STRENGTH IN DEPTH
ENGINEERING EXCELLENCE –
25 YEARS AND COUNTING

UNIQUE Bulletin

ISSUE 2 2019

Unique Group
Strength in Depth

A TRUSTED PARTNER, SETTING A COURSE FOR SUCCESS

As we take strides forward, Unique Group has built a solid reputation for quality, innovation, reliability and customer service since 1993.

Having constantly evolved by diversifying our business lines and expanding into different geographies, we have immense pride in the strength of our performance, depth of our capabilities and range of our services.

The growth Unique Group has achieved over the years is testimony to the talent of our innovative, commercially-minded team who works with clients to develop customised solutions. We go above and beyond to ensure our customers are satisfied with the results.

Our technical expertise and engineering capability, along with our resilience and adaptability, guide us on our way forward.

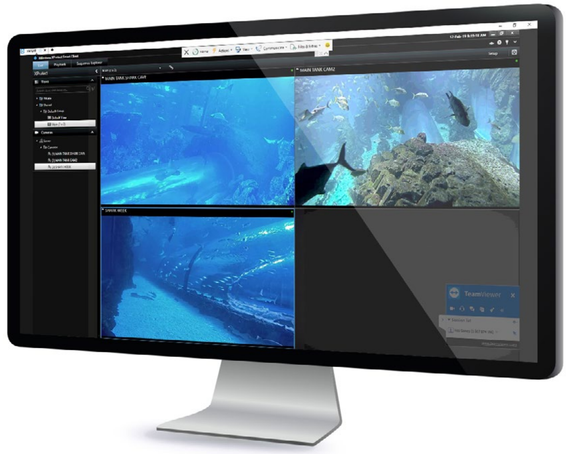
Together, we aim to continue being a trusted partner for our employees, suppliers and customers.

In this Unique Bulletin, we feature a selection of our projects, achievements, capabilities and success stories. I hope you enjoy reading them.

Harry Gandhi – CEO

Visit Unique Group at upcoming exhibitions:
Oil & Gas Asia, Malaysia, 18th – 20th June
Offshore Europe, UK, 3rd – 6th September

MONITORING MARINE LIFE A UNIQUE SOLUTION



In today's world, monitoring and analysis of our surroundings has become paramount.

Whether it is monitoring a beach shoreline or studying marine habitats, surveillance cameras have been used by government agencies, meteorological departments, research organisations and several other organisations for observing and analysing changes in the world around us – as well as for security purposes.

Over the years Unique Group has enhanced its capabilities to design, engineer and install cameras as well as live streaming software, customised to clients' requirements.

In the Middle East, we have installed a wide range of solutions from single-image cameras through to video recording and monitoring systems, all tailored to align with client specifications.

In our latest project, Unique Group has worked with an aquarium to install underwater cameras to help the team monitor the marine life.
A customised solution was developed keeping in mind the client requirements, without impacting the aesthetics of the aquarium.

We designed an assembly of three underwater cameras along with the accompanying live streaming software. Two cameras were mounted in the main aquarium and one in the underwater zoo at vantage points using corrosion resistant fixtures.

Overall, we delivered a tailored solution for complete underwater monitoring combined with a control system for data acquisition and live streaming. We also ensured the solution is corrosion resistant and provided 24/7 technical assistance to ensure smooth project implementation.

UNIQUE ADDS USV UNI-CAT TO ITS SERVICE OFFERINGS

Imagine being able to operate a boat using remote control to conduct an effective offshore survey.

Imagine no more – Unique Group has turned this concept into practical reality, with its own Unmanned Surface Vehicle (USV) Uni-Cat.

Emerging technology

The growing demand for the development of USVs with advanced navigation, guidance and control capabilities, can be directly linked to the worldwide interest in military, commercial and scientific studies associated with the ocean. Such USVs can accompany large survey vessels to help clients cover a larger surface in less time.

The survey industry has been changing tremendously in terms of new technology and, according to market studies, the USV market is expected to grow by 13.8% from 2018 to 2023, reaching a total market size of US$1 billion by 2023. In response to client requirements, we are constantly updating our technical capabilities to offer best-in-class solutions.

Define. Design. Deliver

Our Uni-Cat platform is a 16' Cataraft made of 25" diameter tubes designed for extraordinary performance, agility and stability. The tubes are made of heavy-duty Pennel Orca material. We chose this material for its unmatched durability as it is super abrasion, chemical and UV-resistant. For enhanced security during emergency situations, Uni-Cat has three air chambers inside each tube.

We have integrated the Unique USV with Multibeam system, ancillary sensors and communication links into a remote-controlled platform for quick and easy deployment. This can be used effectively for shallow water bathymetry survey and also at locations where access is difficult for conventional survey boats.

