

"Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than the ones you did do. So, throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover." – Mark Twain

THE CITRUS INDUSTRY REMEMBERS A GIANT

Deon Joubert didn't just live, he thrived. He was known for his humour, energy and an incredible warmth that quite regularly turned strangers into lifelong friends. Colleagues in the citrus industry this past week recalled his passion, foresight, and the collaborative spirit that defined his career.

Justin Chadwick, the former CEO of the CGA, highlighted how Deon changed the trajectory of the CGA and the citrus industry with his understanding of the corridors of power in Brussels, his extensive network in Europe, his understanding of the shipping and port environment, his ability to conjure up market access strategies, and his ability to convince people.

Deon joined the CGA as its European Union Special Envoy in 2014 and was by then already a respected figure in agricultural circles having distinguished himself in both government and the private sector. Justin remarked that he and Deon travelled extensively together and that Deon never tired and was always thinking of the next step. He recalls the loud 'Hello Boeta' or 'Hello Young Man' heard across trade floors and in meetings – when Deon arrived, everybody knew he was there.

Hannes de Waal, CEO of the Sundays River Citrus Company, said Deon was simply a force of nature: "He was one of a kind and completely out of the box. Disruptive, but so charismatic that you just had to forgive him. His optimistic, can-do attitude and passion for our industry and people all over the world was clear. Whenever I phoned with a problem, he knew precisely who I should speak to." Hannes remarked that they used to joke that if Deon was on the phone, he was either organising a gathering at a restaurant or solving a farmer's problems – or doing both at the same time.

Gerrit van der Merwe, the Chairman of the CGA, said that Deon offered a very special thing: perspective, which is important, as growers sometimes get stuck in their environment – but Deon made everyone aware of what was happening abroad, of the bigger picture – constantly pushing one to see the industry within that context.

Leo Holt, the president of Holt Logistics, recalls Deon's distinctive character: "He brought common sense mixed with a very deep humanity to every single encounter with people. His background as a diplomat, as an economist, as a raconteur, was only trumped by his very deep love of family, in the broadest sense of that word. First and foremost, for his close family, but then also every person who was pulled into the trail of stardust that follows the type of star Deon was." Holt was always struck by the love Deon could instil in other people for the veld, the bush and the South African landscape. "He was an ambassador for citrus, throughout the world, and a proud South African, and he made people aware of the economic opportunity citrus offered many South Africans."

I myself cherish my memories of Deon. He had an immense knowledge of trade policy, export dynamics, and supply chain logistics. Few have had such a profound impact on the trajectory of the fruit industry in South Africa as he did. We will miss him dearly. Deon's charm and his talent of reducing highly complex situations down to its clear, understandable elements also made him beloved by the media who covered the citrus industry, and he was regularly seen on television or heard on radio proudly talking about South Africa's largest agricultural export industry.

Although the citrus industry mourns the immense loss of Deon's passing, it is also grateful for all the remarkable ways in which Deon enriched the sector and the lives of so many of his colleagues.