

YOUNG MARINE PILOT LEADS MASSIVE SHIP

■ Black woman beats stereotype

By Sisonke Labase

Xoliswa Bekiswa made waves when she led the MSC Sola, the biggest cargo ship to hit our shores, into the Port of Ngqura in Port Elizabeth last month.

The MSC Sola is the length of three and a half rugby fields and the young woman navigated it safely to the port.

Ms Bekiswa is the fourth black female to have an open marine pilot license in South Africa. She was raised by her mother and grandmother and credits the two strong women for her drive to succeed.

Ms Bekiswa made headlines nationally when she led the MSC Sola into Africa's deepest waters, an experience she describes as "an amazing feeling, especially the impact it has had and the support and kids being inspired by it. It makes me even more proud of my job," Xoliswa

gushes.

Working in the male dominated marine industry comes with challenges, as Ms Bekiswa highlights.

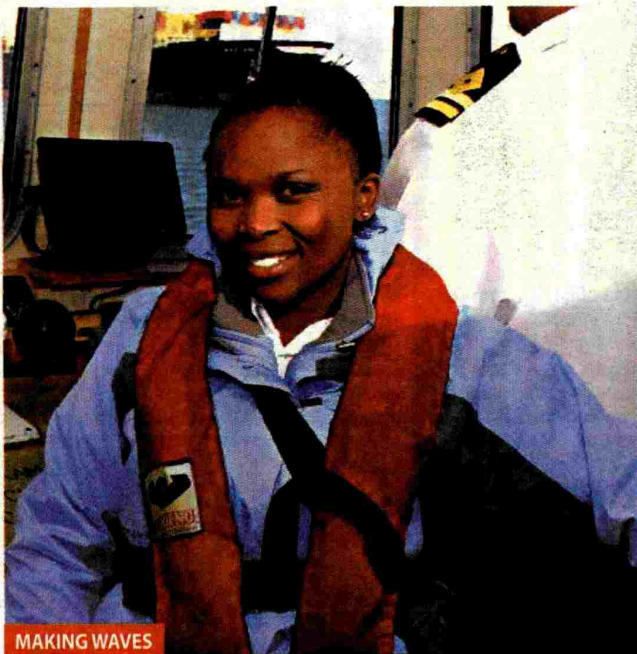
"One has to constantly work three times as hard".

When asked how she came to be a marine pilot, Ms Bekiswa, a Durban University of Technology graduate, says she never knew about marine studies until she reached Grade 11.

"I heard about it when we went to the Grahamstown festival. Before I didn't even know there was anything like it," she says.

Ms Bekiswa is an inspirational young woman who has, against all odds, broken new ground. Her future promises to hold many more highlights.

"There is a lot I am thinking about and with the Lord by my side, not even the sky is the limit," Ms Bekiswa says.



Xoliswa Bekiswa in a pilot ship at the Port of Ngqura, Port Elizabeth.

Picture by Rob Duker