

Female Saldanha marine pilot guiding in the big ships

Marine pilot at Port of Saldanha - the deepest port in South Africa which handles the biggest vessels of all the country's ports - Salmaa Vincent was able to apply her newly acquired Open Licence certification to craftily guide a 350-metre long vessel with a deadweight tonnage of 300,000dwt into the port, just ahead of Women's Month. She is the first female within Transnet National Ports Authority to hold this licence for such large vessels.



Salmaa Vincent

Open Licence certification is one of the most coveted qualifications in the field and permits qualified marine pilots to guide ships of any type and size in and out of our ports, from the very smallest vessels to the gigantic super tankers and container ships.

Of her first experience, Vincent said: "It was nerve wracking at first but this was soon overtaken by exhilaration and excitement at my ability. Throughout the experience, I concentrated and exercised caution to ensure that I was successful."

From maritime student to marine pilot

Vincent, 30, received a bursary from Transnet National Ports Authority in 2005 which allowed her to pursue one year of Maritime Studies at Cape Peninsula University of Technology, followed by 18 months at sea with Safmarine (now Maersk). In 2008, she went on to pass her oral exam with the South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA) and was issued with a Deck Officer certificate of competency.

Transnet then enrolled her in a tug master programme which she completed in January 2009. This was followed by oral exams at SAMSA before obtaining her Master Port Operations certificate. She then went on to do a year of marine pilot training. This included two weeks in

Rotterdam doing practical ship handling. Upon her return, she completed simulation training in Durban at the Transnet Maritime School of Excellence. She finished her practical pilot training in Cape Town in September 2011 and qualified as a marine pilot, serving first at the Port of Cape Town for three months before returning to the Port of Saldanha.

Diverting from her father's dream of becoming a medical doctor, Vincent had a job shadowing experience which introduced her to Marine Engineering. Here she found her flair in the deck side of things and never looked back.

Breaking through the glass ceiling

She credits her success to TNPA's efforts to empower women in its environment which she says she has witnessed through her journey. "I read a lot about women within TNPA doing remarkable things, making a difference and taking on senior and leadership roles which inspire me," she says.

Her advice to other women interested in breaking through the glass ceiling is: "You have to be determined and have strong character. Be clear about what you would like to get out of your career. You also need perseverance because you have to work with mother nature and you must be physically fit."

She is thankful to mentors like retired Captain Brian Radford, Captain Ahmed and her father who encouraged her to continue her studies and to obtain various qualifications while she climbed the ladder of success in her industry. Her

husband Wahseem Vincent has been a “true rock” she says, supporting her in her career and always behind her. In her spare time, Vincent enjoys spending time with her sixteen-month-old daughter, travelling and going to the beach. Although juggling everything can be a handful at times, she cherishes her strong support system that is always there to back her up.

Exciting things happening at the Port of Saldanha

She is excited about the future of South Africa’s ports and – while her dream is to obtain pilot licences in other ports - she says that there are exciting things happening at the Port of Saldanha.

“Transnet is developing new infrastructure and expanding and stimulating the economy. With the development of Saldanha port infrastructure to support the oil and gas sector, the towns of Saldanha and Langebaan will be the jewels of the West Coast with overseas companies establishing businesses here and totally new and bigger vessels visiting our ports. There are lots to look forward to,” she says.

Vincent completed her harbour master diploma in October 2016 through IBC Academy in London and would like to pursue her MBA in the near future.

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