Bird, 59, lives in the house she was born in, in Parktown, jam-packed with interesting items, hundreds of books and wonderful artworks. She is "descended from Johannesburg pioneers", and finds it "very exciting" to live in the city. For 30 years she has been actively involved in researching the history of the city and promoting the preservation of its heritage.

Her love of Johannesburg and its history came from visiting the central library with her father as a child, and wandering around the Africana Museum (now the MuseuMAfricA) which was on the top floor of the library, in the city centre.

Her leisure time is taken up with her full-time passion - the city - and like many Johannesburgers, she would never consider living anywhere else. The city and its residents have got a lot to be grateful for having Bird as a passionate Jo'burger. In 1970 the city bosses proposed a freeway plan in which the city was to be crisscrossed by roads even wider than the present M1, cutting through many historic homes, like The View in Parktown, built in 1897, and its neighbour, Hazeldene Hall, built in 1902, as well as through the playing fields of St John's College, designed by Herbert Baker.

The public battle to shelve the freeway plans continued throughout most of the 1970s and 80s. The council froze development along the route, in an effort to drive down property prices so that they could buy the properties needed for the freeway, cheaply. Residents on the proposed route were frightened by possible expropriations, and shelved plans for alterations and renovations to their homes. However, the persistent Bird and her colleagues won this battle.

Bird sees this as one of her greatest triumphs in securing the heritage of the city. It also started her on her path of challenging the planning department of the city when they were hoping to slip through by-laws or approve plans that she thought were not in the city's best interests.

Now, years later, she is still very active and vociferous in advocating for retaining the heritage of old buildings and places around the city and suburbs, and for restricting property developers who chase money instead of preserving Johannesburg's beautiful suburbs.

Bird was instrumental in forming the Parktown Residents' Association, which, she proudly says, "has never been parochial - we have fought issues in Newtown, or the proposal for a waterfront development at Zoo Lake, or the loss of open public spaces in the inner city".

Although she is no longer on the Parktown Residents' Association committee developers still approach the Joint Plans Committee of the Association, with plans and proposals for the area, which includes Parktown, Westcliff and Parkview.

She has strong views on new buildings in Johannesburg. For example, the Johannesburg General Hospital, opened in 1978, dominates one of Johannesburg's attractive ridges. Bird believes that the then National Party city council made a conscious effort to "smash the heart of British liberalism in the city".

A further example of this National Party imperialism in the city is the equally intrusive Johannesburg College of Education (now an extension of Wits University), for which several dozen Victorian homes had to be demolished.
Bird is the chairman of the Parktown and Westcliff Heritage Trust, which she established in the mid-1980s. The Trust has an impressive library and offers weekly tours on a wide range of places of interest - from Nelson Mandela's hideout in a flat in Hillbrow in the 1960s and Herman Charles Bosman's perspective on Johannesburg, to the early beginnings of the city. The Trust has an extensive tour programme for school children, getting them thinking about history and its different sources.

Bird qualified as a teacher but only taught for three years. She still enjoys researching any issues to do with preserving the heritage of Johannesburg.

The University of the Witwatersrand finds it fitting to award Ms Flo Bird with a gold medal for her remarkable work and dedication to the city.