We can control the USV Uni-Cat manually or pre-programme it to follow routes that can be updated at any point through an easy PC-based GUI. The ground base station has been developed to simplify the operations of the vehicle; it receives various telemetric information from Uni-Cat like obtaining the status of the vehicle through the wireless communication in the mapping equipment. The entire operation of the vehicle can be handled by one operator using the designed base station.

Autonomous and adaptable

The working principle of the Uni-Cat is to realise autonomous navigation mapping according to the lines of survey and mapping set up in advance. This greatly improves the efficiency and accuracy of surveying. The system is also integrated with a GPS position and heading sensor, a motion reference unit and a sound velocity sensor to ensure safe and guided navigation.

The GPRS and mesh Wi-Fi networking allows for uninterrupted communications and real-time video and data transfer. We have also included radar screens and a real-time obstacle warning alarm along with a retractable sensor mount pole for seamless navigation.

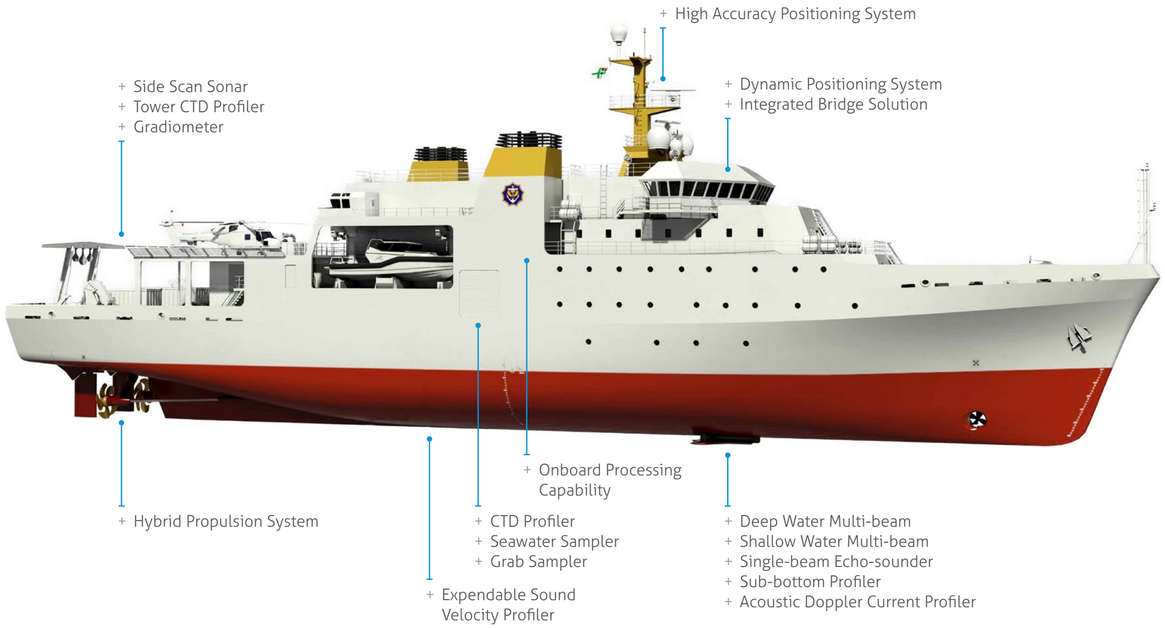
We can also launch and recover Uni-Cat by a lightweight trailer. It is a versatile solution as it has a reconfigurable payload pod which allows for mounting of sonar or other sensors as required by the client.

SOUTH AFRICAN TURNKEY PACKAGE, AMONG 2019 PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

We will be providing an integrated hydrographic survey vessel package to a major Government entity in South Africa.

Our turnkey package encompasses a major vessel and office set-up for Southern African Shipyards. We will be working as a technology partner for the shipyard and will provide multiple new build vessels – main vessel and support vessels with dynamic positioning systems and navigational equipment package.

The hydrographic office onshore will also be updated with new computer hardware and the latest processing software for chart production, data collection, processing, reporting and backup solutions. We will provide a full package, including technical support and relevant operational and maintenance training for the staff.



CASE STUDY

30" single position line stop operation using inflatable gas bag – a creative and robust solution.

A petrochemical plant in Saudi Arabia reached out to Unique Group to help them find a solution to resolve a damaged elbow which is connected to a sea water discharge header in a pump discharge line.

Previously, to seal the leak and quickly fix the issue, the client had performed leak sealing work in and around the elbow.

However, the elbow damage was severe this time and no further leak sealing was possible. Hence, the client wanted to remove the faulty elbow and install a new one in its place.

