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Basrah Votech Center renovated

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Mohammed Hassan Al Hassani, headmaster at the Al Khaseeb Vocational Technical Center in Basrah, signs the close-out documents June 8 marking the completion of a \$1.24 million rehabilitation of that facility. Work there included roof repairs, electrical and plumbing, plastering, interior renovations, and a new perimeter wall. (USACE photo by Norris Jones)

BASRAH, Iraq – Students in Basrah are now attending a newly refurbished vocational technical school as they acquire important job training skills.

The school's headmaster, Mohammed Hassan Al Hassani, said he is very pleased with the \$1.24 million rehabilitation of the Al Khaseeb Votech Center that included major roof repairs, new electrical and plumbing, plastering, interior renovations and a new perimeter wall.

He has been a votech headmaster for more than three decades and points out that because of the deteriorating conditions at that facility prior to the start of the project last fall, only about 30 students were enrolled there. Al Khaseeb was built in the early 1980s.

"Today we have 600 students attending courses in such areas as welding, auto mechanics, carpentry, lathe work, masonry, plumbing, computers, electric installation, air conditioning and refrigera-



Major Stephen Dale with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is thanked by a group of students for the \$1.24 million in renovation work at the Al Khaseeb Vocational Technical Center in Basrah. Dale is the officer in charge of USACE's Basrah Area Office. (USACE photo by Norris Jones)



tion," he continued. "With the structural improvements, I'm optimistic that next year we'll be teaching over 1000 students, ranging in age from 16 to 25." He has a faculty and staff of about 130 employees working there now.

"This project is very important for our students," he noted. "This greatly improved learning environment is a definite plus as they develop their skills."

Among those visiting the project June 8 was Maj. Stephen Dale with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, whose office oversaw the renovation work. Dale toured the welding and mechanics classes and he later told the headmaster it brought back

Left — A student practices his welding skills in one of the newly renovated shops at the Al Khaseeb Vocational Technical Center in Basrah. Students there can choose between a variety of classes including carpentry, electric installation, auto mechanics, air conditioning and refrigeration, masonry, painting, computer basics and plumbing installation. (USACE photo by Norris Jones)



James Hodges, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers construction representative, checks a weld from a student at the Al Khaseeb Vocational Technical Center. Hodges has overseen the \$1.24 million in renovation work that got under way last fall. (USACE photo by Norris Jones)

memories from his teenage years.

"I took agricultural mechanics in high school that covered a number of areas including welding, small engine repair, basic electricity, carpentry and masonry," he explained to Al Hassani. "I remember being in the same situation as your students are today," said Dale, who attended Mineral County Vocational Technical School in Mineral County, W.Va. After graduating, he attended Fairmont State College majoring in civil engineering. "Many of those skills I was taught in high school, I still use today," he added.

James Hodges, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers construction representative who has been overseeing the work since the project's start last fall, said, "I'm very proud to be involved with this effort to help Basrah's young people learn skills needed for good jobs benefitting their households. The facility, when we got here, was in definite need of structural repairs. But the votech staff was eager to help and have contributed immensely to bringing this project to where it stands now. The improvements have allowed the school to substantially increase its enrollment, positively impacting hundreds of additional Basrah families and it's just a start to what this school can do."



Al Khaseeb Vocational Technical Center. (USACE photo by Norris Jones)

Under a separate contract, the 358th Civil Affairs Brigade funded \$487,000 to upgrade the equipment for the classrooms. Those materials included welders, grinders, air compressors, drills, voltage meters, alternators and starter motors, compressors, work tables, desks, chairs, circular saws and sanders, electric nail guns, Pentium 4 computers, projectors, Surveyor's instruments and a variety of supplies (nails, paint, sandpaper, welding rods, etc.).

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