

## IN MEMORIAM: Jim Button

**D**r Jim Button, well-known leader in the fruit industry, died on February 12th after a courageous battle with cancer. He is outlived by his wife, Sylvia.

Dr Button's career in agriculture stretched over 52 years from 1956 to 2008. Jim was born on a farm in the Transvaal Highveld during 1942 and was schooled in White River and Johannesburg. He obtained all his degrees from the University of Natal.

He started his illustrious career at the SA Citrus Exchange in Nelspruit and London and went on to lecture at the University of Natal in Plant Physiology and Horticulture. During this time he spent a year doing his sabbatical in Israel and Germany.

In 1978 Dr Button was appointed as the first General Manager of SAPO and he resigned in 1985 to start Rosenhof Nursery and to join Topfruit as manager and director. He retired in 2008. During the period from 1985 to 2008 he served on:

- South African Apple and Pear Producers' Association's Board
- Deciduous Fruit Tree Nurserymen Association's Board
- Deciduous Plant Improvement Board
- Unifruco Cultivar Development Committee
- Deciduous Fruit Strategic Planning Committee
- Cape Pomological Association's Board
- International Pink Lady Association
- Managing Director of the International Pink Lady Association
- Executive Director of Zaiger SA for the last 10 years

Dr Button received the first OHS Reinecke Industry Leader Award during the Deciduous Fruit Industry's annual Gala Evening in September 2011. The Deciduous Fruit Industries and ARC Infruitec-Nietvoorbij annually reward an industry leader who had over a long period excelled in agriculture and more specific the deciduous fruit environment.

On a more personal note, Peter Dall, friend and colleague, wrote: "Jim was personally known to me for more than thirty years, from the early days of SAPO through Rosenhof Nursery and the International Pink Lady Alliance. Jim was a stalwart in the industry and he will be sorely missed, his contributions to new variety development and plant improvement were tremendous and in his humble, modest way, no one really knew how much he contributed to the South African Plant Improvement seeing new variety procurement. We have Jim to thank for the many new varieties we have available in the industry today. His worldwide network of contacts with plant improvement organizations and breeders is tremendous but he always put the South African Deciduous Fruit Industry before himself. My close working relationship with Jim started when the International Pink Lady Alliance was formed in 2002 with myself as Chairman and Jim as General Manager of the International Pink Lady Alliance. Jim was one of the founding fathers of the International Pink Lady Alliance and sacrificed a lot to make sure that South Africa was at the forefront of IPLA development. Jim's passion for the industry was very infectious and he stimulated many a

person to give of themselves for the industry. He was a man of incredible integrity, loyalty and honesty. He will be sorely missed in the industry and leaves a huge vacuum, especially in the plant improvement new variety development, a sphere of the industry."

In a tribute at Jim's funeral, Lynnell Brandt, a friend, was quoted: "Jim was instrumental in the formation of the Associated International Group of Nurseries (AIGN). This is an international group of people that have members in Northern and Southern Europe, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, United States, New Zealand, Australia, China, South Korea and of course South Africa. Jim was one of the founding members and helped through the formative years where he was the company's Chief Operating Officer. Jim did a lot of ground-breaking exploratory work in China. He made several trips to China where he made many acquaintances who all called him friend. He assisted and instructed others and the result was AIGN now has a vital member and contact in China.

"Where ever Jim travelled, people always welcomed him with genuine enthusiasm. Jim always put you at ease and you were always better off for his visit. Jim was the perfect ambassador for the South African industry to so many places in the world.

Peter Allderman says: "The thing about Jim that will be remembered by most people is his hospitality and warmth that he conveyed. This made him exactly the right person to link up with people from around the world, many of whom became his friends in his endeavour to obtain new varieties for the purpose of making them available to the local industry in the event they were adapted to our conditions. He had an encyclopaedic knowledge about new varieties and breeders from around the world."

Another tribute read: "Few people in the international horticultural world have made the outstanding contribution that Jim has. He is without a doubt one of the great horticultural thinkers of our time. To spend a day with Jim Button was like absorbing an encyclopaedia full of fruit growing knowledge. Specifically his passion for new varieties and thinking through a commercial pathway to success was trailblazing stuff. Nothing highfalutin, just a good thought train, keen eyes of observation, a vision of what could be achieved and the enthusiasm and passion to make it all happen – produced a winning formula.

"An inevitable consequence of the industry that we are in is that he has started a lot more than he could ever have achieved in his lifetime. Generations to come will benefit from the platform he has laid down. In saying farewell to this great man it is fitting to remind ourselves what he leaves behind. And what he leaves behind are thousands of trees that he produced – trees that really are his living headstones, trees that will live for years to come. The fruit industry would like to honour his memory.

