

Port of East London appoints new CMEO

[East London, South Africa, 19 June 2020] Khayakazi 'Pinky' Somzana succeeded in overcoming both mother nature and gender bias to realise her dream of becoming a Chief Marine Engineer Officer (CMEO), inspired by her late father, Nkosinathi, who she remembers as constantly taking apart and fixing items in their home.

On 1 April 2020, the 37-year-old was appointed as the CMEO at Transnet National Ports Authority's (TNPA) Port of East London. She is responsible for the safe and efficient operation of all machinery and engineering functions on Tugboats which includes watch keeping, repair and maintenance.

While working within a largely male-dominated industry has not always been smooth sailing, the experience only made her more determined to navigate her way through. In 2002, with N1 – N4 electrical engineering qualifications under her belt, Somzana joined TNPA as an apprentice Millwright.

"When I joined the company, it was not easy at first since there were no females in the industry at that time, it was only men. I used to feel so small when qualified Millwrights would send me to fetch a spanner and when I came back, the job would already be done. But I eventually I got used to that and gained the experience I wanted. In order to achieve the training despite their attitude, I had to work hard and be dedicated to my job. When they would give me tasks to do on my own, I made sure I accomplished them and that's how I gained their trust and succeeded," Somzana said.

In 2005, Somzana qualified as a Millwright and then went on to serve as a Trainee Marine Engineer Officer at the Port of East London to gain more experience.

Five years later, Somzana's hard work paid off, when she received a bursary to pursue Maritime Studies at the Durban University of Technology to qualify as a Marine Engineer. Later that year, she embarked on a 12-month-long cadetship training period onboard a sea-going vessel.

"Joining a vessel was not as nice as one would think. It was my first time being that far away from my family, with people of different cultures, and being the only woman onboard. I had sleepless nights at times as the sea would be rough and the ship rolls while you are sleeping. We would be called at midnight for manoeuvring or watchkeeping. The training itself was also challenging, as I only had theory in mind."

Somzana completed her Maritime Studies S3 at Cape Peninsula University of Technology in 2018, which allowed her to work full-time as a Second Engineer on the Port of East London's tugs.

Last year, the mother of one was able to take the final step in her career journey, obtaining a South African Maritime Safety Authority Certificate of Competency as a CMEO Port Operations.

"I received my qualification on my birthday, 3 October, which made me realise that God has been with me all this time. It was the best gift I ever had, even though it did not come easy," she said.

Despite her experiences during her early days on the job, Somzana is thankful for the hard lessons and to the supportive male colleagues who encouraged her accomplishments.

"I am so thankful to TNPA for believing in me. Without the company's assistance and my colleagues I wouldn't be here – especially CMEO Andre Breede, Aubrey Tibane - my former Marine Technical Manager who made sure that I got the best training, as well as my line manager, Marine Operations Manager Mzukisi Nqwata and Dock Master Shawn Coetzer, who were always willing to assist me," she said.

“To everyone out there who has a goal to achieve, I would like to say, never give up on wanting to reach a goal. Pray and work hard, nothing comes easy, it takes time but it happens in God’s timing. My career story looks like I jumped from one point to where I am today, but I can tell you that it was not smooth at all.”

Ends

Image Gallery

Below: Khayakazi ‘Pinky’ Somzana has been appointed the Chief Marine Engineering Officer at Transnet National Ports Authority’s (TNPA) Port of East London.



Below: Somzana believes the challenges she faced along the way, has prepared her for her dream job as Chief Marine Engineering Officer.



About Transnet National Ports Authority

Transnet National Ports Authority (TNPA) is one of five operating divisions of Transnet SOC Ltd. The National Ports Authority is responsible for the safe, effective and efficient economic functioning of the national port system, which it manages in a landlord capacity. It provides port infrastructure and marine services at the eight commercial seaports in South Africa – Richards Bay, Durban, Saldanha, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, East London, Mossel Bay and Ngqura. It operates within a legislative and regulatory environment and is governed by the National Ports Act (Act No. 12 of 2005). For more information visit www.transnetnationalportsauthority.net.

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