

PREMIER OF MPUMALANGA TSP MAKWETLA ANNOUNCES SOUTH AFRICA'S HOSTING OF THE 2005 WORLD GOLD PANNING CHAMPIONSHIPS

BARN YARD THEATRE, WHITE RIVER

10 JUNE 2005

Program Director

Provincial Culture, Sports and Recreation MEC Nomsa Mtsweni

The 2005 World Gold Panning Championship Organising Committee,

Representatives of the Media,

The community of Mpumalanga,

Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my privilege and honour today, to officially announce that our country and the province of Mpumalanga will be hosting the 2005 World Gold Panning Championship in Pilgrim's Rest from the 18 to 25 th September, 2005.

South Africa secured the bid to host this prestigious event during the World Gold Panning Association Annual General Meeting in Australia in October 2001, and we are extremely proud and privileged to be the first African country to be entrusted with this responsibility.

This event marks yet another milestone in the growing confidence in our country's ability to successfully host small and major political and sporting events. Over the past ten years we have hosted small and big international events such as the United Nation's World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), the Commonwealth Conference, NAM and the African Union (AU) Heads of States Summit. We also hosted the Rugby and Cricket World Cups, and the African Cup of Nations, amongst other mega sporting events.

As the Mpumalanga province we pledge to do our utmost to ensure that we have a well-organized and incident-free Championship, which will further vindicate the trust that the gold panning fraternity has in us.

We would like to invite you to join us as we count down the 100 days to the official opening of the 2005 World Gold Panning Championship.

We also call upon the people of our country to come to Pilgrim's Rest during the Championship to witness this spectacle as ordinary fans of the sport and adventurers wishing to explore the unknown, to make friends, and to broaden their horizons.

We are looking forward to a grand event that will not only be competitive and memorable for all panning enthusiasts, but will contribute to the growing popularity of the sport in our country, and across the world.

South Africa is a young member of the worldwide panning community, as we only joined the World Panning Association in August 1997. However, our country and the province of Mpumalanga, has long been synonymous with gold and gold panning.

We are told by Gold Panning South Africa that gold panning in our country:

“Started in the creeks of the Knysna Forest before South African history began to be written. The first major gold rush however took place in Mpumalanga at Pilgrim's Rest in 1873, when the rich deposits of alluvial gold were discovered in the Pilgrim's Creek and later in the De Kaap Valley near Barberton. Today a few prospectors still work in these areas as they did a hundred years ago.”

I believe that the World Gold Panning Association could not have chosen a better place for the hosting of the 2005 Championship than this province that shares such a deep history with gold mining and gold panning.

Indeed, gold panning is a part of our heritage, and the story of Pilgrim's Rest is one of many souls who engaged in what was a rather tedious and back-breaking way of getting rich. Therefore, we are hopeful that gold panning's growing prominence as a recreational activity, will not only be a moment to reflect on who we are and how far we have come, but also has the potential to present numerous benefits to our communities stimulating tourism and other associated activities.

The historic town of Pilgrim's Rest, the people of the entire Mpumalanga province and our country as a whole, are looking forward to welcoming the world to the 2005 Gold Panning Championships in September.

We trust that the burning desire to succeed and the high energy levels amongst competitors and spectators alike, will be complemented by a willingness to experience this province in all its facets, particularly the rich heritage, culture, and unrivalled scenic beauty of this region that includes the Blyde River Canyon, God's Window, the potholes, the rainforest, the three rondavels and our breathtaking caves, and pristine waterfalls.

I now have the pleasure to declare the countdown to the 2005 World Gold Panning Championships as officially launched.

I thank you!