Awards

The following awards were made:

2005 SAICE GOLD MEDAL AWARD: Allyson Lawless

The SAICE's Gold Medal was awarded to Allyson Lawless, who has become very well known in the South African civil engineering environment, as well as in national and local government circles.

Allyson was born in Durban and attended Maritzburg Girls High School, where, at a crucial point in her life, she was advised to 'not become an engineer', since that was deemed to be a man's world. Fortunately Allyson did not listen to this advice and graduated from Natal University in 1973. She became a student member of SAICE in 1972, a graduate member in 1974, a member in 1980, a fellow in 1999, and then, in 2000, the first SAICE lady president.

Her versatility ranges from structural engineering to municipal services, from leader in SAICE professional matters to a deep-seated drive to assist and help others in many ways. Her testimony is there for all to see:

- SAICE president 2000, focusing on 'Making a difference', for which she became known as the MAD president
- Leading a delegation to the 150th Anniversary ASCE Convention in Washington and chairing a session on 'Why the world needs Africa'
- Reaching out to government ministers and government structures and leading many delegations in this regard
- Reaching out far and wide during the 2003 SAICE Centenary Celebrations
- Directing the SAICE Brochure of 2003
- Receiving one of the nine prestigious awards of the SAICE Projects of the Century in 2003. Allyson Lawless's pioneering civil engineering software had made her an engineering household name over the years
- Featuring as a role model in the SAICE book Foundation for the future
- She has been and still is the promoter, driver, facilitator and manager of numerous capacity-building programmes
- Researching Numbers and needs. This well-received civil engineering research and recommendation project was one of the biggest projects she had ever handled

Allyson Lawless: a worthy recipient.

HONORARY FELLOWSHIP 2006: Professor Will Alexander

SAICE conferred an honorary fellowship on William J R Alexander, fondly known to most of us as Prof Will. Will Alexander decided to become a civil engineer while still at school, but his tertiary education was interrupted by World War II, during which time he served in North Africa and Italy as a member of the South African Engineering Corps, gaining invaluable experience in practical engineering, particularly the use of explosives.

After the war he resumed his studies and graduated from the University of the Witwatersrand in 1949. He joined the Department of Irrigation, where he displayed not only a practical aptitude for dam building and canal construction, but also an increasing awareness of the need for research as he developed better hydrological methods to replace traditional empirical formulae. Eventually his experience and expertise led to his appointment as resident engineer in charge of the construction of the enormously complex Orange-Fish Tunnel, which diverts water from the Orange River to various dams and irrigation schemes in the Eastern Cape. This is still the longest continuous tunnel in the world, and its construction required the coordination of several consulting engineering firms and three major contracting consortiums, as well as extremely detailed decisions on construction techniques. Will Alexander performed this task with distinction, and included several of his own innovative features.

He was then promoted to Chief of the Division of Hydrology, where, after further studies, he established a vibrant research team that sought improved knowledge of rainfall patterns, river flow and climate change, often questioning existing beliefs.

When he retired from the
PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

In his address, Sam Amod focused on the ‘Ecology of Construction’ after giving a fascinating account of the history of the metre, currently the world’s (almost) universal standard of measure.

Ecological sustainability

Sam pointed out that, as an industry, we must strive for continuous improvement, while understanding that our role in society cannot continue to be purely as purveyors of technology. ‘As the boundaries between professions become increasingly blurred and the public better informed, engineering professionals are required to interact at a human, not technical, level and to persuade, not simply specify. It is no longer sufficient for the technical expert to explain by saying “because it is so…”’.

Sam asked how, if poverty and prosperity were both properties of an ecological system, we would characterise a healthy and sustainable construction ecology. ‘We are obliged to fundamentally review our patterns of work and organisation to address the challenges of poverty and inequality. Procurement, transformation, human and organisational development must turn away from a purely competitive and compliant mindset to the paradigm of ecological sustainability characterised by cooperation and mutual development.’

In closing, Sam paraphrased the words of his holiness Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama: ‘Just as the world of business has been paying renewed attention to ethics, the world of [engineering] would benefit from more deeply considering the implications of its own work. [Engineers] should be more than technically adept; they should be mindful of their own motivation and the larger goal of what they do: the betterment of humanity.’

The full text of Sam Amod’s presidential address can be found on the SAICE website: www.civils.org.za/pa2006.pdf