
<b>Total assets</b>		534,013	481,165
<b>Current liabilities</b>			
Accruals		2,188	-
Distributable income		66,256	66,392
<b>Net assets</b>		68,444	414,773

Represented by:-

Capital Fund	7	11,647	11,647
Distributable fund	4	66,256	66,392
Accumulated fund	8	387,666	336,734
		465,569	414,773

These financial statements were approved by the board members, authorised for issue on 11 May 2022 and signed on its behalf by:

Joe Saliba  
President

Pio Vassallo  
Member





# Artistic touch

The Zaren Vassallo Art Initiative, ZVART, continued to grow by bringing a touch of beauty to the Group's properties.

Set up as part of the Group's 75th anniversary celebrations, ZVART is intended to celebrate the work of local artists and bring a touch of joy and appreciation to the places they occupy.

The artists featured include Flavia Marmara, Jennings Falzon, Rosella Schembri, Stephanie Borg, and Antonio Mifsud.







# Giving back to the community is central to our ethos

NOEL BORG

CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, CAREMALTA GROUP

**You're a qualified nurse, but your role is that of CareMalta's Group Chief Operating Officer. What is the link between the two aspects?**

I'm a nurse by profession, although it's different to what I currently do. I studied bioethics, management and patient safety. I carry my knowledge base and passion for my profession wherever I go and employ them in all aspects and dimensions to my role.

**How would you describe your role?**

My role has two dimensions. On the one hand, there are the exciting day-to-day responsibilities, such as overseeing the nursing and care services, the different projects, as well as maintenance. The other side is more focused on strategy and where we would like to take the company in the next few years.

Despite it being a C-level role, the resident and client are always kept at the centre of everything I do, starting with the vision, through to the implementation and effective outcome.

**What do you love most about your job?**

That I belong at CareMalta. Both my professional and personal sides revolve around the company; I met my wife at an elderly care home and all my life's milestones are tied to the Group.

My role empowers me with the ability to promote dignity and quality of life, and this doesn't just refer to nursing. A proper meal prepared by the chef, or the receptionist directing people in the

proper way all contribute towards keeping the person at the centre of what we do.

**What do the challenges look like?**

I always tell my team that there wouldn't be a need for our role if there were no challenges. We then turn them into opportunities. Our work has implications on people, so we constantly strive to ensure we keep a continuum of optimising what we do and ensuring sustainability.

Of course, the reality is that we work with vulnerable people and that comes with a degree of exposure to risk. You cannot risk without challenging yourself and your capabilities.

**What will the future bring?**

We are working towards driving the company through a knowledge-based approach. Apart from investing heavily in training, we are working towards integrating research as part of who we are and making ourselves – and, by proxy, the vulnerable – tangibly visible.

We would like to promote evidence-based practice and get our people to publish and present papers. In fact, we have already collaborated with the University of Malta in publishing a book on contemporary issues in bioethics, as well as with one of our elderly residents in helping him publish *My Residence at Pine Forest Lodge*.

Giving back to the community is central to the ethos of Vassallo Group. ■



# Challenges make us stronger

JACKIE CORDINA

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, VASSALLO GROUP REALTY



## What is a typical day in the VG Realty Office?

I do not really have a typical day. I always plan my day and prepare a to-do list. I am a morning person, so I'm always in the office very early. The quiet time in the morning is often the best time to prepare for meetings or reply to emails. I spend the first half hour of the day with my team going through priorities. At least once a week I dedicate an afternoon to visiting our properties, together with the CEO and sales manager, as we believe our presence helps strengthen our relationship with our tenants.

## What are the main challenges facing VG Realty?

Changes in the market... especially those which were imposed on us by the pandemic. The pandemic hit the property market big time and we're experiencing that impact now, especially in the commercial sector as companies are shrinking and opting for smaller offices. Most of our tenants also confirmed that their employees still prefer working from home. The residential rental market has also dipped. We are now facing an oversupply of property – both residential and commercial – with increased competition.

Shortage of labour is another challenge. The Group is growing and at the same time we are facing pressure to find workmen.

However, I work with a great team and believe that together we are ready for the challenges ahead. With our extensive experience and reputation as a Group we are able to react and overcome the changes in the market conditions. Challenges make us stronger, give us more opportunities for growth and satisfaction.

## How is VG Realty looking ahead to the next five years?

During these past years I've seen Vassallo Group Realty grow and enlarge its portfolio. We developed and bought properties to rent ourselves or partnered with other entities. Today, Vassallo Group Realty has a strong asset base, including a mix of landmark properties such as Tagliaferro Business Centre in Sliema, The Landmark in Qormi, and the OneOneO residential project in Sliema.

