

## Fifty years of green gardening success

This year, the Stodel Nurseries in Cape Town celebrate 50 years of providing plants, advice and a unique guarantee to the garden-loving public. Started by Robert Stodel as the first one-stop gardening retail centre in South Africa, he offered affordable plants and the guarantee, that if a plant died, the buyer could return it.



Above: Stodels' humble beginnings.

Starting from a garage in Plumstead, he sold flower bulbs imported from Holland on the Grand Parade and from door-to-door, surviving on 'a couple of apples and a pint of milk a day'. In the early 60s, the Director of the Consumer Council requested him to assist in starting and heading up the National Direct Mail Organisation and eliminating dishonest trading from the industry. The result was the formation of the South African Mail Order Association now the Direct Sales' Association of which he was chairman for 15 years.

In 1968, he opened the first one-stop retail garden centre in Kenilworth, Stodels Bellville in 1973, 2005, Milnerton and in 2012, in Constantia.

He initiated the idea of Arbor Day in South Africa, with his greatest award, the emergence of patches of green in previous desolated areas in greater Cape Town. He believes strongly in the words of Cecil John Rhodes, "Whoever has the foresight to plant trees is creating a monument to himself and provides capital for his successors while the gain for posterity is incalculable."

### Highlights

A peace Garden for Nelson Mandela was initiated and created by Stodels at the Trauma Centre in District Six where he planted trees of peace with Hilary Clinton, Archbishop Tutu, Prince Haakon from Norway and Prince Albert of Monaco. Other heads of state and dignitaries included Queen Elizabeth II. President FW de Klerk, Professor Kader Asmal and Govan Mbeki, the President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, Queen Margrethe II from Denmark and King Carl XV of Sweden.

He gave away around 400 000 trees in 20 years to the public. When you take into consideration that one tree provides oxygen for a family of four for a lifetime, there are 1.6 million people breathing easier because of him.

### Awards and accolades

Stodel was awarded the following business accolades:

- The Green Ribbon Award for the best nursery in South Africa.

- The first nurseryman in South Africa to receive Marketer of the Year - an award of Excellence in Marketing from the Institute of Marketing Management.
- In 1998 the prestigious South African Nurserymen's Association Gold Medal Award for meritorious service to Horticulture in South Africa.

He and the business received a number of awards and accolades over the years for the contribution to the greening of the environment including:

- From the Fairest Cape,
- the Mayor (a number of times),
- The Board of the Botanical Institute,
- the Department of Environment,
- The Organ Donor Foundation,
- the Cape Technikon,
- The South African Nurserymen's Association,
- The Round Table of South Africa.

The Stodels Rose was also named after him for his contribution to the horticultural industry.

Not to mention the embossed letter from Nelson Mandela, President of South Africa, saying, "Thank you very much for the beautiful Yellowwood tree you sent me on Arbor Day. I will certainly find a special place in my garden and look forward to watching it grow. I wish to commend your efforts to promote awareness of trees in the environment."

## Graceful retirement, recognition



Father and son, Robert and Nick Stodel

In 2007, he handed the company over to his son, Nick. Robert Stodel says, "I definitely feel after close on 50 years, it's time that young energetic blood with new ideas and technology take the company much further."

It is fitting tribute that Nick Stodel, as president of the South African Nurserymen's Association, presented his father with the President's Award, which is handed out to that person who has offered the most support to the president during his term in office.

Nick Stodel says, "During my term as president, I was very lucky to have one particular person support me, allowing me to get on with my SANA work, knowing that he would step in when I needed help at the business. Without his support and guidance, it would not have been possible for me to have the honour to stand as president of SANA. In fact, there are very many opportunities in life that I recognise I would not have had, if it were not for his hard work and sacrifice. For that reason, this year please indulge me in allowing me to give the President's Award to my father, Robert Stodel."