

John Tschohl To Speak At STI Seminar

By Jude Nwauzor
SENIOR CORRESPONDENT, Lagos

The world's acclaimed customer service expert and the chief facilitator of the Service Quality Institute of the United States of America, Mr. John Tschohl would be in Nigeria this week to deliver a lecture to the management and staff of Sovereign Trust Insurance (STI) Plc, one of the nation's leading insurance and risk management companies.

The one-day seminar, Daily Independent learnt would focus on how to deploy quality service strategies in improving the patronage level for the organisation with a view to making the STI brand a preferred choice in the insurance marketplace. The company is highly committed to providing exceptional customer service of world-class standards to all stakeholders in the insurance and financial services sector in Nigeria.

Mr. Wale Onaolapo, Managing Director of STI said his company is engaging the top-level speaker because the key to quality service remains "the orientation of all resources and people in a company working together to achieve customers' satisfaction." He also noted that a company is as good as its employees, adding, "With the post-consolidation challenges, it is imperative to enhance the service skills and job performance of all employees."

In the same vein, STI's Executive Vice Chairman, Mr. Seun Ajayi added, "the company aims to become a world-class organisation in all areas of its operations and would partner with local and international organisations that share such values of excellent service delivery and customer satisfaction. And the real challenge is to exceed current standards by looking at better ways to deliver quality service with a view to meeting and exceeding our customers' needs."

The company said its aim is to become one of the top five in the insurance sector in Nigeria within the shortest possible time. To achieve this, its management stated that conscious effort would be made to expand the branch network nationwide to afford Nigerians qualitative insurance products and services.

The one-day seminar, which comes up on January 19, is expected to further instill a culture of service excellence and spirit of teamwork, which have been identified as basic elements for not just keeping customers satisfied but get them to remain loyal for life.

Douglasdale Estate: Six Insurers To Guarantee Payments

A team of six fully capitalised insurance companies is to guarantee all advance payments by subscribers to the multi-billion-naira "Douglasdale Estate" in Owerri, Imo State, which was flagged off recently by the Minister of State for Environment, Housing & Urban Development, Mr. Chuka Odom. Led by Consolidated Hallmark Insurance Plc, the insurance companies are to issue performance bonds to everyone that makes advance payments. Buyers are required to make a 50 per cent down payment on subscription in the payment structure of the estate. Another 30 per cent will be made when the shell of an apartment is completed, while the final 20 per cent will be made upon final completion.

Douglasdale Estate is a fully serviced scheme conceived to provide functional residential accommodation to the emerging expatriate community, Nigerians in the Diaspora, the upwardly mobile middle class professionals and businessmen in Owerri. The estate is located by the Works Layout, fronting the new Owerri Ring Road.

Workers, Activists Lament State Of Public Water Utilities

By Michael Simire
HOUSES & HOMES EDITOR

Workers in the nation's water sector as well as civil society activists have bemoaned the poor state of public water utilities in Nigeria, even as they called on governments at all levels to ensure increased prioritisation and funding of the sector.

At the close of a three-day retreat held last week in Calabar, Cross River State, participants advocated that public water utilities should be made efficient through the recruitment of competent staff, and ensuring that they are independent and autonomous of the civil service structure.

Organised by the Amalgamated Union of Public Corporations, Civil Service,

Technical and Recreational Services Employees (AUCPTRE) with the support of the sub-regional office of Public Services International (PSI), the forum brought together the leadership of the AUCPTRE from several states, community groups and representatives of non-governmental organisation (NGOs).

It had "Water Sector Reform: Need for collaborative action between Labour and the Civil society" as its theme.

Welcoming participants, Mr. Sylvester Ejirofor, General Secretary of the AUCPTRE, said the retreat provided a platform for critical discourse by labour and civil society on ongoing structural changes in the nation's water sector.

He lamented the failure of public water utilities to provide

safe and adequate water services to citizens, saying this had given rise to the indiscriminate sinking of boreholes by individual households.

"Nigeria has the largest number of boreholes and largest brands of sachet and bottled water in the world, chiefly because of the failure of public water supply systems. Yet these alternatives are not sustainable options of water supply. For instance, the average life span of boreholes is between eight and 10 years," said Ejirofor.