We will continue to explore the market for new investments and more partnership opportunities. Vassallo Group has always believed in partnerships. The right partners bring new energy and ideas to the table.

We want to grow our business, increase our turnover and continue to offer the best service to our clients, but above all we want to maintain the good reputation Vassallo Group has developed over the past years.

## What is your biggest satisfaction?

Building trust, credibility and rapport with our tenants. ■



# Running a smooth operation

KEVIN DEBATTISTA

GENERAL MANAGER, CATERESSENCE



## What does a typical day look like for you?

I manage and supervise all the operational activities at CaterEssence: from food preparation to stores and maintenance, from F&B in the hotels we operate to The Cake Box outlets. One very important function I have is to ensure all the food we produce complies with the food safety standards, ensuring kitchens at CPU are running without interruption and deliveries are carried out smoothly and on time.

Moreover, I make sure that all our food offerings are kept up-to-date and current with the type of demands we get from the market.

## What do you enjoy most about your role?

The process of creating projects, implementing ideas and challenging myself and my team to reach new heights helps me overcome obstacles and tiredness as we jointly work to reach the goals set.

I am not an office person but the kitchens remain my favourite. I handle all departments including the stores, logistics and maintenance. I would like to build a stronger team around me that would enable me to strike a

better work-life balance, and give me more time to work on implementing my vision.

## Where do your biggest priorities lie?

I would like to focus more on our retail food sector – The Cake Box. I was never a pastry chef, but when I was asked to take over the brand, I poured my heart and soul into it. I would like to consolidate the pastry department and take it to another level. I would also like to see the opening of new outlets, in addition to the three existing ones.

It's fair to say, the more attention we give to our shops the better feedback we get, and in turn expect better business performance and happier customers. Our brand is still growing and it's giving us some very promising results. We see huge potential in the brand's further development.

## How do you unwind after a long day at work?

I cannot say I manage to switch off easily as my mind is continuously working, with ideas and concepts popping up in my head at night. What I do find relaxing is cooking at home for my family or when possible enjoying the sunsets by the sea after a long and hectic day at work. ■





# Driving shift in mentality

CARLO AQUILINA

CHIEF CORPORATE SERVICES OFFICER, VASSALLO GROUP



Carlo Aquilina certainly has his work cut out for him. Not only has he taken over a new role as Chief Corporate Services Officer within Vassallo Group; he is also retaining the role of Chief Information Officer responsible for all IT services within the company.

Reporting to Group CEO Pio Vassallo, his role is to consolidate the Group-wide support services and departments based on subject matter experts, best practices, and technology to serve internal customers and business partners.

He is ably backed by “two super individuals”: Daniel Mercieca, responsible for systems administration, infrastructure and IT security, and David Micallef who is responsible for infrastructure and user support.

Still, it’s quite the challenge!

“I do not see challenges *per se*, but many opportunities,” Carlo says with a smile.

“Research suggests that one cause of medium- to large-business shortcomings is the lack of internal standardisation, weak company procedures and processes and flaws in centralisation and standards. The aim of this new role is to grasp these opportunities before they become limitations.”

Working in international companies since the first day of his career has helped Carlo understand what consolidation and

standardisation mean, and why it is important to have certain processes and procedures in place.

“In my last job, I spent almost five years as part of corporate, travelling throughout Europe and the US, where I continued to establish my understanding of how a corporate works. I consider this as a personal strength that will hopefully guide me in succeeding in this exciting new role,” he says.

Although he is responsible for the Group’s digitalisation, Carlo is quick to stress that digitalisation is not only ‘his’ project but one which each and every employee needs to be part of.

According to Carlo, digitalisation is not simply pitting IT solutions against problems, but it entails a huge cultural shift in mentality. He believes digitalisation needs to be embraced and understood by the employees who will eventually use the set of digital tools provided to them.

“Vassallo Group is a family business, and several employees have been with the company for many years, so much so, that we all say everyone is ‘part of the family’.

“We cannot change the way people work abruptly while hiding behind the word ‘digitalisation’. We first need to understand business requirements, improve processes, design improvements, test and make sure whoever will be part of the new process is aligned, then implement as part of digitalisation.” ■

We cannot change the way people work abruptly, while hiding behind the word ‘digitalisation’





# Always on guard

MARTIN BONDIN

HEALTH, SAFETY & SECURITY MANAGER,  
VASSALLO GROUP

**W**hen a person walks up to one of the company's establishments or offices spread across the island, most often, the first person they meet at the door is a security guard who Martin Bondin hopes will evoke a sense of customer care and guidance.