The challenge on this project was that the pipeline had an internal rubber lining and the idea of utilising conventional welded type fittings was negated, as the welding would damage this lining. Unique Group's On-Site Engineering team, after analysis of the project conditions, opted for the feasible solution of Single Position Line Stop operation. Since we needed to avoid welding, we used a mechanical fitting to deploy an inflatable gasbag to act as an isolation. The remedial work on the 30" damaged elbow was subsequently carried out, and once the work was completed the inflatable gas bags were defused and the pipeline continued to function normally.

The client appreciated Unique Group's quality of work as well as our ability to tailor the solution to their requirements.

YOUR DECOMMISSIONING PARTNER – EXPERIENCE, KNOWLEDGE, RESOURCES

Decommissioning is the final stage of the oil and gas production process, once the field production cycle has ended, the facilities must be dismantled, and the surrounding area returned to its initial condition.

This process is necessary as it minimises the environmental and safety risks posed by leaving unused structures in the open or on the seafloor for ocean life.

Driving factors

Across the globe, there is an increasing number of assets which are reaching the end of their design specified life and this has led to the burgeoning onshore and offshore decommissioning industry. Some of the driving factors behind the decommissioning market include environmental concerns, low oil price, the rising number of ageing oil & gas assets and the stringent regulations guiding it.

Rising industry

Europe has been a key market for decommissioning but there has been an increase in the number of fields under evaluation for dismantlement in Asia, the Middle East and elsewhere.

According to a study by Rystad Energy, the decommissioning obligations are projected to hold steady at an average of about $12bn per year from 2019 through 2021. By analysing the market scenario, Unique Group has ventured into the decommissioning of both offshore and onshore ageing assets.

Your experienced partner

We assist owners with the identification of the best possible modes of decommissioning of assets past their useful life and execute projects with maximum efficiency while keeping costs optimal and meeting all regulatory compliances. As this is a high-risk project, clients need an experienced service provider which has executed several projects successfully and can provide expert technical guidance as well as support as required.

This is a key highlight for Unique Group as we have an excellent track record in our past projects in dealing with the technical and logistical challenges involved in any decommissioning project, whether it be offshore or onshore, in all stages of planning, preparation and surveys to plug and abandonment, including post-project monitoring.

Global presence

With equipment located in different bases around the world we can ensure a swift and cost-effective mobilisation to meet any customer requirements, whether it be a complete platform decommissioning or just conductor cutting and removal.

We have equipment ranging from Diamond Wire Saws and wellhead milling/drilling equipment to an annular testing facility which can be used for both topside and subsea operations.

UNIQUE DIVING SOLUTIONS – ROBUST, RELIABLE AND LEADING THE WAY

The offshore industry is recovering from challenging market scenarios, throughout which Unique Group has been resilient and striding forward.

With that in mind, over the past two years Unique Group has strengthened key areas within its organisation and network, and developed new enhancements with operational excellence as a key driver of the new direction. We are sure our efforts will continue to bear fruit in the near and long term for Unique and our clients.

Unique expertise

Over time, it has been shown that the diving industry represents an indispensable partner for underwater inspection, construction, maintenance and repair activities. It is very common for divers to operate at depths of up to 200 – 300 metres; for depths starting from 70 metres, we employ saturation diving.

Saturation diving is one of the most sophisticated forms of underwater intervention and is carried out from specially built diving support vessels (DSVs). With a significant track record in manufacturing classed saturation diving systems, Unique Group is ideally positioned to manufacture custom DSV saturation, portable and HRF saturation systems to client requirements. Our bell and chamber life support equipment, diver's heaters and environmental controls are the most robust in the industry.

However, as in every industry, stringent measures must be taken to ensure the wellbeing of the personnel involved in the diving sector as well. For example, according to IMCA regulations, it is mandatory for all dive support vessels to be equipped with hyperbaric rescue facilities, such as self-propelled hyperbaric lifeboats (SPHLs).

Your reliable partner

SPHLs are used during emergency evacuation of the mother ship, to rescue the divers and place them in a pressure chamber to avoid any interference with their saturation/decompression procedure. SPHLs can accommodate between 1 and 24 divers, depending on the model. They contain all ancillary equipment, including engine, generator, crew facilities and life-support system, thus offering an independent survival capability of 72 hours for divers under pressure.

Extensive capabilities

Unique Group has a 1,500sqm production facility in the Netherlands which has manufactured 74 certified and classed SPHLs in the past 12 years under the Oceanwide S.a.S product brand – a feat achieved by no other company in the world. Being the market leader in the design, construction and maintenance of SPHLs, we provide custom and turnkey specialty boats with expert repair and maintenance services to the commercial oil and gas sector, the diving industry and offshore vessel market.

