**CITATION: Brian Joffe**

Brian Joffe, chief executive and founder of the JSE-listed Bidvest Group, was born in Johannesburg and attended school in Greenside and Emmarentia. He graduated from Wits University as a chartered accountant (CASA) and served articles with Levitt Kirson Gross.

His entrepreneurial career began in 1978 when he borrowed capital of R49 000 to buy an interest in a small pet food manufacturing business. A year later Joffe borrowed again to acquire full ownership and expand the company. Within six months his business – using largely discarded machinery on a makeshift production line – held a 15% share of the South African canned dog food market.

He subsequently sold his business to a major industrial group. After a short spell in the USA, Joffe returned to South Africa and employment in senior executive positions before launching Bidvest in 1989.

From an initial R8 million in start-up capital Joffe ultimately built an international business that now spans five continents and in 2011 generated revenues of R118.5 billion.

Joffe saw beyond apartheid to a democratic future in which South Africa would again be integrated into the global economy. He bought when others sold, consistently expressing his faith in his country’s ability to transform and grow. In the process he developed a uniquely empowered business model driven by autonomous entrepreneurs, each responsible for growing their own operations. The business is today one of the country’s largest private sector employers. He came to national (later international) prominence as one of South Africa’s most successful entrepreneurs and job creators.

Following acquisition by Bidvest, under-performing operations were often transformed into industry leaders. Countless jobs were saved and the basis established for a diversified service, trading and distribution group. Bidvest companies are today active in foodservices, freight management, financial and corporate services, automotive retailing, office supplies, electrical product distribution and printing. These companies employ more than 106 000 people, and approximately 90 000 of the jobs are in South Africa.

By 2012, the Bidvest geographic footprint stretched from Lithuania (the birthplace of Joffe’s parents) through Europe and the UK, to Chile in South America, South and southern Africa, to Singapore, Hong Kong and mainland China and then on to Australia and New Zealand.

By 2009, Bidvest was celebrated as one of the world’s Top 40 best performing companies. The Group is one of only three South Africa-based companies on the Global Challenger List (compiled by the Boston Consulting Group) and is a constituent of the JSE Social Responsibility Investment Index.

Its reports to the UN-sponsored Carbon Disclosure Project consistently achieve high South African rankings.

In 1992, he was named one of the Top Five South African Businessmen of the Year and in 1994 and 1995 was recognised as the South African Jewish Business Achiever of the Year.

Joffe was subsequently honoured as South Africa’s Manager of the Year (2002) and in 2003 represented South Africa in the World Entrepreneur of the Year Awards, after winning national honours as South Africa’s Entrepreneur of the Year. In 2007 he was voted the Sunday Times’ Businessman of the Year and in 2010 was named by Wits Business School Journal as one of South Africa’s top 25 business leaders who had made significant impact on business in South Africa over the preceding five years

The Sunday Times Lifetime Achiever Award was bestowed on him in 2011 and in 2012 Brian Joffe was included in the Forbes list of the 20 most influential people in Africa. In 2008 he received an honorary doctorate in Commerce from the University of South Africa.

Brian Joffe is a past president of Beth Hamedrash Hagadol Sandton (the Sandton Shul) and is current president of ORT SA, the non-profit developmental organisation with a commitment to help build South Africa through education, specifically by helping to drive improved schooling in mathematics, science and technology. The business he leads makes a sustained contribution to communities and worthy causes, locally and in all markets where its subsidiaries are active.

Recent local initiatives include the Bidvest World Chefs Tour against Hunger, an intervention to ensure 500 children receive a meal a day for the next five years. The Group’s Rally to Read initiative is another high-profile effort. Every year the rally delivers books and teaching aids to under-resourced rural schools. Education and literacy training receive targeted attention in the corporate social investment programmes of Bidvest companies. Bidvest also has an ongoing commitment to the children of Bethany House, the children’s shelter and youth development centre.

Bidvest is the ‘name’ sponsor of Wits University FC and Brian Joffe is an avid supporter of the team. In 2010, Bidvest Wits won the prestigious Nedbank Cup competition and donated R1 million of the R6 million in prizemoney to the University to be channelled into bursaries for deserving students.

The Group is also a supporter of the Bidvest Wits outreach programme to assist the street children of Hillbrow and other inner Johannesburg suburbs. In addition, Bidvest recently joined the University in a joint-venture to establish the Wits Art Museum.

Wits University wishes to acknowledge Joffe’s sterling contributions to society and the University by awarding him a Gold Medal.