"Our security staff are trained in customer care, first aid and firefighting. They are trained to remain calm and composed in the face of any situation. From my experience, I've come to understand that a person entrusted with the safety and security of their colleagues needs to think of the consequences of their actions and ensure their reaction is justified, because at the end of the day, they're answerable for their actions."

Continuous training is important as the Group does not exist in a vacuum, Martin notes.

"The Group exists within the context of a changing society. The country recently experienced a sudden increase in population, which, statistically, increases the possibility of crime. So, while the role of security in homes for the elderly hasn't changed much, so-called disturbances elsewhere are on the increase."

Security is a recent addition to Martin's portfolio. When the person tasked with managing the security unit for the company moved on, Martin – who spent 27 years in the army – was the natural choice.

We are as strong  
as our weakest link,  
so I try to keep  
everyone on  
their toes

Among others, he now also manages security within construction sites and establishments owned by the Group, where guards ensure access control. Security personnel also ensure safety within the establishments, such as making sure exit and entrance points are free from obstruction and fire safety equipment is in good operational order, test fire alarms and conduct fire safety drills.

In some cases, including shopping areas and parking lots, security personnel deal with beggars who might bother customers. They might also deal with former employees and customers who want to settle some grievance, and deter or report infringements to the police.

But today's security needs transcend the physical world: there are several hackers, fraudsters and spammers lurking in the dark side of the worldwide web.

When it comes to virtual safety and security, Martin's focus remains education and prevention, so he often conducts data protection training sessions and sends eye-catching reminders to the Group's employees to be wary of fraudulent material.

"Considering how large and varied the Group is, our security goes beyond protecting the data of individual employees – we also have lists of clients, suppliers and medical histories of our residents to protect. We are as strong as our weakest link, so I try to keep everyone on their toes." ■





# Finding solutions together

CAROL CASSAR

FINANCE DIRECTOR, VASSALLO BUILDERS

Following two years of rising prices, supply shortage, unpredictable demand and continuously fluctuating financial markets, Carol Cassar will be erring on the side of caution over the next five years.

“A century ago, the world went through a similar cycle. Despite being less developed than it is today, the world experienced an economic slowdown following a war and a pandemic. This time around we had a pandemic, followed by a war.

“We’re in for some dark times in the next few years, with the world experiencing a slowdown, or, possibly, a recession. This, coupled with the fact that for some time now we have been saying that the construction bubble is set to either gradually deflate, or suddenly burst, following massive development in the sector,” he adds.

Carol believes this possible slowdown in the industry might give the Group an opportunity to think in a different way and to further diversify business; a move that might provide new opportunities and give the Group an edge over its competitors.

“One can only hope that recovery is quicker than it was 100 years ago, as the world has developed since then, with the economy shifting completely towards new sectors.”

Carol, who started off with the Group as a credit controller 21 years ago, moved into his new role some four years ago before the pandemic struck.

Throughout the pandemic and afterwards, Vassallo Builders was mainly impacted when it came to purchasing raw

It’s at times like these where you feel that the company is your own offspring

materials, not just because of an increase in prices, but also due to a spike in the cost of transportation. Additionally, some projects grew during construction phase, with a resulting overrun of costs.

He admits that liquidity issues have, at times, kept him awake at night as he pondered how the company could absorb increased costs, pay suppliers on time and issue wages.

“It’s at times like these where you feel that the company is your own offspring. And one of the best things about the Group is that when you don’t see a way out you can turn on your colleagues and superiors to find a solution together.”

What about the company’s financial strategy for the next five years?

“In today’s circumstances, five years is too long to forecast, but we need to draw some predictions. From the finance side, the country’s construction sector is set to experience some bumps, following excessive development.

“But while remaining cautious, Vassallo Group is also looking forward to the return of big projects that it recently invested in, such as Campus Hub and Vassallo Business Park.” ■





LEE XUEREB

CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER, VASSALLO GROUP

# We promote equal opportunities for all

Lee Xuereb is a staple of the Vassallo Group, having joined close to 15 years ago.

“What gives me the most satisfaction in my role, which involves coordinating and leading all the different HR teams within the Group, is getting positive feedback from the employees about any issue we would have solved,” he says.

