



ROB JOHNSON

Through his ongoing interest in the development of the construction industry as a career of choice, the Association of Schools of Construction of South Africa is honouring Rob Johnson 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. Rob joins Rodney Milford and Colin De Kock as a recipient of this special award.

Rob's career in the industry started when he worked as an apprentice carpenter while completing a National Diploma in Construction Supervision.

"During my apprenticeship I worked on many projects from housing schemes to the construction of blocks of flats. After my apprenticeship, I was engaged by my employer to look after its small works division."

Rob says that during this period he learnt more about the industry than he has ever learnt – to date.

"Having to deal directly with clients as well as being responsible for the full building process taught me that it was not just a matter of bricks and mortar. I was subsequently promoted to contracts manager and, after 16 years, I spent a year and a half with a housing development company before forming my own company, Rob Johnson Construction, in 1983."

In 1995 he was elected to the executive committee of the Master Builders Association Western Cape and was elected president of the association in 1999.

In 2000, he joined the MBA Western Cape as a full-time staff member and was appointed as the executive director. He also closed down trading operations on his own business.

"This was a difficult time for me but I was extremely fortunate to have ensured that my workforce enjoyed full social benefits during the years of business operation as the entire workforce was able to draw on their benefits after being laid off once trading operations ceased."

Rob is currently still the executive director of the MBA Western Cape and serves as the managing trustee for the commercial arm of the Belmont Square Trust. He also serves as a board member of the Master Builders Association of South Africa and is the current chairman of the Occupational Health and Safety committee.

His focus as executive director of the MBA Western Cape is ensuring services to members such as OH&S, contractual and legal, education and training, insurance, labour matters as well as industry matters. "My primary focus is to ensure the constitution of the MBA is upheld, which ensures that our members act in the best interest of the industry at all times. My position has been to encourage skills development and we are fortunate to have our own skills levy, which our members contribute to through the Building Industry Bargaining Council benefit scheme. Delivery of skills and quality of workmanship are passions of mine and I spend a considerable amount of time promoting contractor competency and contractor development for those persons who require knowledge in this regard."

He also served for many years on the Construction SETA council and resigned after "my efforts towards skills training were

constantly frustrated by persons with agendas that had nothing to do with the advancement of skills in the industry".

One of his major challenges has been to get companies from previously disadvantaged backgrounds to become members of the MBA. He says, "Many of them do not want to formalise their business activities as they will then be subject to the statutory regulatory rules and regulations that govern the industry. A huge challenge is to urge those contractors to be part of the formal industry and grow their businesses."

In terms of his own interest in his field of work, Rob cannot pinpoint a single aspect. "I am involved in every facet of the industry from practical advice to client and contractor administration requirements."

He encourages young entrants to the industry to keep learning as much as they possibly can. "There is much to learn and one can never know too much. Just being part of the industry is a daily learning experience, which makes one feel very fortunate. My advice to people is to conduct their business affairs in a just and ethical manner and ensure that the future of the industry remains in the hands of fully trained and competent persons."

Rob believes that the building industry is a tough one, but there have been people who have experienced the good with the bad and have triumphed – "this makes them a special calibre of person".

But Rob isn't all work. He took piano classes as child and during his adult years started a group that played "mainly 60s and oldie favourites, purely for social pleasure". He also does a lot of woodwork as he enjoys working with his hands and is currently the chairman of the Cape Town Woodworkers club.

As a youth he enjoyed sailing. However, these days he prefers sailing radio controlled yachts "I partake in the annual RC Laser championships, but have not achieved anything of note in this regard – I am working hard at this one," he says.

Rob has been married to Margie for 43 years and they have two children.

His feelings about being honoured by ASOCSA are "pure delight and appreciation".

"I am delighted and extremely honoured to be given this award and am grateful that, in my absence, my wife, Margie, is able to accept it on my behalf."

Rob is in Australia to investigate alternate sustainable building methods that could be used in the production of mass housing.