Due to the importance of life support, we follow a strict and extensive prototype testing regime as per MED/SOLAS regulations and other class systems. We perform several tests on our SPHLs, including a drop test, impact test, flooded stability test and flooded self-righting test with a fully loaded SPHL and pressure vessel integrated into the GRP hull.

Wilbert Beilsma, Head of Sales at our Netherlands office, commented: "It is definitely a proud achievement for Unique Group – this provides motivation for our entire team to continue to work towards excelling in our field. We offer tailored geographical solutions to customers around the world, and have workshop facilities in the UK, Europe, Middle East, South Africa, India, Singapore and the USA."

CASE STUDY
68" enclosure clamp ensures continuous plant operability.

Unique Group helped a client avoid shutdown due to a weld crack on a 68" pipe flange on a sea water pipeline. The 68" line provided cooling water to different trains in the plant, and one of the options to rectify the leak was to shut down the trains and isolate the pipeline. This was not a feasible solution due to production schedules and other commitments.

CLIENT REQUIREMENT
To get a better understanding of the client requirements, Unique Group's On-Site Engineering team visited the site and took precise field measurements. We also analysed that further deterioration of the flange could result in separation of the pipe, which could lead to the shutdown of plant and severe production loss.

UNIQUE SOLUTION
Based on the measurements obtained by our team we designed and manufactured an Enclosure Clamp that would seal the weld leak and sit on the 68" pipe on one side and flange OD on the other. We opted for the enclosure clamp over standard repair clamps due to space restrictions and the location of the leak point.

The Enclosure Box Clamp was designed in accordance with ASME Sec VIII Div 1 specifications and manufactured in four pieces for ease of installation at site. There was also high ovality in the pipe, which presented a challenge in achieving 100% sealing. So, we designed the clamp with three independent sets of size packing grooves aimed at overcoming the pipe ovality.

COMPETENT AND SAFE
Furthermore, to meet the requirements of Unique Group policies, a strongback system was also designed and installed to restrict the system from moving in the event of complete failure of the weld joint in future.

Now the client can operate at full pressure capacity until the next planned shutdown, when permanent repairs can be done. That's a job well done, and a happy client.

UNIQUE TO DELIVER INTEGRATED SOLUTIONS TO POSH SUBSEA

Our 2019 projects schedule includes a pivotal partnership with POSH Subsea to offer integrated diving solutions.

Unique Group will be supplying a holistic suite of classed air & saturation diving equipment, compliant to the stringent Oil and Gas Producers (OGP) 468 and International Marine Contractors Association (IMCA) guidelines, as well as consumables and technical support during and post installation spanning a two-year period.

In order to minimise operational downtime and accurately track the condition of the equipment for POSH, we will also be integrating Unique Equipment Manager (UEM), a digitalised planned maintenance system, with the dive systems.

UNIQUE GROUP & WATER WEIGHTS

SYNERGY OF ENGINEERING AND EFFICIENCY

In the 1970s, Water Weights began as an alternative solution to the cumbersome practice of using solid weights for weight lifting.

The idea of water-filled bags was the catalyst that inspired and launched the problem-solving and engineering approach Water Weights is known for today.

In September 2018, Unique Group acquired Aberdeen-headquartered Water Weights. This acquisition, which capitalises on Water Weights' 30-plus years of expertise, provides customers with a wider variety of products and services from over 25 worldwide locations. We can support our clients locally in most locations as we have a global reach.

Together we have the collective ability to find creative and innovative solutions to dynamic challenges by providing dedicated technology which adds value to the client with a focus on safety, efficiency and profitability.

We specialise in the design, manufacture, supply and support of two main product lines: inflatable buoyancy products for diving, salvage and installation operations; and water bags for the load testing of cranes, davits, lifeboats, gangways and other load-bearing structures.

The combined technical expertise of Unique Group and Water Weights can be used across a wide range of industries such as defence, marine, oil and gas, construction, process machinery and offshore. We continue to develop and increase our products and service offering to address challenges faced by clients, while optimising the performance on their investment.

UNIQUE INSIGHT

Chief Operating Officer, Sahil Gandhi, offers his views on Unique Group accomplishments to date – and on the way forward...

Tell us about the key highlights for Unique Group over the past 25 years.
Unique Group over the last 25 years has worked with an aim to deliver technically distinct products and provide customer service like no other. It is this philosophy that has led to development within the Group. The key highlight is its growth in terms of manpower, locations and the range of offerings. We aim to be the preferred partner for our clients around the globe. Today we have over 500 employees located at our offices in ten countries. We truly believe our people are our strength and our depth of the range of services enables us to cater for client requirements most efficiently.

Can you briefly describe the strategy going forward?
Over the next few years, Unique Group aims to expand to new geographical territories which represent the future of the oil & gas industry like Nigeria and Latin America. We will continue to enhance our quality product offerings to customers globally and with a focus on the renewables and defence markets.