“Our main job is balancing the needs and wants of employees with trying to ensure the service given by them to the companies is what it needs to be. Most of the companies, which make up the Vassallo Group, are based on service, so good service is one of its most important principles.”

Inclusivity and diversity in the Group have become extremely important over the past years, as just over 50 per cent of the workforce is non-Maltese, and as more time passes, that percentage keeps growing.

“As the people running the companies, we need to ensure those

coming from different cultures understand what it means to work in a company in Malta, and more specifically to work with Vassallo Group,” Lee explains.

“Different countries and cultures hold different attitudes towards work. We need to align all of them to ensure we have

We believe equality is not limited to issues of race and religion, but also to other factors such as gender and sexuality.

happy employees who want to stay on and work in harmony with the company... and with each other.”

To this end, the Group has a number of policies and rules in place relating to equality and discrimination.

“We believe equality is not limited to issues of race and religion, but also to other factors such as gender and sexuality. We promote equal opportunities for all,” he adds.

“We also form part of the Equality Mark, which is a certification given by the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) to workplaces that make gender equality one of their values.”

Another factor that is particularly important for the Group is the well-being of its employees, with Lee saying that they try to have a balanced outlook in this regard, balancing productivity with various initiatives promoting aspects such as mental health and happiness.

“One thing we’ve learnt over the four years, and which we need to focus on going forward, especially in the aftermath of Covid, is how we can take nothing for granted. We need to find a new way to look at work so that we can find – and retain – the best talent, which will become our greatest asset.” ■



# SHINE AWARDS



**BEST MANAGER AWARD**

JOSEPH FARDELL



**BRAND AMBASSADOR AWARD**

HENRY JORDAN GALANG QUIMSON



**BEST EMPLOYEE AWARD**

ANGELA DIMECH



**BEST SUPERVISOR AWARD**

THOMAS GATT



**CUSTOMER FOCUS AWARD**

ELIZABETA PRODANOVIKJ



**CUSTOMER FOCUS AWARD**

RITA MAGRO



**BEST MANAGED PROJECT AWARD**

CASAL NUOVO



**TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT AWARD**

ANDREW ZAMMIT



**SERVICE QUALITY AWARD**

CLAIRE CAMILLERI



**SERVICE QUALITY AWARD**

RONALD SPITERI



**TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT AWARD**

CHRISTIANA CURMI BONANNO





**HEALTH & SAFETY AWARD**

MARTIN GALEA



**THE 3 RS ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**

CHRISTIAN MICALLEF



**DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION AWARD**

VLADAN STANOJEVIC



**EMPLOYEE WELL BEING AWARD**

JOANNA FARRUGIA





## VASSALLO BUILDERS

### 5 YEARS

Derome Aguis  
George Borg  
Lawrence Camilleri  
Charles Fenech  
Nazzareno Grech  
Abdale Jibril Buni  
Joseph Micallef  
Aleksandar Milicevic  
Davinder Singh  
Harpinder Singh  
Dennis Zammit  
Alexia Cachia  
Jessica Farrugia  
Jurian Refalo  
Ton Silvio  
Abdiaziz Abib Hassan  
Matthew Azzopardi  
Borisav Grujic  
Godwin Micallef  
Dajian Raaman

### 10 YEARS

Sarah Marie Portelli  
Edison Scicluna

### 15 YEARS

Jesmond Bugeja  
Anthony Joseph Galea  
Alexandar Vuckovic

### 20 YEARS

John Farrugia  
Adrian Grixti  
Robert Barbara  
John Farrugia

### 25 YEARS

Enrico Calleja

### 35 YEARS

Joseph Sammut  
Carmel Chircop

## VASSALLO GROUP

### 5 YEARS

Maria Christine Pillow

### 15 YEARS

Natalie Briffa Farrugia  
Elisa Camilleri

### 25 YEARS

Eusebio Muscat

### 40 YEARS

Silvana Borg

## HILA

### 5 YEARS

Angela Gili  
Akilesh Rajan

### 10 YEARS

Vladimir Sucurovic  
Doreen Micallef  
Renata Zahra

### 15 YEARS

Michelle Borg

### 20 YEARS

Rita Muscat

## CATERESSENCE

### 5 YEARS

John Henry  
Refalo Nikita  
Pace Nicholas  
Farrugia Philip  
Scerri Keith  
Fardell Joseph

