

Mike Jones, MJ Event Gear

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MJ Event Gear for win the Favourite Lighting Rental Company recognition for 2007 at the TPSA Awards

With R20 in his Perm bank account, two bags of clothes and his friend, Elkie van Zyl – a former colleague at the South African Police Force – Mike Jones left Natal's South Coast in the pursuit of greener pastures in Johannesburg. Arriving in an aged Datsun bakkie, Elkie's windsurfer and surfboard being sold some days prior to put tyres on the vehicle and to buy petrol, the comrades shackled up with Kurt du Preez, presently one of South Africa's most talented lighting designers.



Big Fish

By night they slept on the floor, sharing a duvet, and in the day time, Kurt taught them his trade. "Kurt was my mentor," says Mike. "He is the person to thank the most."



Little Fish

As a youngster growing up in Pinetown, Michael Jones, son to British father Steve and Afrikaans mom Engela, thought he would be a Farrier. If that dream came about, there's no doubt he would have been the best horse smith in the trade. Mike's alternative vocation was to be a cop... or at least so he thought! With the constitution of the day requiring school leaving males to either join the army or the police force, Mike opted for the SAPS in 1987.

Working as a bouncer in a night club in Margate (KwaZulu Natal) in his free time, often arriving early to assist with the rigging of lights and sound equipment, Mike was steadily roped into the entertainment industry. By 1990, he paid R200 to hand in his police badge. He ran the Palm Grove in Margate, where his duties ranged from DJ to bouncer and equipment repairman. Soon Mike and Elkie were working side by side doing beach promotions, weddings, set-ups and strikes. That is when they met up with Kurt du Preez, then from Seraph Productions, and John Roughly (JR).



“Kurt asked us to come to Johannesburg and work on a gig or two,” comments Mike. They freelanced for Seraph Productions, where Kurt ran the Lighting Department, and gigs included the Russian Ballet, Moscow Circus and the Pyramid of Light. Mike still managed to work along the coast when required.

When Mike and Elkie returned to Johannesburg, Glen Broomberg, one of the owners of Seraph took them both into his home and looked after them.

When Seraph Productions liquidated, The Light Rig was established by Neil Russell (former director at Seraph Productions) and Mike. They ran and rented out old Seraph gear from a house in Risidale. “I basically lived with the gear until Charlie Stothard took a lease and rented the units for an extended period.” Mike ended up freelancing for Charlie and simultaneously did a lot of work for Mark de Klerk from the Sound Corporation. There he “humped” gear with many a well-known name such as Philip Roche, Charl Smit and John Mack.



Mike with a friend from school, Vinny de Billot

“Then I started buying kit,” says Mike. “I had 12 parcans and dimmers. When we went on tour – just after 1994 there were a lot of concerts on tours and I did most of Louis van Wyk’s events as a freelancer – I started making cables like janices and three phase and with the extra money started getting bits of gear together.”

Late 1994, Mike approached brothers Glen and Ryan Broomberg. Ryan had just left Seef properties and was interested to hear Mike’s business plan. It would be to buy the old Light Rig from the liquidators and form a company called MJ Lighting. The partners became three equal shareholders with Mike responsible for the day to day running of the company.

With Lighting Unlimited catering for rock and roll type events, Production Projects filling a niche in theatre and corporate gigs, Mike, after doing a few launches for companies such as SAA and Plascon Paints realized there was a gap in the market for corporate events.

Still with shoulder length hair and an earring, Mike decided to promote the clean and cut look presenting clients with neat and smart gear. After visiting Hong Kong in 1995 and seeing how service orientated the Chinese were, Mike arrived back in South Africa with a new mindset. His company would give clients the best attention and products they could possibly require.

“In the early days we had parcans and profiles. The first time moving lights were used in Miss World 92 or 93? I am not sure, but that was using mirrors. There were show changers, and if you had sixteen you could only use 12.”

That said, MJ Lighting had the first Cyberlights for rental in the country, and continues to offer

clients fresh new innovative products. When expos increased in popularity, they offered white powdered coated fixtures to compliment the corporate looking stands.

By 2003, Mike not only believes he had the best team working for him in the industry, but as the client's needs changed, the company offered more than just lighting. "We always had sound, but we added an outdoor roof, a 3D design studio, offered rigging and decided to appropriately change our name to MJ Event Gear. We basically supply gear to the events industry."



In September 2007, Mike was able to take full rein of MJ Event Gear and become the sole owner. Mike believes that any newcomer can achieve anything if they are passionate in life.

"If you really have passion, you'll do well. Believe in what you do and in the people around you. The most important asset in any business is the people who work there. Business is about people and not about kit, and having honest, hard working people is important. And remember don't promise something you can't deliver."

His love and thanks also go to Dylan, his son born in 1992. Mike says Dylan was the spark who started the fire. "When I found out I was going to have a child, I started the business. I wanted to be able to provide for him."

When playing, Mike enjoys fishing, off road riding and any bar sports! "I am a typical South African, who loves rugby and braai-vleis. I support the Sharks, they are the best team out there. Anyone who supports the Sharks can come and work here!"



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