Honours from UKZN for Uys and sky-gazer

Leanne Jansen

AUTHOR, actor and activist Pieter-Dirk Uys and star-gazer Bernie Fanarroo will receive honorary doctorates from the University of KwaZulu-Natal in recognition of contributions in their fields.

They are among five “leading South Africans” who UKZN has chosen to salute during its graduation ceremonies, the first of which is today.

Uys is to be recognised for his work as satiric playwright and performer, and his success in encouraging a more tolerant society, and Fanarroo for his role as director of the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) project.

The honorary doctorate recipients include printmaker Malcolm Christian, industrial chemist Basil Kranzendorf and conservationist Andrew Muir.

Uys, who has four honorary doctorates, said it was always extraordinary to receive an unexpected accolade.

He expressed gratitude that UKZN had “taken the time to nudge me and say it’s been a good life, carry on doing what you’re doing”.

The university has praised Uys for using humour as a weapon with which to expose the absurdities and inequities of apartheid, and post-1994 to challenge the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS.

Asked whether he would be capped in person or would dispatch alter ego Evita Bezuidenhout, Uys said she was “too busy fitting curtains at Nkandla”.

More than 10,000 degrees will be conferred at the Westville and Pietermaritzburg campuses, where two of its academics – Professor Sarojini Nadar and Professor Simon Mukwembi – will receive its Distinguished Teachers’ Award.

The award recognises those teachers who demonstrate successful learning outcomes, but who also improve teaching and learning practices and curriculum development.

Nadar, of UKZN’s school of religion, philosophy and classics, is also dean for research for the college of humanities.

Asked about her teaching methods, Nadar said she believed in a “democratic classroom” in which there was participation and discussion. This was stimulated by media such as Facebook and Twitter.

Next Monday, two respected scholars will be made fellows of the university: emeritus professor in UKZN’s school of social sciences Christine Stilwell, and senior professor in the school of theology Jonathan Draper.

The graduation will also mark a triumph over adversity for Master’s in education student Funani Shezi, an Nkandla school teacher, who drove hundreds of kilometres a day to attend classes and relied on solar power to charge her laptop.

Shezi’s Master’s research looked at how pupils who were Zulu speakers coped with learning maths in English in Grade 4.