



At the 1990 5th TAPPSA biennial conference, Chris represented what was then known as the Association of Pulp, Paper and Board Manufacturers (APPBM) as he gave a talk entitled "Why is kraft so crafty?".

Attending what was then the TAPPSA Transvaal's 1990 Swazi Conference, where the "Out of Africa" theme was much enjoyed by all



Handing out prizes at the 2005 TAPPSA Berg Conference

A FOND FAREWELL TO OUR CHAIRMAN

After serving on the TAPPSA Executive Committee in some form or other for the past 25 years, Chris MacDonald has stepped down as the TAPPSA Chairman to enjoy a well-deserved break and a restful retirement. In his own words, Chris describes his career and experiences within our industry:

I started working at Sappi Enstra Mill in January 1974, having just completed a degree in Chemical Engineering at UCT. Joining Sappi was quite fortuitous as I was actually attending an interview with the Platinum Refinery down the road but failed a heavy metal allergy test. The personnel manager [no HR in those days] said Sappi down the road are looking for chemical engineers. My cousin, Sandy Blades of Mondi repute, had worked at Enstra and so I thought why not. The interview was at 16:30 on a Friday afternoon with the General Manager, Mr Griffiths [who I later learned was called Patatkop behind his back because he was totally bald], the Personnel Manager and the Pulp Production Manager, Skimmel Wiese. The following morning, back in Cape Town, I received an offer of employment as a process trainee for the princely sum of R400 a month. The decision had been made at the interview, and acted on directly afterwards. Things have changed.

So that January, I began my learning experience in the pulp and paper industry in the Chemical Section at Enstra, making chlorine, caustic soda, calcium hypochlorite and chlorine dioxide for the bleach plant which was bleaching two sequences, hardwood on ODED and softwood on CEHDED. I worked shift in the first eight months which suited me fine as I could follow the British Lions tour when they destroyed the Springboks in that year. All meetings started with a discussion on rugby [in season].

I soon progressed to process engineer, production superintendent and technical superintendent for the pulp [or South Side] of the mill. Under the mentorship of Leon Smith who was the most knowledgeable pulp and paper person I ever met, I was learning fast. In those days R&D was on the Enstra site with such technical experts as Henry Myburgh, Ella Steyn and EJ Smith. In addition, the whole Sappi Technical Library was on the Enstra site. During my time at Enstra the use of chlorine in bleaching was terminated and all pulp was produced ODED, way ahead of the rest of the world. A new bleach plant and ClO₂ generator were installed and the Kraft recovery process was decommissioned and replaced with a Copeland reactor [energy was really cheap]. Lon Wayburne, the then Technical Director of Sappi, was inspirational during this period.

In 1981, for personal reasons, I left Sappi and started working in the ethanol industry in Durban for five years. This is also a fascinating business but not as diverse as pulp and paper. In June 1987, I re-joined the paper industry as the Head of the Pulp and Paper school at Technikon Natal. At the same time I was co-opted onto the National Committee of TAPPSA and attended my first of twenty five "Berg" conferences.

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..... ASSOCIATION NEWS

At the Technikon, I learned much more about the industry than any student and I hope I imparted good knowledge to all the students I encountered there, about 230 of them. They are working in all mills in SA and all over the world and most of them have done very well.

At the end of 1999, the management of the technikon, then the Durban Institute of Technology, was making it very difficult to engage in the running of a very effective and profitable department. In January 2000, I met Gavin Travers and he offered me a position as Paper Manager at Stanger which I fulfilled for four years, including a major machine rebuild, before returning to the "south side" and back to pulping. Back at the pulp mill, the bleach sequence was CEH and it was necessary to change away from chlorine, so based on technology evaluated by Evonik and confirmed by Sappi Technology Centre, the process was converted to DqEpP in 2005, the last mill in Sappi to move away from chlorine bleaching, twenty seven years after Enstra.

My career in the industry has been focused on technology and production more than management [and I have always found that to be a sanctuary away from the madness of modern day corporate management] but manage one has to do; I always based my decisions on science, common sense and fairness.

Back to Tappsa, as mentioned earlier, I joined Tappsa in 1987 on the National Executive Committee. In those days Tappsa was run by dedicated mill people in their spare time. The organising of conferences, call for papers, vetting papers, setting up the programme, booking venues, organising conference facilities was all done by the committee. The magazine, Paper SA, was published by George Warman Publications.

A snippet from the TAPPSA Journal in which Chris is captured mingling with delegates at the 2000 TAPPSA Conference.



Chris Macdonald, Sappi Stanger, seen with Lazare Etiegni of Kenya's Moi University.



Mike Dennis (Nampak Tissue), Chris Macdonald, (Sappi Stanger) and Jack Steyn (Nampak Tissue).

I was Tappsa Treasurer for five years from 1996 to 2000; this meant all subscriptions, the costs of the new National Organiser and all conference financing. In 2000, Tappsa became more commercial and set up a national office and handed finance to an accountant with vetting by the Treasurer. When Roger Sobotker suddenly resigned from the industry in 2006, I stepped into the Chairman role. It has been a very trying time for the industry with severe manpower reductions, very competitive imports and significant machine closures, yet Tappsa has managed to grow. I retired at the end of 2011.

I have greatly enjoyed my years with the industry and with Tappsa and have managed to make many incredible friends [and no doubt some enemies]. I have learned everything I know about the industry from all these people and am very grateful for that. In 2004 I graduated cum laude with a Masters Degree in Chemical Engineering, based on a thesis regarding water usage in the industry.

Having been in "production" for a good part of my working life, it is a pleasure not having the phone ring at night and not worrying about a Copeland or a recovery furnace or a CIO₂ generator. But I do miss the challenges. I have immensely enjoyed my associations with Sappi, Mondi, Nampak, Kimberley Clarke, Tappsa and the Tappsa Journal and wish them to go from strength to strength. ■

OUR NEW COMMITTEE

Jonathan Hermanus	<i>Southern region rep</i>
Brindha Roberts	<i>Northern region rep</i>
John Bartleman	<i>Northern region rep</i>
John Read	<i>Eastern Region rep</i>
Iain Kerr	<i>Eastern Region rep & Pamsa rep</i>
Lynne Askew	<i>Tappsa office rep</i>

The National Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary and an additional Eastern Region rep will all be confirmed at the next TAPPSA Committee meeting.