Agius Raymond  
Montebello Mario

### 10 YEARS

Christian Abdilla  
Lisa Bugeja  
Emanuel Deguara

## VASSALLO GROUP REALTY

**5 YEARS** Karen Chircop

## CAREMALTA

### 5 YEARS

Joanne Rose Ciantar  
Maria Gauci  
Romy Randis Emit  
Joyce Mendoza  
Joly Manacup  
Linda Pucyah Acosta  
Iram Younas  
Arlene Quieta Mortales  
Gloryfe Coronado  
Newlyn Panes Parrera  
Patricia Cini  
Byron Mercieca  
Dorianne Stanicic  
Simone Margaret Caruana  
Leny Fuellas Agustin  
Chantal Catania  
Kayleigh Caruana  
Wendy Broqueza Caraan  
Alicia Seixas  
Luciano Sant  
Glende Anana Benaning  
Josna Jose  
Sodiq Adebayo Idris  
Manyi Ako Catherine  
Rita Frendo  
Gboyega Oladimeji Lawal  
Anuya Bartolo  
Fredirose Cacho Bulaclac  
Andro Emit Sedrome  
Norinne Angilee Suyat Lagasca  
Liezl Maranga Leonida  
Maclainne Mangilit Navarro  
Cristina Muscat  
Krystel Joy Pingol Abalos  
Sonu Baby  
Maritonee Sabado Nuque  
Jenny Lizl Gaabucayan Pasicaran  
Manju Mayakkattu Rajappan  
Claudine Son Montalban  
Anoop Jose  
Carolyn Carmona Dela Pena  
Ljiljana Cicmilovic  
Christine Ann Lumbao Miranda  
Elma Abriam  
Hammed Alabi Idris  
Taniya Thomas  
Maria Lourdes Landicho Maralit  
Lynn Hird  
Linda Patricia Harris  
Raymond Camilleri  
Joseph Grech  
Renchelin Mulcare  
Ljiljana Dordevic  
Stuart Caruana  
Josette Grech  
Charmaine Izuakor  
Ivan Briffa Farrugia  
Peter Borg  
Marclin Agius  
John Willis  
Maria Victoria Saliba  
Jasmina Micic  
Jamie Rodriguez Martinez  
Merciros Garcia Abuan  
Criselda Tanjuatco  
Shynimol Jacob  
Michelle Aboyme  
Victoria Daquinag De Guia  
Elizabeth Landicho Magpantay

Michelle Dinu  
Emmalin Guevarra Alalan  
Romina Apap  
Nedy Arro Psaila  
Maria Teresa Sarmiento Bautista  
Mariia Frankovska  
Pornpimon Suwannasilp  
Marla Soliva Rubio  
Rosselle Erosido Burnea  
Gina Lausa Abello  
Ljiljana Lekic  
Hyden Lindzey Soriano  
May Mantes Regala  
Mary Teresa (Marisa) Micallef  
Cheryl Arlene Nadela Tangayan  
Rita Sammut  
Mark Formosa  
Antonia Barbara  
Leah Pauline Carolino  
Blessy Baby  
Jacqueline Bajada  
Deepty Jose  
Tatiana Kolesova

### 10 YEARS

Matthias Borg  
Natasha Camenzuli  
Dorianne Scerri  
Helen Dordevic  
Tania Mangion  
Lara Grech  
Carl Caruana  
Vicky Grech  
Anto Manuel  
Philip Grima  
Pauline Gatt  
Audrey Vassallo  
Mariella Gauci  
Jinu James  
Helen Cortis  
Romina Spiteri  
Roseanne Triganza  
Carmen Portelli  
Rita Debono

### 15 YEARS

Marisa Caruana  
Kenneth Bezzina  
Lucienne Cassar  
Maria Fenech  
Lina Farrugia  
Catherine Caruana  
Graziella Bongailas  
Paul Agius

### 20 YEARS

John Farrugia  
Adrian Grixti  
Robert Barbara  
John Farrugia

### 25 YEARS

Mary Vella  
Carmelo K/A Charles Vella  
Carmen Galea  
Pauline Azzopardi  
Rita Micallef



## VASSALLO GROUP

**Jenise Darmanin** Financial Controller  
**Elisa Camilleri** Senior HR Executive  
**Donnalise Caruana** Junior Procurement Executive  
**Olga Soboleva** Digital Marketing Strategist  
**Martin Bondin** Data Protection Officer/Health And Safety  
 Manager/Security Manager  
**Carlo Aquilina** Chief Corporate Services Officer  
**Kirsty Falzon** Payroll Clerk

