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4th July 2014

1914 – 2014: SKF South Africa Celebrates a 100 Year Reputation of Excellence

1914 was a year of many important world firsts - first airline, first plane flight from Los Angeles to San Francisco, first colour film and Babe Ruth's first professional game.

1914, on April 12th, was also the year that 'SKF South Africa' first opened as SKEFKO (South Africa) Ball Bearing Company Limited in Pritchard Street, Johannesburg.

Swedish holding company, SKF AB, founded in 1907, upholds the motto, 'Equipping the world with knowledge'. Its expansion programme led to the establishment of the subsidiaries outside Sweden; SKF South Africa was the first subsidiary on the African continent.

In 1953 SKF South Africa started an Engineering Division to cater for the needs of the mining industry and in 1970 SKF appointed its first distributor. And the rest, as the saying goes is 'SKF's successful' history.

Headquartered in Witfield, Jet Park, Gauteng, SKF, is a specialist supplier of bearing and engineering solutions to approximately 40 market sectors including mining, materials handling, automotive (passenger and commercial vehicles), wind energy, railways, machine tools, medical, food & beverage and paper.

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"A number of important contributing factors played a fundamental role in SKF's rich and successful history, and indeed continue to do so," says SKF South Africa's Managing Director, Ian Cillié. "We would not be where we are today without our loyal customers, our dedicated distributor network and our committed SKF employees."

A company is defined not only by its products and services but by the values it embraces. SKF values of empowerment, high ethics, openness and team work are core to SKF employees. "Our values and ethics drive our decision-making processes and interactions internally as well as with our customers and distributors. We remain committed to our global policy of sharing engineering knowledge with our customers."

There were many highlights and important developments, both globally and locally over the past 100 years. Some examples include the expansion of SKF's product offering with the introduction of the six global core technologies (bearings & units, power transmission, seals, mechatronics, lubrication systems and mechanical and reliability engineering services). On the local front, SKF opened the Bearing Remanufacture Centre in Whitfield in 2008 for the remanufacturing of large sized bearings and a year later the Solutions Factory was established.

"SKF's distributor network is an essential part of the SKF family and is a true reflection of our tremendous success," continues Cillié. Record Engineering Sales cc started as an SKF agent/distributor on 16th September 1970 and is SKF South Africa's oldest distributor. "SKF is known for the highest quality products and leaders in technology and development and this is true today as much as it was 44 years ago," remarks owner, Trevor Howell.

Today SKF's impressive countrywide distributor network which also includes Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Malawi, comprises authorised independent industrial distributors, lubrication, commercial vehicle and agricultural distributors. With further representation in Zambia, East Africa and North Africa, SKF delivers engineering, product and service solutions to customers' doorsteps across the African continent.

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"As our partners, our customers are the reason why we do what we do; relentless investment in R&D to constantly develop new technologies to deliver sustainable, ever more energy efficient solutions to assist our customers in keeping operational costs low and plant availability high. On behalf of the SKF team, I extend a sincere thank you to companies like David Brown, Bosworth, Osborn and CPM, to name but a few, who have been doing business with SKF for many years. We value your unwavering support."

SKF is supporting various community projects during 2014 as part of the company's centenary celebrations. These projects are over and above SKF's usual commitments to the St Francis Nursery School and Legae Day Care Centre in Daveyton whom the company has supported for many years. A donation by SKF staff of stationery to Legae learners for their 2014 school year kicked off SKF's 100 year celebrations community project in December 2013. In February 2014 it was the turn of the Boksburg SPCA who received a welcome donation of food and cash raised by SKF staff. SKF's third community project took staff members to Nigel Old Age Home on 28th May where they spent an enriching day enjoying a tea party and engaging with the residents. "More projects for deserving causes are in the pipeline for the rest of the year," adds Cillié.

As SKF South Africa celebrates 100 years of delivering product innovation and service excellence to customers across South and Southern Africa, so begins the next 100 years. "With our local competence, knowledge and skills we not only working in the now, we are working for the future. We forecast future opportunities and are putting plans and structures into place now to ensure that we are ready and prepared when the opportunities present themselves later. This is how SKF has not only endured but prospered through both easy and difficult times."

"But none of this is possible without our committed employees. The calibre of people that have walked through SKF doors over the past 100 years pays tribute to SKF South Africa's success. Each and every staff member, irrespective of position or length of service, has played a part in making some contribution to SKF's history. I thank each and every staff member, who the SKF team for all the hard work and dedication."

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"We can be proud of our rich 100 year heritage and stand tall in the business community with an unblemished reputation for excellence in product and service. We see a lot of potential on this continent and we are positive as we look to the next 100 years with confidence," concludes Cillie.

SKF is a leading global supplier of bearings, seals, mechatronics, lubrication systems, and services which include technical support, maintenance and reliability services, engineering consulting and training. SKF is represented in more than 130 countries and has around 15,000 distributor locations worldwide. Annual sales in 2013 were SEK 63,597 million and the number of employees was 48,401. www.skf.com

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