



PICTURE: APHIWE BOYCE

■ Dr Prieur du Plessis, a Durbanville-based businessman, now a Slovenian Consul, has set his sights on developing economic, cultural and scientific relations between Slovenia and South Africa.

# PRIEUR FLIES THE FLAG FOR SLOVENIA

## Diplomatic first for Durbanville

It's as if Prieur du Plessis, a Durbanville businessman and newly-appointed Slovenian Consul, is a head of state himself. Business associates and visitors bow their heads and bellow enthusiastic greetings as he strolls up and down the passages of his office. This is the first diplomatic mis-



sion of its kind to be established in Durbanville and the new consul has a lot on his mind. He is getting to grips with the challenging task of forging a productive partnership between Slovenia and the South African government.

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# Durbanville man turns diplomat

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Dr Du Plessis, 54, has a doctorate in financial management from Stellenbosch University and grew up in Welgemoed – which is a long way from Slovenia. But on Saturday May 16, he was appointed honorary Slovenian consul in South Africa. The consulate will be based at Dr Du Plessis's Durbanville premises.

Dr Du Plessis lives in Stellenbosch with his wife, Isabel Verwey, and two children. His hobbies are long distance running, travelling, reading and motorcycling. He has 26 years experience in professional investment research and portfolio management and has travelled extensively in central and eastern Europe.

"I have been travelling to those countries and discovered Slovenia about three years ago. There, my path crossed with the officials of the Slovenian Department of Foreign Affairs who subsequently suggested the idea of me representing the country diplomatically in South Africa," he said.

A two-way diplomatic channel has been created to capitalise on business opportunities, tourism, cultural and educational interchange for both countries.

He has been assigned normal consular tasks, which means he must provide assistance to Slovenian citizens in South Africa.

"I must promote co-operation between Slovenia and South Africa and expand links between the two countries in the fields of commerce, tourism, culture, education and sport," he said.

## BACKGROUND

The Republic of Slovenia lies at the heart of Europe, where the Alps face the Pannonian plains and the Mediterranean meets the Karst. To the north it borders Austria; Hungary is to the east; Croatia to the south and Italy to the west.

One of Europe's smaller countries, it was formerly part of the communist Yugoslavia and has been a democratic parliamentary republic since 1991. It was the first of the new entrants to join the European Union in 2004 and European Monetary Union in 2007.

Source: Wikipedia

One of his first assignments will be taking a 12-member South African business delegation to Slovenia to explore first-hand, trade potential and the investment climate.

He said Slovenia offers many business opportunities.

"Given its location in central Europe and its high quality professional services, it provides a perfect gateway to central and eastern Europe."

The two countries, he said, had already started several projects focusing on cultural activities, science and education.

Dr Du Plessis said his wife Isabel had been very supportive.

Ms Verwey is involved in Proud Partners, an organisation that uplifts vulnerable communities, providing musical instruments and paying school tuition.

Through her project, South Africa was invited as the special

guest to Ljubljana, capital of Slovenia which was selected by Unesco as its 10th city to be designated as World Book Capital for next year.

Dr Du Plessis said the city was selected "for the quality of its application as well as for its diverse and complete programme, widely and enthusiastically supported by all players involved in the book industry, publishers, book stores and libraries".

Every year, Unesco and the three major branches of the global book industry – the International Publishers' Association (IPA), the International Booksellers' Federation (IBF) and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) – designate a city as World Book Capital for the 12 months.

"This initiative is a collaborative effort between representatives of principal stakeholders in the book sector and the cities which have committed themselves to promote books and reading," said Dr Du Plessis.

Ms Verwey said this gives South African authors the chance to participate on the world stage.

"Also, a planned international photographic competition for children will see the South African winners visiting Slovenia and vice versa, while an exchange project concerning music is also being discussed," she said.

Dr Du Plessis said he lives by the words "living to run, running to live" from Bob Seger's book *Against the Wind*. He said this motto manifests itself in his management style and keen participation in long distance running.