**Carmen Debattista** Payroll Clerk  
**Nicholas Agius** Administration Clerk  
**Silvio Fenech** Project Manager  
**Maximo Agustin Rocchia** Payroll Officer  
**Alina Shymko Rapa** Purchasing Clerk  
**Amy Borg** Marketing & Communications Executive  
**David Micallef** IT Officer

## VASSALLO BUILDERS

**Derome Agius** Civil Works Foreman  
**Chris Micallef** Works Manager  
**Bryan Deguara** Accounts Executive  
**Anderson David Yances Buelvas** Project Cost Estimator

**Nathan Carabott** Junior Quantity Surveyor  
**Nikola Gosev** Furniture Technical Planner  
**Jose Manuel de Agrela de Sousa** Civil Works Foreman  
**Julian Andres Osario Tejada** Clerk of Works

## CAREMALTA

**Alessia Casha** Assistant Facility Manager  
**Marion Abdilla** Assistant Facility Manager  
**Antoine Borg** Facility Manager  
**Edel Borg Mizzi** Facility Manager  
**Anthony Caruana** Facility Manager  
**Joanna Farrugia** HR Executive

**Christiana Curmi Bonanno** Assistant Facility Manager  
**Maria Theresa Tesaluna** Facility Administrative Assistant  
**Alicianne Scicluna** Allied Health Specialist  
**Claire Coldman** Facility Manager  
**Naomi Castillo** Facility Administrative Assistant  
**Fiona Bezzina** Facility Administrative Assistant

## CATERESSENCE

**Keith Agius** Credit Controller  
**Leidy Marcela Arandez Gonzalez** Supervisor  
**Nicole Aguis** Senior Packaging Designer  
**Mailene Francisco** Outlet Coordinator  
**Dina Tromp** Senior Dispatch Clerk  
**Maria-Alessia Abela Micallef** Senior HR Executive  
**Henry Jordan Galang Quimson** Product Development Chef  
**Tiffany Bonnici** Accounts Clerk  
**Daniel Gauci** Operations Assistant  
**Katerina Cihakova** Resturant Manager

**Hywel Falzon** Junior HR Executive  
**Iryna Peftibai** Operations Coordinator  
**Aparna Abraham** HR Trainee  
**Kylie Formosa** Sales Administrator  
**Valeria Bermeo** Dispatch Coordinator  
**Julia Cilia** Operations Executive - The Cake Box  
**Haroun Ferchichi** Cost Controller  
**Donna Cachia** Tournant II  
**Mark Borg** Catering Executive

## VASSALLO GROUP REALTY

**Carmen Formosa** Administration Executive  
**Angelo Micallef** Security Officer

**Joseph Calleja** Security Officer  
**Mark Joseph Azzopardi** Maintenance Operative

## LEARNING WORKS

**Mikele Vella** Student Support Officer  
**George Micallef** Director of Sports Developments & Recruitment  
**Krista Von Brockdorff** Student Recruitment Assistant

**Elaine Bonnici** Administration Manager  
**Helen Childs** Student Support Officer  
**Joe Balzan** Manager (Curriculum)

## CAMPUS HUB

**Federico Dellamano** Customer Experience Supervisor  
**Caroline Borg** Financial Controller  
**Jay Sascha Von Brockdorff** Customer Experience Officer  
**Gabriel Borg** Accounts Clerk

**Laura Marcela Torres Rojas** Accounts Clerk  
**Andreina Agreda** Sales & Reservations Agent  
**Dejan Andelkovic** Maintenance Operative



# SUCCESS THROUGH



## Mark Bone, CaterEssence Chef

There are various ingredients that make a successful sous chef: creativity, speed and excellent organisational abilities so that everything runs smoothly when pressure arises during busy periods.

Mark Bone ensures that all these are in constant supply as part of his role as sous chef at CaterEssence's centralised industrial kitchen (CPU) in Qormi.

His typical day starts off with going through all his emails, then proceeding to place all customer orders with the right department. He then goes around the premises to give a helping hand in the kitchen.

The role is a perfect marriage of the two things he loves best: cooking and managing the kitchen.

"I get the most satisfaction from ending the day without receiving any complaints," he says with a smile.

Of course, the role is not without its challenges, which can range from items that are impossible to obtain, from suppliers being out of stock, to sick staff, as this invariably slows down the kitchen's production.

However, Mark finds himself constantly driven by the desire to outdo himself and perform better every day.

And when he's away from the kitchen's hustle and bustle, how does he unwind?

"I spend most of my free time going out or staying at home with my family and friends... and fishing!"

