

From small beginnings come great things and great prizes

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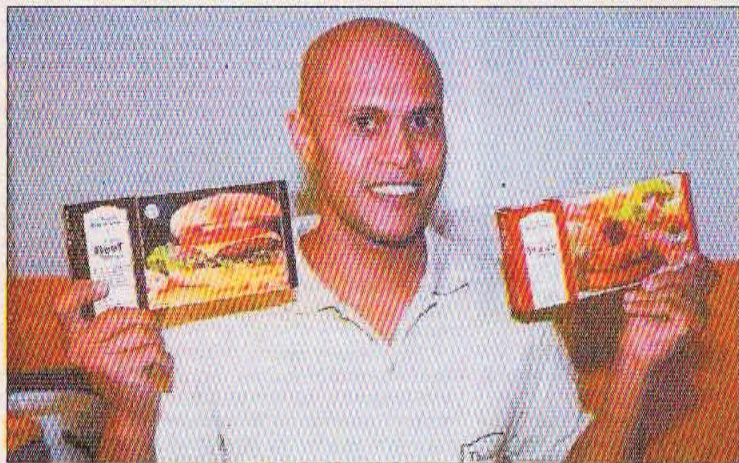
A VEGETABLE peeler, a weaver and a butcher are on the threshold of big things in their small businesses as they head towards the finals of a national top entrepreneur competition which offers prize money totalling R750 000.

They now talk of exporting overseas, taking on the big guns in their industries and becoming major players in the South African economy.

The entrepreneur contest is part of the annual Kickstart project started by South African Breweries (SAB) in 1995 to inculcate a culture of entrepreneurship among people between the ages of 18 and 35. The idea is to promote business awareness through training, the provision of grants as start-up capital as well as mentorship and assistance during the setting-up phase of the businesses.

Selected from scores of KZN applicants, the regional finalists are:

Lungile Sokhulu, owner of a weaving business, back2life, in Gamalakhe, near Port Shepstone, who won the top SAB Kickstart KwaZulu-Natal award of R100 000. Her business, back2life, makes a variety of fashion products



using newspapers as the main material.

Sooveir Rajkumar of Meatlicious near Verulam, who scored second prize in the competition winning R80 000.

Meatlicious produces burger patties and is soon to introduce chicken sausages and fish patties to its Boastful Butcher range.

Third-placed Sindi Mbambo of Owofthu Products and Projects in Pietermaritzburg who won R60 000. Mbambo's company peels vegetables, packs them and supplies supermarkets and a variety

of other organisations.

The three winners are in line for honours in the national Kickstart awards which will be announced in Joburg in October.

The entrepreneurs said the Kickstart awards had given their businesses a significant boost through the publicity and training they had received.

"Suddenly people who hadn't really given me much attention were prepared to listen to what I had to say and to do business with me. Then things really took off and now we are looking at exporting our

products to other parts of Africa and overseas," said Sokhulu.

Rajkumar quantified the boost saying his monthly turnover had shot up from about R20 000 to more than R100 000 since being announced as a regional winner.

All three businesses had small beginnings.

Mbambo started peeling vegetables by hand after work and selling them to friends and a variety of small organisations.

She removed the back seat of her car and used the space to

Sooveir Rajkumar of Meatlicious shows off packs of his beef and prawn patties which are made from premium halaal meat.

transport the vegetables for sale.

Now she's getting ready to take on the big frozen food suppliers.

Mbambo, who has seven people on her staff, already supplies a variety of supermarkets and other outlets with peeled and packed fresh vegetables with the business being extended into providing soup and starch foods such as rice and samp to schools and the prison services, among other customers. The company's monthly turnover is now about R140 000.

Sokhulu of back2life says she is currently negotiating for her goods to be sold in Woolworths stores.

The company uses newspaper coated with resin to manufacture fashion items such as barrel bags, bowls, peak caps, hats and sling bags. The business is based in old school buildings where about 35 staff members create the fashion items.

Rajkumar said from small beginnings his business was now producing about 50 000 burger patties under the Boastful Butcher brand every month and he was supplying supermarkets, including Spar and Checkers, with monthly turnover exceeding R100 000.