Which industries will Unique Group look to target in future?
Oil & gas has been our key industries over these years and that will continue to be the case. We also have a strong marine and offshore presence and are looking to enter industries as diverse as defence and medical technology.

What is the prime focus for Unique Group in terms of new technology/service offering?
At this moment – the Uni-CAT (Unique USV) is our big launch. It is designed and developed by our experienced team and we are very proud of the end result. It is purpose built for bathymetry surveys offshore and in shallow waters.

How is Unique Group coping with the dynamic changes in the energy industry?
Whilst the energy industry will witness a sea change over the next 20 years, more and more key industry players are facilitating plans that are in line with the industry's goals of focusing on carbon reduction and investing in renewable technologies. We are also working on futuristic solutions using Artificial Intelligence, to provide technologically advanced solutions to our clients to help them engineer the future. Unique Group understands this goal and has recently invested in a world-class marine exhaust scrubber system manufacturer, Kamelia Cleantech, which engineers scrubber solutions in Finland and has manufacturing facilities worldwide. Through this venture, we will be targeting ships and vessels that are not compliant with the IMO 2020 Sulphur Cap regulations across the world.

As a young leader, what leadership lesson would you like to share with aspiring young minds?
We work in a very dynamic industry with an ever-changing environment, and the young talent must be agile to keep up with the changing trends. With the digital world taking over, it is important to be innovative in one's approach to minimise costs and maximise efficiency. We must all learn from the veterans in the industry and use the trends of today to offer the best solutions to our clients.

IN PROFILE – FLEXIBLE BUOYANCY

Unique Group, through its Seaflex products, has been involved in thousands of subsea lifting and installation projects on every continent bar Antarctica.

ALBs – the professionals' choice

The most common types of bag used for lifting materials from the seabed are air lift bags (ALB) or parachute bags. They are long and thin and take on a more bulbous shape when inflated; they are generally attached to a load by a diver and inflated via his pneumo, an airline to the surface, or via ROV. Once they are filled to the extent that their capacity exceeds the weight of the load, the load will rise from the seabed and head towards the surface. They are often used for salvage operations and are a viable way of lifting weights up to 1000 tons – beyond which it can become difficult to find space to attach sufficient buoyancy onto the load.

Versatile solutions

Rather than using a smaller number of larger ALBs, it is more common to have a larger number of smaller units for a balanced and safer lift; if one of the bags becomes compromised during the operation, the larger number of bags spreads the risk. If the lift is to be followed by a tow, then depending upon the distance and the sea state, clients will sometimes opt to add enclosed modules when the load is at the surface to provide greater stability and contingency during the towing phase.

Unique Group's Seaflex ALBs are available in units up to 50t capacity for tasks such as reducing winch load when disconnecting FPSO mooring chains, down to 25kg bags designed to help divers work with tools which would otherwise be difficult to manoeuvre underwater.

Safety is paramount

Our parachute air lift bags have been designed to provide the maximum amount of lift for the least overall height. The design brings with it a wide hem, which aids swifter emptying of the bag on emergency inversion – a notable safety benefit. All our ALBs automatically vent excess air as they ascend dynamically with their load. Their single attachment point helps keep them inherently stable, regardless of load orientation or trim.

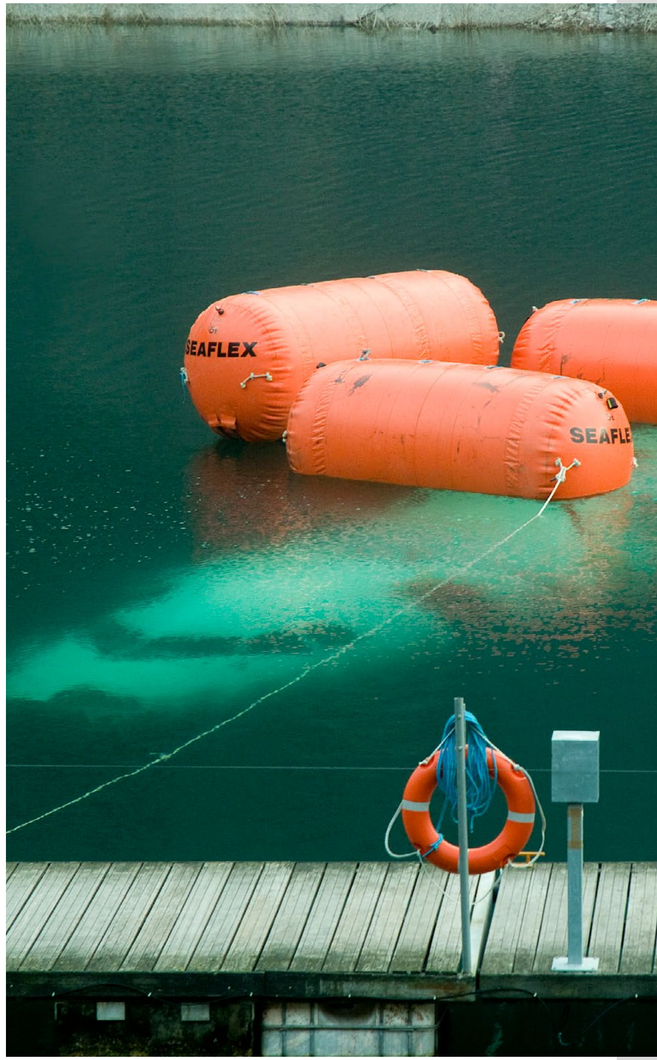
One vital feature of these bags is an inverter attachment point in the crown of the bag. A separate line is attached to this point and tied off to the main load, so if the main connection to the load is broken, the bag up-ends, releasing the air inside but otherwise rendering the bag harmless.

