

First-time

voters'

smiles

will touch

me forever



Eric Sirokin

Albuquerque attorney Eric Sirokin is one of 15 attorneys from the United States observing South Africa's first multiracial election.

Minabatho, South Africa.

It has a nice ring to it.

We danced at the Minabatho town square with 1,000 residents of the former homeland Bophuthatswana Tuesday night.

When the clock turned to 12:01 a.m. today, a new constitution and bill of rights went into effect.

The all-White parliament and black homelands were dissolved, and a new national flag sporting the colors of the African National Congress was raised by the South African defense force. Many of us who have opposed apartheid for so many years could hardly have envisioned such a moment.

Such jubilation was evident throughout the first day of voting Tuesday, as thousands of elderly, disabled or infirm citizens took to the polls. These "special voters," in wheelchairs or on crutches, stood in line for up to eight hours in the blazing sun waiting their right to vote for true democracy in South Africa.

The first line we encountered was at the museum where there were at least 500 people still seeking voter-identification cards. Computer photographic equipment allowed them to leave instantaneously with their voter cards. No advance voter registration is required, and one marvels at how inclusive this election is.

I spent my day in the partially renovated wing of the hospital in Masike-ing. More than 1,000 elderly citizens cast their votes at our station, and the fact that it is the first free vote in their lives is written across their faces.

White South African defense force soldiers were told to leave their weapons outside, and they now stand