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Integrity PERSONALISED
INNOVATION Individuality
CREATIVE DYNAMIC
Adaptability



HONOURING 50 YEARS

Cox Yeats celebrates 50 years since opening its doors as an innovative, personalised Durban-based law firm. **Nicola Jenvey** spoke with managing partner Michael Jackson about the years behind and those lying ahead

Things change in 50 years – people come and go; cities grow and technology constantly advances. Yet, some things also remain constant – and it is these things that can be the most powerful.

When Graham Cox launched his law firm in 1964, it was on the core beliefs of integrity and individual care for clients; principles to which Jeremy Yeats was also drawn when joining him soon thereafter.

“It is by keeping these beliefs at the core of the business and attracting more people through the same vision, that the firm has continued to grow and flourish. Today, Cox Yeats is among the country’s leading legal firms with a national reach, and although we have grown substantially, the founding principles remain strong,” Jackson says.

He says these are the fundamental elements of the firm’s DNA, and that in understanding them emerges a picture not only of why Cox Yeats has been successful, but also how by living them, the future was assured for another 50 years as exciting and inspiring as those already passed.

Jackson recognises the legal landscape has dramatically changed. Regional law firms have been acquired and consolidated into large national and international firms. Technology has changed the way

MANAGING PARTNERS

Left: Managing partners past and present: Roger Green, Michael Jackson and Graham Cox, and below, Graham Cox with Paul Valayudum

professionals practice, but in accommodating these moves, Cox Yeats has adopted several strategies centred on attracting and retaining the best legal minds.

This means creating a culture of freedom and independence; placing each professional within a team to maximise their potential and allowing each person within that team to focus on enhancing their specialisation. The approach has reduced the barriers to accelerated professional growth and enhanced expertise within the firm. This approach also enables the firm to offer specialised services regionally which many companies with local headquarters prefer.

That the firm’s articled clerks have received a sound and varied training is borne out by two of them later becoming esteemed South African judges – Hilary Squires and Thabani Jali.

Also, Paul Valayudum – who started as an office helper to Graham Cox back in 1964 – today celebrates 50 years of loyal service with the firm.

Jackson says in learning to identify and strictly adhere to the



firm’s vision, Cox Yeats has built a sound platform from which to shape its future. Decisions are evaluated against the core values and purpose, as history has shown compromising on this has always resulted in bad decision-making.

“Within this framework is the willingness to remain flexible and continuously assess and re-assess the legal environment and our strategy,” he says.

However, it has always been the intention to keep Cox Yeats an independent firm and to operate as a caring, professional practice rather than a business. In 2007 and 2011 it was rated as the Best Small Legal Practice in South Africa – and in the intervening years, always occupied one of the three top places. More recently, Cox Yeats was the proud recipient of the Client Choice Award 2014.