



Lifetime Achievement Award in honour of Helen Suzman

MEYER KAHN

MEYER KAHN THE PHILANTHROPIST

Kahn is a famously humble man who has always kept his philanthropic activities and community involvement very much to himself. But he has “an absolute care for people, all people,” says Rabbi David Masinter. “You always walk away from him feeling better than when you walked in,” says R. Masinter, adding that Kahn is a “giant of man who is exceptionally humble.”

His three most well documented philanthropic contributions to have been: Chabad’s Miracle Drive; his passionate contribution to SA society; and his unrelenting support for Israel.

MIRACLE DRIVE: In 1988, says Rabbi Masinter, Chabad had financial difficulty and was fighting for its survival. Masinter, who had never met Kahn before, called him to help. Kahn immediately rose to the challenge. While Kahn was not a Chabadnik himself (he remains a member of West Street Shul to this day), R. Masinter says Kahn “saw a Jewish institution in deep trouble, it wasn’t about philosophy, it was simply about a Jewish organisation, or people, in trouble,” he says.

Chabad’s Miracle Drive was born – with Kahn as its chair. “He’d get involved to fix the machine and give direction, he said he would put his name to it, here was the CEO of one of the biggest corporations in SA,” says Masinter, “his name gave it status.” From the inception of the first Miracle Drive in 1989, Kahn was its Honorary Chairman, until 1997 when he took his sabbatical as SAPS CEO. Thereafter he returned as President, a position he still holds.

SOUTH AFRICA: Kahn’s sabbatical as CEO of SAPS -0 putting his name on the line for the police - is detailed above. “That’s how he is,” says Masinter. “He supports all South African causes in this way. He can’t say no.”

Apart from his personal philanthropy to SA causes directly, says R. Masinter, Meyer Kahn’s contribution to Miracle Drive also reached the community at large. “It services the entire Jewish community and extends beyond into the wider South African society,” he says.

ISRAEL: While Kahn’s unrelenting personal support for Israel is the stuff of legend, financially, nobody knows, says Masinter. That’s the sort of Kahn is, he says: “Generosity of spirit, not a boastful person, being able to save a life, save a world, that is what matters to him.

“He is just the ordinary boy from Brits, he cares deeply about people, a humble man who is observant and deeply traditional,” says Rabbi Masinter of his mentor.

Read more about Meyer Kahn on sajr.co.za/Achievers

Meyer Kahn may be best known to the world at large as the CEO and later Chairman of SABMiller Plc. But to his community, he was so very much more.

Jacob Meyer Kahn, BA (Law), MBA (UP), DCom (hc), SOE, served as Group MD of SABMiller PLC (formerly SA Breweries) from 1981 to 2012 and as Executive Chairman from 1990 to 2012.

Kahn joined the SAB group in 1966 and occupied executive positions in a number of their retail interests. In 1977, he was CEO of the OK Group. Among his notable business awards are: one of SA’s five Top Businessmen (1983); Marketing Man of the Year (1987); Business Manager of the Year (1990); Wits Award for Business Excellence (1991); Professor Extraordinaire, Pretoria University (1989); The SA Police Star for Outstanding Service (SOE) (2000); and MBA (honorary doctorate in Commerce), Wits, (1990).

At the pinnacle of his career, and at the behest of then-President Nelson Mandela, Meyer Kahn commenced a two-year sabbatical secondment to the SA Police Service as its CEO in 1997.

In April 2012, SABMiller Plc announced with regret that after 46 years of service Kahn would retire as Chairman, effective from the year’s AGM in July, and would be succeeded by then-CEO Graham Mackay.

John Manser, who was Senior Independent Non-Executive Director and Chairman of the Audit Committee at the time (and who subsequently added Deputy Chairman of the board to his duties), said at the time that “The senior management team at SABMiller has been one of the most stable and consistent in the FTSE 100, with the Chairman and Chief Executive being amongst the longest serving in their respective posts. Under Meyer Kahn’s extraordinary leadership, both as group managing director and latterly as Chairman, the Group has grown from its South African roots to become one of the world’s largest and most respected brewers. The Group and its shareholders owe a huge debt to Meyer and to the executives whom he has developed and who have worked so closely with him over his years at the helm.”