Tested and proven

"While there is no legislation concerning open-ended bags, recommendations for the safe design, manufacture, testing, operation and servicing of such equipment are provided within IMCA D016 guidelines", said Chris Sparrow, Global Sales Manager at Unique Group. "Unfortunately, not all manufacturers – even some of those who make liberal use of the IMCA logo – are supplying bags which can be proven to comply with those guidelines. Whereas all Seaflex ALBs most certainly do."

CHRIS SPARROW
Global Sales Manager – Buoyancy & Ballast

Chris joined Unique Group in 2013 and brings with him over 20 years of experience in the marine and offshore sectors. He has extensive experience working with buoyancy and ballast customers worldwide. He has a keen eye for detail and is focussed on delivering the best possible technical and commercial outcomes to clients.



CLIENT COLLABORATION LEADS TO ANOTHER UNIQUE GROUP 'FIRST'

It is always an achievement when we widen our capabilities and venture into new territories.

In November 2018 we had one such proud moment when we delivered our first classed Hyperbaric Reception Facility (HRF) in South East Asia.

We worked with Kreuz Subsea to build a Classed HRF System with an additional pressure vessel, which was manufactured by our engineering team in South Africa and integrated into the 18-man HRF in Singapore. We have also provided Kreuz Subsea with auxiliary equipment to upgrade the existing HRF control facility in order to utilise the pressure vessel as a hospital lock. This facility enables the client to use the pressure vessel as a medical chamber in case of emergency.

The system will be deployed for long-term operations in Brunei, and the inclusion of the hospital lock also makes it one of the most preferred systems available in the market. We take pride in creating tailored solutions for our clients within exact timelines. The complete system has been class designed and approved with full compliance to IMCA D053 standards for safe and effective diving operations.

UNIQUE PARTNERSHIPS AND JOINT VENTURES

We are proud of the relationships and partnerships we have built over time – these are based on trust and commitment.

Our most recent partnerships...

The Management team of Unique Group and Kamelia Cleantech. From Left to Right: Richard Hall – Chairman, Sharad Kumar – COO, Kaisa Marion – Managing Director, Harry Gandhi and Sahil Gandhi – Executive Directors.

Kamelia Cleantech
A Unique Group Company

Investing in the future

As the shipping industry enters the final lap in the race towards meeting the IMO Sulphur cap by January 2020, Unique Group has invested in the scrubber industry – one of the solutions that ship owners can adopt to comply with the IMO regulation.

Unique Group has purchased a major share in Kamelia Cleantech, a prominent exhaust gas scrubber solution provider. Through this venture, we will offer the global shipping industry the full range of end-to-end integrated scrubber solutions engineered in Finland for removing Sulphur Dioxide from vessel exhausts. We can provide open loop and retrofit scrubbers to clients based on their requirements on-voyage with no need to dry dock the vessel.

The technical knowledge Kamelia possesses, combined with Unique Group's global presence, is ideal to provide flexible bespoke solutions for new and old vessels with minimised downtime.

BRAeMar

Broadening our horizons

In November 2018, Unique Group entered into a partnership with BRAeMar Serviços Portuários e Offshore Ltda., a prominent provider of knowledge and skill-based marine services. Based in Rio de Janeiro, the partnership will facilitate comprehensive support for the shipping, energy and oil & gas markets in Brazil and across Latin America.

BRAeMar will be the sole representative agency for Unique Group in the region. Unique Group's Survey Equipment, Diving & Life Support and Buoyancy & Ballast divisions will predominantly service customers in this region through the newly established partnership, with a focus on enhancing accessibility and visibility.

This partnership between Unique Group and BRAeMar creates an amplified service offering to clients in the Latin American market.

