

In Memoriam

MICHAEL JOHN VERSFELD

22 April 1942 – 19 August 2023



Michael John Versfeld was born in Barberton and then attended primary school in Windhoek, Namibia, before moving to Bishops in Rondebosch, Cape Town for his high schooling, where he finished in 1960. Known to all as Mick, he married Dorelle Janette Jamneck in 1967 and they had a daughter Ellie (now Courts). He was remarried in 1975 to Cherry Momburg and they had two children – John William and Karen Versfeld.

In 1961 Mick went to Natal University to complete his 1st year of Veterinary course. He then qualified from Onderstepoort in 1966, where he initially was a State Veterinarian in Pretoria and also a Junior Lecturer in Gynaecology at the Faculty. He then went into private practice in Bredasdorp and Green Point, Cape Town and then Worcester in June 1977, where he built a successful three-man mixed rural practice. When he left private practice, he entered the poultry industry where he was appointed as Production Veterinarian to Rainbow Farms in Worcester in March 1986. Later, he was transferred to Natal in the same capacity. In April 1994, he moved from Rainbow Farms to National Chicks as Group Veterinarian, which position he held until 2001. National Chicks were supplying 1,5 million broilers into the South African broiler market a year. During this period, Mick was also a Consultant Veterinarian in poultry production in Africa and the UAE. In 2001, he joined Intervet as the Business Manager for Pigs and Poultry where a lot of the work involved technical support of the Intervet clients in both the pig and poultry industries. In October 2005, he decided to become an independent private Poultry Consultant and returned to the Western Cape, which position he held until he tragically experienced a stroke. Subsequently, he sadly deteriorated and moved to the Fairtrees Retirement Village in Durbanville, Cape Town. Mick's contribution to the poultry industry was substantial in the form of being involved in the production and health of breeders and chicks. He was involved in numerous

poultry vaccine trials, and he was particularly involved in training the principles of basic hygiene and its monitoring, for broiler health control, supervision of processing plants slaughtering 650 000 per week, for the introduction of a Salmonella monitoring programme for the breeder and broiler farms and the Hatchery and Processing plants. Further involvement was a H.A.C.C.P. system instituted in the processing plant to monitor shelf life and to check for Coccidiosis and Gizzard erosion lesions. During his career he was a member of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, he was a founder member of the SAVA Livestock Health and Production Group in the Western Cape, was elected as a Federal Councillor of SAVA in 2002 and then became a Chairman of the Finance Committee from 2003 to 2005. He was also Vice-Chairperson of the Education Committee. He had multiple interests in that he was a Life Member of the Overhex Farmers Association as well as President of the Rotary Club in Worcester. He was awarded the Boswell Award by SAVA in May 2007.

Mick was an active sports person – he participated at Bishops in Rugby, Squash, Cross country and Athletics. At the universities, he continued participating in Rugby, Squash and Cross country. Mick was an outdoorsman and loved camping and 4x4 driving, hunting, and cray fishing on the West Coast of the Cape. While a practitioner in Worcester in 1985, he had the very unusual experience of treating a young female leopard who had been injured in a road accident in Du Toit's Kloof Pass. He spent a substantial period of time together with his good friend Geoff Dyer and Graville and Louie Ruddock rehabilitating the six-month-old female leopard. She was eventually, after 379 days in care, set free at the age of 19 months. For a short period, her progress was tracked by a collar which had been fitted. This whole incident was publicized by the public media at the time (The Paarl Post, The Argus, Die Burger, Prime Time, Vet News) and was the topic covered in the "In a day of..." series as "A day in the life of a South African Veterinarian" because of the importance of the endangered Cape Leopards and because of his association with the Leopard Conservation Project Fund. This story is described in detail in the book "Against the Odds – The Remarkable Story of Leopards at the Cape". The veterinary profession made TV history when the Western Cape vet was featured on the longest time slot yet allocated to a single report in the prestigious national Prime Time programme, when Dr Mick Versfeld was interviewed regarding the darting, treatment and survival prospects of the young leopard found injured near Du Toit's Kloof. The veterinary profession will be poorer with his passing but richer due to his contributions and achievements. His family can be proud of a man who had many friends in his profession and who will be fondly remembered. We wish to sincerely thank the family for providing all the information included in this tribute.

Gareth Bath