

Joe de Beer (Johannes Hendrikus de Beer)

Born 6 April 1938, passed away peacefully on 16 April 2022.

Joe de Beer was born in the Eastwood Nursing Home, Pretoria. His early schooling was in Pretoria. His family moved to Johannesburg where he attended high school, matriculating in 1955 at Helpmekaar High School for Boys. Joe majored in geology and geography at the University of the Witwatersrand, completing his BSc in 1959.

Joe commenced his working career in 1960 spending a year working for General Mining and Finance Corporation in the Free State gold fields before returning to Wits to complete an honours in Economic Geology in 1961. He returned to the world of mining, based at Stilfontein Mine where he worked underground. At this point, in 1964, he switched direction and, in 1965, completed an MSc in Engineering Geology with Dr Tony Brink as his supervisor. His thesis with hundreds of profiles around Johannesburg and his map, the Engineering Geological Map of Johannesburg, which resulted from his MSc is still used by many and was recently digitised (by Oliver Barker and SRK) so that it and the profiles could be made more widely available.

Having completed his MSc, Joe joined Ove Arup and Partners where he worked from 1965 to 1979. This period was important to him and he believed it launched him into a solid career in engineering geology. Joe worked in South Africa and spent time in London being trained there. During this period he worked as an engineering geologist on some notable projects in South Africa including:

- The Carlton Centre with its 30 m deep basement covering four city blocks,
- The Standard Bank Centre, a tall building also with a 30 m deep basement, was built over old stopes on the Main and South reefs (a first at the time),
- The Hillbrow Microwave tower which is a 269 m high concrete structure, and
- The Vaal Reefs South Reduction works which had complex foundations in dolomitic terrain.

During his time in the London office, Joe worked on investigations for hydro-electric projects in Madagascar as well as a number of projects in the UK. In April 1978, Joe was made a Partner of Arup. Joe left Arup to set up his own practice, JH de Beer and Associates but shortly thereafter, in 1981, joined Harold Weber to set up Weber De Beer and Associates. He was involved in some intensive work on dolomite in this period and also worked on the Lethabo and Majuba Power station projects.

Joe left Weber De Beer and Associates to join SRK in 1987 and at the same time moved his career into the field of Environmental Geology which he practiced in for the next 24 years. Joe believed that his background in mining geology and engineering geology provided an excellent foundation for working in environmental management. In this arena, he worked in

a large number of countries around the world, Russia, Yemen, Gabon, Madagascar, Eritrea, DRC and other parts of Africa too.

Joe was a committed member of the profession, believing strongly that it was important to put time into the professional bodies that supported engineering geology as it is our profession that gives us our living. Joe became involved in the South Africa Section of the Association of Engineering Geologists (AEG) in the 1970s in the years before SAIEG came into being. He was chairman of the group for some years and, as such, represented South Africa at Annual General Meetings in the USA in 1974, 1978 and 1984. Joe remained a member of AEG and in 2009 was offered Senior Emeritus Membership. In 2014 Joe was awarded SAIEG's Gold Medal in recognition of his contribution to engineering and environmental geology. It is perhaps appropriate to note that the first time this award was made, it was Joe and Oliver Barker, then chairman of SAIEG, who presented the award to Tony Brink who was in hospital in Cape Town and died very soon after.

Joe has left an indelible impression in the field of engineering geology and his passionate interest in data banking kept not only his own records in order but also those of the companies he worked in, including both Arups and Weber De Beer and Associates. Joe was involved in setting up the Johannesburg Geotechnical Data Bank and worked on this with Tony Brink, then at Wits, as well as Des Biggs of the City Engineer's Department. Joe was given time by Arups to work on this valuable project. This is perhaps the last functioning data bank in the country although it has to be said that it is not receiving the support from the city that it previously had. Joe compiled the contribution dealing with Johannesburg for the AEG Symposium on the Engineering Geology of Cities in South Africa in September 1981 in Pretoria. Given his involvement in the iconic Hillbrow Tower and Carlton Centre and his map of the city, this was indeed appropriate.

Joe married Paddy, a music teacher, on 17 December 1966 and they raised two children, Tamsen, born in November 1970 and Charl, born in August 1972. Paddy sadly contracted Alzheimer's disease and this took her life not long after Joe moved them to Cape town in August 2002.

Joe's partner in recent years, Anna Batchelor-Steyn has made many journeys around the world with him since he retired. These trips were often archaeological journeys as this was a growing area of interest to both of them. Joe clearly enjoyed these journeys into the past often seeking geological links and spoke much of them, memorably so in his speech at his Gold Award presentation.

Like any good geologist, Joe was an avid collector of rocks and succulents and would proudly show visitors to the family home in Bryanston the rockery near the entrance which, he claimed, had a rock from every site he'd worked on; it certainly looked like it! Joe was a total environmentalist. He was deeply informed about botany, loved indigenous trees, aloes and succulents and would rescue plants from sites if he deemed it appropriate!

Joe, you will be sorely missed by your family, friends and colleagues both in South Africa and in the USA.

Geniet jou lang rus, Joe