## Federico Dellamano, Campus Hub Customer Experience Supervisor

Federico Dellamano started off his career with Vassallo Group as a security officer, working shifts across various premises owned by the Group. Shortly after, he was noticed by one of the shareholders, Christian Vassallo, during a shift at the Campus Hub construction site.

He was subsequently promoted to car park supervisor, with the promise that once the Campus Hub opened, he would take over the role of Customer Experience Supervisor, the position he holds today.

Federico's role involves taking care of the front desk and car park operations, while supervising and managing the staff working in both places; duties he carries out with energy and enthusiasm.

He especially enjoys the fact that no day is exactly like the other; some days he'd be taken up with managing the daily operations and with troubleshooting, while other days find him working on rosters, car park revenue, and planning events for students, among others.

Pressed with listing the challenges, Federico says one of the main ones is keeping everyone – both students and staff – happy and satisfied with the Campus Hub. This can be particularly demanding since different people have their own requirements, opinions and needs.

Another challenge is attempting to exceed customers' expectations and anticipating issues before they arise.

"But my favourite part about this job is that each day is different. I am not the type who likes routine, even though this may be simpler; I like it when the unexpected crops up, as I see it as an opportunity to prove myself."





# DIVERSITY

Vassallo Group prides itself in having a diverse workforce of different nationalities and abilities that merge together to make their ventures a success. ARKATI shines the light on four representatives.



## Matthew Azzopardi, Vassallo Builders Mason

Matthew Azzopardi's story of working with Vassallo Builders reads somewhat like fate. His father spent 11 years working with the company, while his two brothers also spent a stint working there. So it came as no surprise when Matthew decided to join the organisation six years ago.

As Matthew puts it: "The trade runs in my blood."

As a mason, Matthew moves between different construction sites, building structures, cutting, shaping and dressing materials, and lifting and carrying blocks and beams.

An early riser, his working day kicks off at 7am and wraps up by 4pm. Matthew particularly appreciates the nurturing environment and camaraderie among his colleagues, adding that he feels respected.

Exertion and strenuous lifting are part and parcel of the job, and Matthew makes up for this by spending his free time resting or going for gentle walks in the evening.

In fact, he just about stops short of describing his job as his hobby.

"I'd go mad if I didn't go to work. In fact, I rarely fail to turn up."

A skilled craftsman, Matthew's greatest talent is that of fashioning with his hands whatever his mind's eye perceives. He is particularly skilled at constructing arches.

"My greatest satisfaction is that of seeing it all come together."

## Asha Kirar, CareMalta Nurse

One of the many definitions that represent nursing is by Val Sainsbury, who said: "Nurses dispense comfort, compassion, and caring without even a prescription." And it perfectly aligns with what Asha Kirar stands for.

As a lead nurse at the Casa Arkati care home, Asha has many responsibilities. She not only cares for elderly residents and their medical needs, but is also in charge of other employees and ensuring the quality of care delivered is consistently at an optimum.

This guarantees that her days are always unpredictable, challenging and interesting.

She finds her biggest challenge to be the juxtaposition of being responsible for others, with simultaneously employing a mindset that is completely different from that of other professions.

"We are dealing with lives, and not just with files," Asha emphasises.

She leads her department in a way that promotes the constant improvement of the quality of care delivered, while empowering the team to keep growing and learning.

Asha enjoys the trust of her team, as well as that of the residents she lovingly cares for.

"Whenever I am told I am doing my job from my heart, I feel incredibly satisfied. It is a reward I receive every day and it provides the motivation I need to face any challenging situation that may arise." ■





# We do our best to produce the best

JOSEPH FARDELL

HEAD CHEF, PASTRY DIVISION CATERESSENCE

## What are your main daily tasks?

The day-to-day operations include taking customised orders, as well as production, dispatch, and packing, with the help of my two sous chefs and all our team behind us. I also manage all orders of raw materials, and work on how to negotiate better deals with suppliers, assisted by Kevin Debattista, our General Manager Operations. Furthermore, I take care of the weekly rosters for each employee. I try to understand the needs of my team, supporting them mentally, physically, and personally... all the while working on the pastry, of course!

## The CaterEssence mantra is 'food is nourishment for the body, mind and soul'. How do you incorporate this into your role?

We crave new nourishment in our lives, to satisfy our body, mind, and soul, and as a human being I feel that food, especially sweets, provide comfort to our emotions, taste buds and hunger. Food is more than just surviving; it brings people together and this benefits our physical health, social, mental, and emotional wellness. Sharing food has always been a big part of our history and it will continue to be... and that's what we do in our department. We help keep this tradition alive.

