



**YUMMY:** Leena Pillay shows off her cooking skills.

# Deafness no hurdle to her tasty delights

## Zenoyise Madikwa

ANYONE who has worked in a restaurant knows the noise in its kitchen can be deafening: orders being shouted, pans clanging and the occasional dish shattering.

For budding chef Leena Pillay, though, her restaurant kitchen is anything but noisy.

Pillay can't hear, but she certainly can cook. Born deaf she refuses to allow her deafness to interfere with her dream of cooking as a career.

The 23-year-old, who was born in Port Shepstone, is one of the cookery learners from the National Institute for the Deaf.

She is moving in the right direction of achieving her childhood dream to be a chef.

It is thanks to the Compass Group Southern Africa's Chefs' Academy that she is a few steps away from achieving her dream.

Through the year-long hospitality education and training authority accredited training programme, which is underpinned by allowances and stipends, free uniforms and a set of chef's knives, students learn the skills required to become professional chefs.

Pillay says she is inspired by Chef Ruben Riffels. The charming and disarming trainee chef says she admires him because of his great food and presentation, and because he owns a restaurant.

"I've always had a passion for food, its preparation, catering and the hospitality industry in general.

"I want to be a role model and an inspiration to deaf people," she says through an interpreter.

Deaf or not, one thing's for sure, this young woman is not allowing hearing impairment to get in the way of success.