From Left to Right: Sharad Kumar, Group Director Business Development at Unique Group with Steve Hankins, Technical Sales Manager at Deepwater.

DEEPWATER

Enhancing our customer proposition

Unique Group entered into a cooperation agreement with Deepwater Corrosion Services Inc. in November 2018 to offer Deepwater's technologically advanced corrosion control solutions to the Middle East Market.

Deepwater has been delivering world-class solutions to safeguard offshore infrastructure from corrosion by developing more efficient systems to protect, monitor and extend the productive lives of ageing assets.

Deepwater's sacrificial (SACP) and impressed current (ICCP) systems are well known in the corrosion industry as the designs are easily retrofitted. Some of the ICCP systems are RetroBuoy and RetroBuoy Junior, RetroMat ICCP and the Raparound Anode System.

CONNECTOR SUBSEA SOLUTIONS

Bolstering our market offering

Unique Group has entered into a formal collaboration agreement with Norway-headquartered Connector Subsea Solutions (CSS).

The products line will help strengthen our product offerings for both shallow water and deep-water operations by the inclusion of first-rate subsea pipeline IMR solutions. Connector Subsea Solutions is a specialist provider of Inspection, Maintenance and Repair (IMR) solutions for subsea pipelines, risers and conductors.

Through the partnership, Unique Group will deliver complete lightweight and compact remote operated tools and systems for the cleaning, inspection and maintenance of subsea risers, flowlines, and pipelines.

CHARKIN
MARITIME & OFFSHORE SAFETY CENTRE

Dedicated focus in key market

Unique Group has formed a joint venture (JV) with Nigeria-based Charkin Maritime & Offshore Safety Ltd, a prominent professional training company for the maritime and offshore oil & gas industries. The JV, Unique Charkin System Ltd, is based out of Port Harcourt in Nigeria.

The JV currently offers a full range of support to the oil & gas market in Nigeria and will further extend services into Sub-Saharan Africa. This positions us well for further expansion into the African region and the permanent base in Nigeria also facilitates a better relationship with, and offering for, our local clients.

Through the joint venture, we are also aiming to empower local young people to enhance their maritime skills, thereby opening the path to improved maritime job prospects in Africa as well as further bolstering the region's economy.

From Left to Right: Mark Severn, Sales Manager at Unique Group with Sir Charles K. Wami, CEO of Charkin Maritime & Offshore Safety Ltd.

A UNIQUE VIEW ON THE RAPIDLY DEVELOPING AFRICAN MARITIME INDUSTRY

SHARAD KUMAR
Group Director,
Business Development

The winds of change are steadily blowing over Africa. A recent analysis by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) shows that there could be an increase of 2% in GDP when there is a 25% improvement in port performance. With a constant quest to substantially uplift the continent's role in the maritime industry, the 'Vision 2050' of the African Union aims to revolutionise the maritime industry by creating more jobs for the African youth and finding a global market for African products.

The idea of creating a Combined Exclusive Maritime Zone of Africa (CEMZA) will be a major step forward for overall development.

Moreover, an integrated coastal zone management will streamline the operations. Some major ports to watch out for are Lagos (Nigeria), Port of Djibouti, Mombasa (Kenya) and Abidjan (Ivory Coast).

With all these looking positive for the region in general, Unique Group also stepped up its operations in the continent by setting up a base in West Africa to cater to a growing customer base in that region. Our strategic joint venture in Nigeria called Unique Charkin System Ltd. offers a full range of support to the oil & gas market with further expansion plans into Sub-Saharan Africa.

MARCHEL'S 100% SPHL RECORD

Marchel Werkman, Project Manager for Diving in our Netherlands office, has a claim to fame within Unique Group – he has played a part in all 74 SPHLs (Self-Propelled Hyperbaric Lifeboat) we have built to date.

Marchel started out as a Navy engineer and diver in 1980, before progressing to become an Army diver and dive instructor. He left the Army in 2007 to start a new career in the civilian diving and life-support manufacturing industry.

He has extensive experience in the manufacturing and delivery of life support equipment, from the drawing table to final installation for the client. His proudest professional achievement is his work in the development and re-launch of the system to evacuate divers under pressure, which we now know as SPHLs. Here, Marchel discusses his journey so far – and the changes he has seen in the industry.

Tell us about your journey with Unique Group so far? I joined Unique Group in 2016. When my colleague Ben V Gils and I started, our job was to strengthen Unique Group with our knowledge of diving, life support and medical equipment. In collaboration with our South Africa office we were able to furnish our workshop and begin marketing our expertise.

In order to enhance my skills during this time, I also did some courses in Kirby Morgan and Luno systems. During this initial period, I made the work instructions and formats for certificates, while my colleague did the field work with the Unique Group crew. Most of my work was focused on certifying Unique Group as an official inspection and maintenance centre for life-support equipment for industrial cleaning.