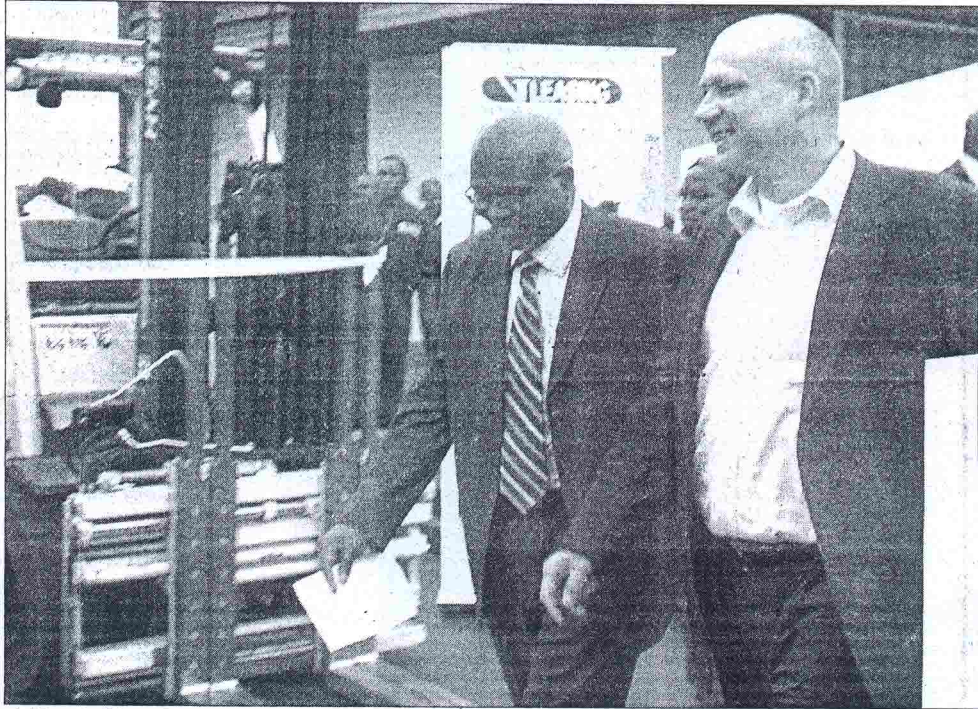
He added, "We must raise public consciousness on the state of water sector in Nigeria, and get the water utilities running again under an efficient public management."

Also welcoming participants, Mr. Babatope Babalobi, the Director of the Bread of Life

Development Foundation, a Lagos-based NGO, said the poor performances of public water utilities is as result of non-prioritisation of the water sector by national and state governments; declining public investment over the years; and deliberate mismanagement of some public water utilities, which he described as an odious strategy of making them attractive for privatisation.

Saying that national and state governments must assume primary responsibility for delivery water services to the people to achieve the Water and Sanitation MDG in Nigeria, Babalobi advocated for "strategic partnerships and stronger ties between labour and civil society to oppose water privatisation in Nigeria."

He therefore called on members of the AUCPTRE to use its national spread and numerical strength to drive forward the campaign against water privatisation in Nigeria.



The Managing Director, VT Leasing, Mr. Akin Opeodu (left), with Supply Chain Director, Nigerian Breweries, Ed Van Willegen, at the commissioning of the Forklift trucks in Lagos recently

Nigeria Was Short-changed – Chigbue

By Oladunjoye Phillip
SENIOR CORRESPONDENT, Lagos

The Director General of the Bureau of Public Enterprises (BPE), Mrs. Irene Chigbue has declared that Nigeria was being short-changed by those in charge of running the affairs of public enterprises, which prompted the government to embark on the privatisation exercise.

She made the remark during a visit to the Bureau by the executive

of the National Association of Material & Metallurgical Engineering Students on January 15.

Chigbue, who was represented by the BPE's Director of Electric Power, Dr. Sam Agbogun, said it was the failure recorded by those running public enterprises that prompted the privatisation exercise.

She castigated those kicking against the privatisation exercise, describing them as enemies of

progress.

"Anywhere there is reform, there will be resistance. Those who have power, money and influence are behind the opposition. But should we continue with business as usual? We have everything, yet we have nothing to show for it because of the way our leaders have run public enterprises in the past," she pointed out.

She added that government opted to privatise the steel sector due to the paucity of funds available.

