

## AWARDS, HONOURS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- Poynter Fund for Media Studies (1987 – 1988)
- Aurora Fellowship (1984 – 1988)
- Alec Brook Scholarship (1975 – 1976)

## DEFINING MOMENT

The first time he travelled overseas he saw the world outside apartheid South Africa and realised he had been denied opportunities to engage with people as equals and to express his opinions on politics and anything else without fear of repression.

## WHAT PEOPLE MIGHT NOT KNOW

"I like to do 'colouring-in', not just using adult colouring books but even children's books; I find it relaxing and at the same time expressive."

## ENSURING QUALITY IN ALL THINGS

Ships and spies carved a decade-long gap between Eugene Julies' first enrolment to study chemical engineering at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in 1975, and his eventual *cum laude* graduation overseas. "I was moderately successful at Wits until the Soweto Boycott in 1976 when I became involved in politics on campus." At that time, a comrade he had suspected of being a government spy had tried to recruit him to join the resistance movement. "Fortunately I did not join because that person indeed turned out to be an *impimpi*, responsible for the arrest of several of my university friends."

Nevertheless, he was forced to leave university. He joined the Unicorn Shipping line where he became a navigating cadet and was part of the first black group to enter into the officer corps, which had previously been reserved exclusively for whites. "There I spent four years before graduating with a government Certificate of Competency as Second Navigating Officer (Foreign Going), among other certificates."

After four years at sea for Unicorn Shipping, he got married and returned to South African shores in 1981. "This part of my life was one of the most interesting. If I had my way, I would still be doing it today," he says.

"However, getting married and the birth of my first child really made me understand that the world revolves around others too."

He found work as an assistant to a metallurgist in the automotive sector and learned the skills of photomicrography (photography using a microscope) and fracture analysis.

He also worked as a quality supervisor and while doing research one day he walked into the American Library in Cape Town and discovered an opportunity for a scholarship to study in the United States. He decided to take it and his studies in Florida opened his eyes to the possibilities available outside apartheid South Africa.

He obtained a BSc in Mechanical Engineering (*cum laude*) and was awarded a plaque for Best Engineering Student at the Florida Institute of Technology in 1988. He would go on to complete a Master's at the University of Florida, and he was awarded the University President's Award for Service to the Community.

## SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY

Part of service to the community for Julies meant helping engineering students at a community college with their instrumentation and measurement coursework while at the same time teaching instrumentation and measurement to engineering students at the university. While working for Aircraft Porous Media, where he designed fuel, lubricant and hydraulic filter units, he was also part of their 'Big Brother' programme to motivate scholars who were at risk of dropping out of school.

It was here that he did his first designs for aircraft parts, including a small lever for the B2 bomber and a small component for the Airbus A340. "It was amazing to have one of my designs actually manufactured and fitted to an aircraft – even if it was only a ten-millimetre long hinge pin. I felt as if all my training had finally come together to create something physical and concrete."

Julies registered as a professional engineer back in South Africa in 1992 and joined the Elektrode Maatskappy van Suid Afrika (EMSA) as head of Industrial



Engineering. Even at that level, he still offered tutoring to local matric students from time to time and he became a member of the Vereeniging Further Education and Training (FET) College. He would later consult at what is now Denel on the manufacturing of components for the Oryx and Rooivalk helicopters.

In 1998 he became the first black head of a science council, serving as President and Chief Executive Officer of the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS).

His career up to that point had shaped his thoughts on management, so he naturally jumped at the opportunity to take on the leadership of SABS. "I could finally put into practice what I always preached about management," he says. "At SABS we had a direct impact on people's lives through product safety testing and we provided the South African consumer with assurance of safety and quality." Julies pioneered the SABS's policy of supporting small businesses by performing tests on products at a 50% discount, and his work there earned him a place on the Technical Advisory Group of the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO), representing both South Africa and Australia.

His international influence included serving a period on the Executive Board of ISO, and extended as far as Afghanistan and other regions in the Middle East and North Africa, where he worked with the UN on standardisation and quality projects.

While at the SABS he served in many advisory roles locally and around the world including the South African Auditor Certification and Accreditation Association and the International Organisation for Standardisation Executive-Finance Committee.

He now lectures undergraduate students on a part-time basis at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in the Property Management and Quantity Surveying Programme. "It is always a joy when my students ask me to teach them again in the next semester because it shows that I must be doing something right," says Julies.

"It makes me proud to contribute to their education, as it is a confirmation that I am doing something of consequence."



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# Legends of South African Science II

**Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf)**

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