

Johann Rupert receive Stellenbosch University's prestigious Pro Bene Merito Award

2019-11-19

The Award

Stellenbosch University (SU) awards its PRO BENE MERITO Award – in the form of a medal and certificate – under very special circumstances for exceptional service at local or international level. “Service” could include many things, amongst others, the promotion of SU’s interests, especially in the academic community and the institutional community connected to the academy; the creation of opportunities for studying and research for SU staff and students over a longer period; the promotion of academic relations between universities; and the promotion of the general interests of SU and/or the broader society, in the context of South Africa and globally in a wide range of fields.

The Recipient

Raised in Stellenbosch as the eldest son of the South African business tycoon the late Dr Anton Rupert and the late Mrs Huberte Rupert, Johann Rupert studied Company Law and Economics at SU. He soon spread his wings and served his business apprenticeship in New York for five years, before returning to South Africa in 1979. During that year, he founded Rand Merchant Bank (RMB), and started the Small Business Development Corporation (now known as Business Partners), which subsequently created around 500 000 jobs in South Africa.

Dr Rupert **founded, merged and restructured various leading companies**, and **served in a leadership capacity in several institutions**, ranging from the *Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns* to the Daimler Chrysler International Advisory Board and Gold Fields South Africa. In 1984 he successfully presided over a merger between RMB and Rand Consolidated Investments before joining his father’s Rembrandt Group, of which he later became chairman. In 1988 he formed the Swiss-based luxury goods company Richemont, followed in 2000 by venture capital companies Remgro and Venfin. He also took ownership of the L’Ormarins wine estate from his late brother Antonij, and developed it in his honour.

Dr Rupert holds **three honorary doctorate degrees**, one in Economics from SU, awarded in 2004; one in Commerce from the then Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (currently the Nelson Mandela University), awarded in 2008; and one in Law from the University of St Andrews, Scotland, awarded in 2010. His outstanding achievements in business leadership and his vision have earned him **numerous other local and international awards**.

Amongst others, he was chosen in 1992 as one of *200 Global Leaders of Tomorrow* by the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, and went on to be chosen three times as *Most Influential Leader in South Africa* by the top 100 listed companies in South Africa; elected as *Businessman of the Year* by the Sunday Times (twice), Die Burger and the Cape Town Chamber of Commerce respectively. He was also the recipient of the prestigious Wits Business School’s *Management Excellence Award* for 2009. In the same year, he also received the *International Wine Entrepreneur of the Year Award*, presented in Dusseldorf, Germany, and was appointed *Officier* of the French *Ordre National de la Légion d’Honneur* by the President of the French Republic. More recently in September 2018, he was awarded the Appeal of

Conscience Award of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, an interfaith coalition of business and religious leaders that promotes peace, tolerance and ethnic conflict resolution, in recognition of his philanthropy and work with the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund. He was introduced at this event by former US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger.

A **sports lover** and former cricketer, Dr Rupert is a co-founder of the Sports Science Institute at the University of Cape Town. He played an instrumental role in the establishment of the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation, which funds 65 projects globally, and benefits underprivileged children. He also served as chairman of the South African PGA Tour and the South African Golf Development Board.

Dr Rupert is also a **tireless advocate for the conservation and protection of the environment and of heritage treasures**. Dr Rupert invests heavily in his late father's home town of Graaff-Reinet, where he has had almost all of the historic buildings in the town refurbished. He funds a hospitality academy that annually trains hundreds of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds for a career in tourism, supports local schools with the upgrading of infrastructure and provides daily meals to hundreds. In addition to conserving about 29 500ha in the Graaff-Reinet area, his family foundation has bought and donated additional land to the South African National Parks Board. He is also chairman of the Peace Parks Foundation, which supports the creation of trans-frontier conservation areas. In recent years, Dr Rupert has been a vocal opponent of plans to allow fracking in the Karoo.

After fire destroyed 53 homes and eight other buildings in the historical Moravian mission station, Wupperthal, on 30 December 2018, causing more than R20 million in damages, Dr Rupert readily offered his assistance to residents in the rebuilding process.

Dr Rupert is completing his second and last five-year term as the fourteenth **Chancellor** of Stellenbosch University (SU) this year, having been reappointed by the University Council in December 2014. He has held this position since November 2009, when he was elected by an electoral college to succeed Dr Frederik van Zyl Slabbert. The Chancellor is the ceremonial head of the University and is elected according to the Statute of the University. The Chancellor awards degrees in the name of the University at graduation ceremonies, and also performs other ceremonial duties. Dr Rupert has served SU as Chancellor with great passion and distinction for the last ten years.

He has also over the years been a **major benefactor** of the University, funding initiatives in various areas of interest, including viticulture, law, sport, education, music and conservation. Dr Rupert's contribution towards the community of Stellenbosch extends much wider than only the University. In December 2018 Dr Rupert handed over 326 title deeds to new homeowners in Kayamandi, part of 10 000 sponsored by Dr Rupert's NGO, The Reinet Foundation in partnership with the Free Market Foundation. It can in truth be said that the town of Stellenbosch, including the University, has benefited enormously over the years from Dr Rupert's generosity.

In addition to being Chancellor and major benefactor, Dr Rupert serves as an important **ambassador** for Stellenbosch University, both nationally and internationally. The University has over the years greatly benefited from his facilitation and networks. He has opened doors for Stellenbosch University that has helped the University significantly towards realising its vision to be Africa's leading research-intensive university, globally recognised as excellent, inclusive and innovative, where we advance knowledge in the service of society.

Commendation

Stellenbosch University commends this distinguished South African business leader, entrepreneur, conservationist and philanthropist by conferring its prestigious Pro Bene Merito Award on **Johann Peter Rupert** for his exceptional service in the promotion of the general interests of SU and the broader society, in South Africa and internationally.