

*The University's Council has approved the use of a donation made by Mr Richard Sonnenberg in 1987 for technology transfer activities, as the nucleus to initiate a self-sustaining (evergreen) seed fund that will be known as the **UCT Evergreen Fund**. The current balance of the donation is in the order of R2 million.*

Richard Sonnenberg – David Sonnenberg Describes his Father

By Cynthia Best, RCIPS

Richard Sonnenberg was the co-founder of Woolworths, along with his father, Max, a Member Parliament in the Smuts Government. Together, father and son started Woolworths in Cape Town in 1931. In 1942, Max bought the Diemersfontein fruit farm in Wellington as a family retreat. Diemersfontein has remained in the Sonnenberg family and become a top wine farm under Richard's son David and his wife Susan.

David Sonnenberg describes his father:

"My father was by nature quite a creative man albeit well couched in business practice. He was a chartered accountant by training.

He had a special affection for the University of Cape Town - he was a member of the UCT Council and sat on the UCT Council Executive. His interest stemmed from his early involvement in University affairs as far back as the days when Sir Richard Luyt was Vice Chancellor from 1967 to 1980.

In recognition of his efforts, he received an Honorary Doctorate in Economic Sciences from UCT in 1983, followed by an Honorary Fellowship from Tel Aviv University in the following year.



He was a "mover and shaker" and got things done. In a sense he could be described as a wistful "non-scientist" and liked above all to see the application of ideas out into the wider economy. He felt that this would be a better way to bring innovation to the market place and he also wanted his donation to provide a "good will" stimulus to the University and its academics. He felt there should be a reward flowing back to the academics and that the University would thus be able to leverage off his donation and raise its own funding off that base. The Registrar still remembers how Richard Sonnenberg simply walked into the office of then Vice Chancellor Dr Stuart Saunders and calmly handed over a cheque.

He loved creating things. During his career in retail, he filed his own patent on a sunblind mechanism and the family used to jokingly call him "The Inventor". He practised what he preached and invented all sorts of funny knick-knacks. For

example, we grew almond trees; he realized that shaking the tree was quicker than picking by hand, so he invented his own tree-shaker cum blanket harvester.

He also invented a design for an automated fruit picking device and a number of other good common-sense applications. It was his passion and gave him much pleasure, because it had its roots in his early creative instincts. He always had an eye for improved efficiency.

This was his private passion – it was what he believed in. One of his formative influences was the beginnings of era of early industrial parks and the concept of industrial innovation on the applied side. He wanted to play his part in making this happen.