## What does the Best Manager Award mean to you?

It meant a lot to me, not only because I was given this award, but because I really appreciated that my team and all employees involved thought I am the 'best manager' for them.

## How essential is it for you to have an excellent team supporting you?

It is everything. Without them I can do nothing, I am not a leader. We are where and who we are because we are a fantastic team and have a great 'chemistry'. In difficult times, everyone makes that vital extra effort.

## Where do you see CaterEssence over the next five years?

I joined CaterEssence six years ago, and today I see a big leap in the standards of our desserts, catalogues, seasonal items, and other

things we produce, thanks to the people involved. In the next five years I see us getting even better than we are today, because every day we do our best to produce the best. And we will continue pushing to get better. ■







# Taking the motto iCare to another level

ANGELA DIMECH

SENIOR CARE ASSISTANT, CASA ARKATI

## How would you describe your day?

Every day, before I walk out of Casa Arkati at the end of my shift, I make sure all my clients are comfortable and happy.

I try to accommodate them and do my best to see to their needs. If, for example, they are reluctant to take a shower, I try to understand what's troubling them and we reach a compromise. Knowing that they are comfortable and happy, I can punch out with a smile on my face. That way I turn up for work with a smile, and leave the home for the elderly with a smile.

## Did you always want to be a carer?

For as long as I can remember, I've always wanted to be a nurse, however, I never had the opportunity to study. As the eldest of seven siblings, I spent a good part of my life caring for relatives before joining CareMalta 25 years ago.

A year after joining the Casa Arkati team as a carer, my manager, Charmaine Attard, encouraged me to sign up for some courses and training and I soon qualified as a senior carer. I haven't looked back since.

## You were presented with the Best Employee Award. What does this recognition mean to you?

I was only able to make it so far with the support of my management and colleagues.

"I still cannot believe I've been given this award. To be honest, I was shocked, in a good way – I never thought my work is appreciated so much. When I was told that I had won the award it felt like I had won the lottery.

## Are you planning on retiring now that you're 60?

As long as I am healthy I'm not planning on retiring any time soon. I really enjoy working with the elderly, especially those suffering from dementia, and I feel for their relatives. At the end of the day I feel accomplished because despite dementia being what it is, I would have helped in the best way I could.

And just the way I find comfort in my colleagues and management – including my manager Robert Grech, who always support me – I try to support clients and their carers with encouraging words. ■



# Freedom to fulfill ideas

THOMAS GATT

PLANT SECTION SUPERVISOR, VASSALLO BUILDERS

**You were presented with the Best Supervisor Award. What does this recognition mean to you?**

I was delighted, of course. It's a testament to the fact that the work is being done properly... and it's also thanks to my team. I have 16 people on my team, so if something succeeds, it is down to them. By myself, I am nothing.

**What does your typical day look like?**

As plant section supervisor, I deal with logistics. This essentially encapsulates the process of planning, executing and controlling procurement, transportation and resources. It also includes the maintenance and repairs of all vehicles, such as trucks, and heavy machinery such as cranes.

My day kicks off at 7am when I arrive at the office (some say I wake up in a bit of a mood but I quickly get into the groove of things). I proceed to map out the morning, ensuring that vehicles and resources are sent where they need to go at precisely the right time. Materials and equipment must arrive to the different sites on time and without any damage so that workers can make progress toward completion.

In fact, you will find me with my telephone glued to my ear, and my line constantly busy!

**What are your greatest challenges?**

Traffic and road works are the main challenge. They can throw everything off schedule. Sometimes, vehicles can break down and that's also a challenge. The trick is to try and be on top of things by anticipating certain issues and preparing for them.

**What do you enjoy most about the job?**

I love logistics, it's challenging but very rewarding. Whenever the phone rings, you never quite know whether you'll be faced by a big problem or a small one. The problem-solving aspect of my role appeals to me. I also enjoy forming part of a family-run business, and my manager George Azzopardi and my team are like family. We are given the freedom to fulfill our ideas.

**How do you unwind when you're not working?**

You'll most often find me watching my son train and play football. I also love watching football myself; I support Liverpool, although they're not doing too well at the moment! ■





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With a heritage spanning over seven decades, Vassallo Group is one of Malta's most well established and successful companies, with a staff complement of over 1,900 and investments in a large variety of key macro sectors mainly in:

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| **HOSPITALITY** | **BESPOKE FURNITURE** | **ENERGY** | **EDUCATION**



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