In the meantime, as a result of my experience with life support systems, I was also involved with our South Africa office in developing a Hyperbaric chamber for a lifeboat. This led to us building the pressure vessel and the SPHL at our Netherlands workshop, which we currently sell as well.

During this period, I have picked up new skills and gained more understanding in HSEQ and customer service. Every day I face challenges: one moment I am working on approvals for a system we built in the office and the next I am working on a system somewhere else in the world. So throughout my journey, no two days have been the same.

How do you feel about being a member of the team which has built every SPHL made by Unique group to date? I'm proud of that fact; it is a special product which will be used only in an emergency situation and, when used, it saves the lives of the divers that need to be evacuated under pressure.

What are your key areas of expertise? Building, developing and servicing of medical treatment chambers and life-support systems; military and offshore diving equipment; government and class regulations – these are my key areas of expertise which I have acquired and honed over the years.

How has technology and time changed the way we manufacture SPHLs? Over the years, the finishing standard has become higher and working together with the customers, we have made the system more user and maintenance friendly. We have also developed UNIQUE eCOAST system, which helps us to locate the SPHL and monitor the condition of the divers and the SPHL environment, from anywhere in the world.

THE SKY'S THE LIMIT FOR HIGH-FLYING ANDRE

While many of us still hesitate at the thought of jumping out of a plane, Andre D'Argent, Senior Engineer in the Services Division at our South Africa office, celebrated the 20th anniversary of his first sky dive in December 2018.

He has come a long way in the activity – from a coaching point of view, he now holds a Jump Master and Static Line instructors rating and is aiming to obtain the Accelerated Freefall instructor and Tandem instructor ratings.

When asked about his motivation to take the first plunge, his answer is simple, "curiosity". He had a couple of friends who were active sky divers and their constant badgering piqued his interest. He signed up for the course, trained for a day and did his first solo static line jump the next day. From then on, he has been hooked on this extremely challenging and open-ended sport.

When we asked him about his first jump, he said: "I always say that I did jump two because I was too terrified to clearly remember jump one. I did jump three because jump two was mind blowing. After that I wanted to do my first solo freefall. From there on, it was always about the next task in training, the next crazy experience or the next personal mountain to climb. There never was and never has been a final goal. Skydiving is a journey without a destination. I like that."

Andre has skydived mostly in and around South Africa and Namibia, although he has also tried the indoor wind tunnel in Prague. He told us that, when in mid-air it is not a floating feeling, but it feels more like dancing on a hurricane. "It's hard to explain the amount of energy out there when you are travelling through the air at 200-250 kilometres per hour." And here's his pro tip for all those interested in sky diving: "Find a dropzone with a good reputation for teaching and set a date. Go jump on that date. Do a tandem skydive or do a first jump course straight off. Finish the training course. Learn to fly. But honestly, it all begins with setting a date."

The achievement that literally and figuratively made him reach the skies is being a part of the current All South African large formation record in 2017, but he is not resting on his laurels. He wants to be a part of a very large formation of around 100 individuals. When he is not sky diving, Andre also enjoys riding motorbikes and hiking mountains.

1993

Harry Gandhi founds Unique Maritime Group with three employees based out of a garage in Sharjah, UAE

1995

Unique Maritime Group signs its first agency agreement to service the marine and subsea market sector

2000

With the acquisition of the Hydra brand, Unique becomes a leader in the manufacture and supply of diving and life support solutions

2006

Unique makes a move to a new 14,000m² purpose built facility in the Hamriyah Free Zone, Sharjah

2009

Expanding into new geographies with offices in Aberdeen, Scotland and Mumbai, India

2011

Unique further expands with the acquisition of Seaflex, specialists in airlift buoyancy bags and water load test weights

2011

Unique Cares – The Lighting a Billion Lives initiative led by Harry Gandhi raises over $140,000 to bring lighting to 27 villages across rural India

2012

With the addition of Wellube, Unique Group further extends its hot tapping and line stopping capability

Wellube

2014

Blue Water Energy brings strategic capital investment to Unique Group, key to facilitating further growth

2015

Unique Group's survey division is further strengthened with the acquisition of GSE Rentals

GSE RENTALS

2015

Unique Group extends into South East Asia opening an office in Singapore

2015

OceanWide SAS, market leaders in the design, construction and maintenance of self-propelled lifeboats brings new capability

2017

Unique launches its Medical Technology division

2018

INNOVATION · SERVICE · QUALITY

25 YEARS

Unique Group now employs over 500 people and has achieved 25 years of excellence

2019

Unique Group launches its first USV Uni-Cat for survey applications