

COLIN DE KOCK



His passion, determination and desire to move the construction industry towards a positive change is what prompted the Association of Schools of Construction of South Africa (ASOCSA) to honour Colin de Kock with its Lifetime Achievement Award at a gala dinner on July 29 during the 7th PPC Cement/ASOCSA Built Environment Conference held at the Belmont Square Conference Centre in Rondebosch, Cape Town. Colin joins Rodney Milford and Rob Johnson as a recipient of this special award.

Colin grew up in Sandringham, a suburb north east of Johannesburg that was built for ex soldiers, which Colin's father was. He completed his primary and high schooling and then joined the army, where he drove armoured cars. Later, he went on to obtain an engineering technician diploma and for a while worked as a Safmarine engineer sailing on boats that transported fruit to Europe.

He subsequently started working as a computer operator before his interest in motor racing transported him onto a new track as a mechanic for Dave Charlton, South African Formula One champion for a number of years.

Colin then moved to Pretoria and started work as a civil engineering technician. His plan was to study civil engineering, but changed his mind and, at 25, married Jeannie.

In 1975 he applied to study a five-year degree (two years full-time and the remainder a combination of study and internship) in 'Boubestuur' at the University of Pretoria.

Says Colin, "After work hours and out of class hours, I did engineering drafting on a freelance basis to earn money to live off. In the beginning of 1976, a classmate's father offered me a student job in his construction company and I worked with him for about five months."

In 1976, while still studying fulltime, Colin started working at Alexander Grant Construction. He worked hard to support his family while studying, having to juggle classes with his new job.

In spite of having to manage work and his studies he became the contracts manager at Alexander Grant Construction and later contracts director and a shareholder of the company. He stayed with the company until 1991 and did all the project management on site for 15 years.

Colin's expertise, however, did not only apply to on-site duties. In 1990 and 1991, he was elected president of the Pretoria Master Builders Association and on July 1, 1991, he was appointed as the executive director of the Pretoria Master Builders Association. His contract was for two years, but lasted 20 and he retired on June 30 2011.

During his time as executive director he faced many challenges. "One thing we did just after I became director was change the name from Pretoria Master Builders Association to the Building Industries Association Transvaal North. In the 1980s, black unions sprang up, some of whom wanted to get into formal bargaining issues and some of whom did not. As a result, there was some politicised resistance to master builder associations; they were old style white organisations. The master had an evil connotation, so one of the bigger things we did in that period was to move away from the MBA, an elitist organisation that had been in existence for just short of 100 years. At more or less the same time, as a

result of national politics, the guys in Johannesburg also wanted to change their name. After the political change they changed to Master Builders Association Gauteng.

"In 1995, the two MBAs merged and the legal process that followed resulted in one of the MBAs being absorbed into the other: BIA Transvaal North disappeared. I changed the name from Master Builders Association Gauteng to Gauteng Master Builders Association."

Colin retained the position of executive director of the newly merged organisation. Besides spending a lot of time running the issues of the MBA, he was also doing significant amount of work for the Master Builders Association of South Africa.

He became disillusioned with the industry. In 2009 he became a Business Unity South Africa (BUSA) representative on the National Skills Authority. "My focus was the building industry and the insufficient training that was taking place, particularly among artisans. Training was dwindling to the point where there was none and the lack of skills was getting worse and worse."

Colin added that 95% of those who were skilled were 50 years and older with few young skilled people entering the industry. He was severely disillusioned.

Between 2001 and 2002 he became deputy chairperson of Construction Education and Training (CETA). However, he said that they battled to get processes going for training and that in his time there he noticed too much talk and no real action taking place. "Learnerships and apprenticeships were not being created."

He was also a BUSA representative at Nedlac. Of this he says, "Many issues came up, but mainly issues around labour laws."

These were just some of the issues Colin dealt with in the industry.

Other than work, he has a keen interest in birding and since retiring and moving to Britannia Bay on the West Coast has done a fair amount of bird watching and bird ringing. He is the chairman of the West Coast Birding Association and is involved in the local tourism association. "It keeps us occupied."

Colin and Jeannie have four children and one grandchild.

In reaction to the ASOCSA Lifetime Achievement Award, Colin says he feels honoured that his work in the industry is being acknowledged and happy that there are people who acknowledge that there are people who are working hard to improve the industry.

"Nothing I did was for personal gain. I am pleased that somebody recognises our endeavours," says Colin.