She commended the students for seeking knowledge and enlightenment by visiting the BPE.

The national president of the association, Mr. Zaharadeen Usman, bemoaned the poor state of the steel sub-sector in the country, noting that without a vibrant steel sector Nigeria would not achieve her Millennium Development Goals. "It is awful that we import everything. If we continue this way, we will never make it," he lamented.

Sterling Bank Sponsors Golf Tourney

Sterling Bank Plc has demonstrated its support for sports by sponsoring the first ever PGA Nigeria Golf Tour holding between January 29 and February 2, 2008 at the Ikoyi Club.

The PGA Nigeria Tour was established in order to promote the development of professional golf in Nigeria through the support of corporate organisations.

Sterling Bank Plc had in the past sponsored other notable yearly golf tournaments. Among these are

Ikoyi Club Golf Tournament, Ikeja Club Golf Tournament, Indian Golf Association of Nigeria and Ibadan Golf Club Tournament.

A statement issued by the bank said its association with Golf is connected to the fact that the game promotes professionalism, integrity, reliability and excellence, values, which have over time, become the hallmark of Sterling Bank.

Aside the game of Golf, Sterling Bank Plc is also actively involved

in other sports such as soccer, table tennis and cricket. The bank sponsored the 2007 edition of the Lagos State FA Cup competition.

Sterling Bank further demonstrated its support for sports by sponsoring the 2007 edition of the Ikoyi Club 1938 Table Tennis Tournament.

The bank has also offered its support to the Howzat Junior Cricket League. The Bank has successfully used Cricket, a relatively unknown game in

Nigeria, as a springboard for youth empowerment and development.

This further confirms Sterling Bank's status as a financial institution which recognises the inherent potentials in individuals and empowers them to achieve their goals.

The League has continued to produce talents who are today, national team players and have gone ahead to represent the country in international competitions.

Niger Delta Crisis, Bad Governance Bane Of Poverty Eradication—Minister

By Christopher Adedeji,
CORRESPONDENT, Abuja

The Minister of State for Finance, Mr. Remi Babalola on Friday, said the unabated conflicts in the Niger Delta, mismanagement and misappropriation of public funds have contributed to the challenges confronting the living standard of the Nigerian people.

The minister who made the observation at the Seventh Anniversary Celebration of ActionAid Nigeria (AAN) at the Yar'Adua Center, Abuja noted that challenges of ensuring that Nigerians access dividends of democratic have continued to increase in spite of the nation's increase in population.

He said, "Added to these have been the daunting problems caused by underdevelopment, the conflicts in the Niger Delta, misappropriation and mismanagement of public funds."

All these, he identified as, aside having negative impact on the people's living standard, have resulted in poor service delivery, as well as abject poverty for most of the citizenry.

Acknowledging that ActionAid was committed to fighting poverty in the country, he commended the Non-Governmental Organisation, saying, "This is indeed laudable and I commend and ask you to raise the level of your interventions even as the year rolls by."

Remi said the Federal Government and the finance ministry were committed to evolving new initiatives to expand the country's revenue base, and ensure judicious use of public funds to provide goods and services capable of enhancing the developmental process and the well-being of the Nigerian people.

"It is clear that government cannot do it alone and we believe that civil society organisations, like yours, can assist government in policy influencing in these regard. As an active grass-root development agency, your organisation can assist in propagating government policies and in acting as a bridge between the people and government," he urged.

VT Leasing Partners Nigerian Breweries, Cadbury

By Oladunjoye Phillip
SENIOR CORRESPONDENT, Lagos

VT Leasing Limited, a company with the passion to drive businesses, has entered into a five-year Forklift Truck Operating Lease Services agreement with Nigerian Breweries and Cadbury Nigeria. The contract was signed under VT's Outsourcing and Logistics Management Solution (OLMS) scheme.

Akin Opeodu, Managing Director, VT Leasing Limited, said that the OLMS scheme, which included the Forklift Lease Services, was among many initiatives of the company to assist manufacturers and other companies nationwide.

Opeodu also said that the OLMS Forklift Lease Services will be of tremendous advantage to industries. "Our Vision at VT Leasing is to be a world class company, providing world class leasing services to our clients in Nigeria," he stated.

He said the company would commit itself to achieving goals, which would make it to be a reliable, consistent and competent solution provider to its clients.