



From left, former managing partner Roger Green; Paul Valayudum with 50 years service; Graham Cox, the founder of the firm; Jillian Cox; Alastair Hay, senior partner; Michael Jackson, managing partner. The collage was presented to Graham Cox in recognition of 50 years of service to Durban's legal fraternity.

## Half a century of legal practice

**Colleen Dardagan**

THE two youngest lawyers at one of Durban's oldest law firms say bigger firms, more technology less red tape and more women in suits are the future for the legal profession.

Jason Goodison, 28, and Sybil Mvulane, 20, two up-and-coming legal eagles at Cox & Yeats, which celebrates 50 years in business this year, said not only would the legal profession shift from male-dominated to female-dominated, but it would move towards less paper, and see smaller firms amalgamating to form big companies in the next half-century.

Mvulane said despite being "relatively new" in her job she had already noticed the increasing role of technology particularly in the hearing of cases.

"The Oscar Pistorius case really demonstrated where the legal profession is headed. Technology and social media, especially, played a

significant role in the way the public were kept abreast of the 'live' happenings of the trial," she said.

Mvulane and Goodison agreed that small firms were being squeezed on the back of rapid expansion and amalgamation of firms.

"I am sure there will always be a place for the one-man-band whose fees will be more affordable for the man in the street. But there is a move towards bigger firms," Goodison said.

He said law firms – renowned for generating piles of paper – were already moving towards a paperless profession.

Goodison said the number of statutes in South Africa today far exceeded those in place 20 years ago.

"I expect South Africa to be vastly more regulated in 50 years. With that in mind, specialisation in defined areas will become more important and more refined," he said.

In an interview at their new offices at Ridgeside, uMhlanga Ridge, the staff and senior partners agreed that the reams of law being published was not only exponential, but that specialists in specific areas of legislation were now in demand.

Michael Jackson, managing partner at the firm since 2011, said monitoring and commenting on the impact of legislation had become a "significant" part of the practice.

He said some clients requested that all draft legislation be read.

"Armed with this information and the knowledge we have of our clients' businesses, we assist (them) in developing strategies to deal with the new legislation, as introduced," he said.

The firm has come a long way from when founder Graham Cox consulted from a one-roomed office with no phone in central Durban five decades ago, to the plush offices with vast views of the Indian Ocean they own today.