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Anthony Lawrence, one of our Columbia Kiwanis Club members, has this to say about his life overseas in Dubai, Saudi Arabia for Wilbur Smith Associates:

One of the advantages of working for an international company is having the opportunity to work and live in many different places that are enriched with unique people, various cultures, and a truly different way of life – Life that is somewhat opposite of how we live in the United States.

Over the past several months my family and I have been engulfed by endless sand dunes, a crystal blue-green ocean, a multitude of languages and accents, and amazing foods and treats. The USC Game Cock fight song that blasts from a loud speaker atop the Keenan Building and resonates throughout downtown Columbia has been substituted by the soft, harmonic Arabic call to prayer chant that echoes throughout downtown Dubai several times daily. The tree lined streets and green ways that populate Columbia have been replaced by six to eight lane boulevards, brick paved sidewalks, Palm trees, wind towers, overcrowded markets, hazy construction sites, and sand as far as the eye can see! The sites and sounds of this evolving utopia are making an impression that will last a life time.

As one of several project managers in our Dubai office, the challenges encountered here test ones ability to be flexible due to the ever changing demands of the client. Moreover, language barriers add another factor of complexity, especially when trying to communicate key project concepts that require a detailed explanation. The challenge is to make the message clear, simple, and as non-technical as possible, when necessary, even if drawings have to be generated to clarify the objective. For a moment, picture your toughest client. Image that same client without a budget, limited English speaking skills, and a “finish two days ago schedule”. Now image him investing multi-million dollars on a hand shake – in essence...the contract - and entrusting you to help him meet the objective of making it the best in the world!

As a father of two young children that have been relocated to the desert, some 9,300 miles away from very passionate and engaged grandparents, the task that my wife and I have is keeping “home” with them. Thanks to modern technology (Yahoo! Messenger) and wonderful GSM mobiles, life has not been too hard for them. Children have the wonderful ability of adaptation and will (as our 6 year old has done) expose you to life through their unclouded, unbiased, truthful eyes. Although both of us are college graduates, we are being taught Arabic by a kid who has the audacity to correct our pronunciations of words we have never spoken before. The beauty of this experience for our children is co-existing with so many different kids they would never have the chance to meet, play with, and learn from.

Moving my young family to this region was a stressful decision. But after in-depth research, several visits, and discussions with worldly friends, the question about the move became simple - when would we have this chance again?

Dubai is uncharacteristic of any city in the world and is one of the only places where one can receive invaluable lessons about project management dynamics, client interaction, cultural tolerance, and appreciation for tradition.

We are glad about the move abroad and find that people on this side of the globe are not too dissimilar from us.

Anthony Lawrence, Project Manager/Senior Planner, Wilbur Smith Associates
alawrence@wilbursmith.com