

## Choose a career in the food and hospitality industries



GOOD BEGINNINGS: ICT's inaugural class.

# Life skills meet chef skills in culinary training

### INFINITY CULINARY TRAINING SPOKESPERSON

THE Five Ps: proper preparation prevents poor performance.

ABC: always be communicating (and always be cleaning).

In order to get something you've never had, you must do something you've never done.

These are just a few of the ideas communicated daily to the students of Infinity Culinary Training (ICT), a non-profit chef school providing Cape Town's previously disadvantaged young women and men with the basic cooking skills, life skills and professional tools necessary to gain immediate employment within the food and hospitality industries.

In just three years of existence, ICT has produced nearly 100 graduates, young people whose lives and families have been changed for the better.

"It's beautiful to watch people get jobs," says Barry Berman, ICT's executive director. "But it's magic to watch them build healthy families and careers."

ICT often sees complete transformations in its students. Many begin the class with massive self-doubt and little knowledge of the basic skills needed to foresee a sustainable future. But 12 weeks later, ICT students have a new vision and hope for their lives.

While in class, the students learn much about the professional kitchen. But every cooking lesson is threaded through a larger life lesson, translatable to any skill or vocation.

In teaching the use of a chef's knife, Berman not only demonstrates the proper technique, but introduces a new consciousness to the student.

"Think about the knife," he says to the attentive learners. "It's a tool that can be used for good or ill. The same is true for your mind – which is also a tool capable of good or ill. Are you going to use the knife to produce a perfectly diced onion, or to make a mess and possibly cut yourself?"

"Are you going to use your mind to bring harm to yourself or others – or will

you slice through old habits to new, positive decisions.

"ICT is not just about vocational skills," continues Berman. "It's about giving people an opportunity to form a new vision and make new choices. We tell our students it's not about where you come from, but where you're going."

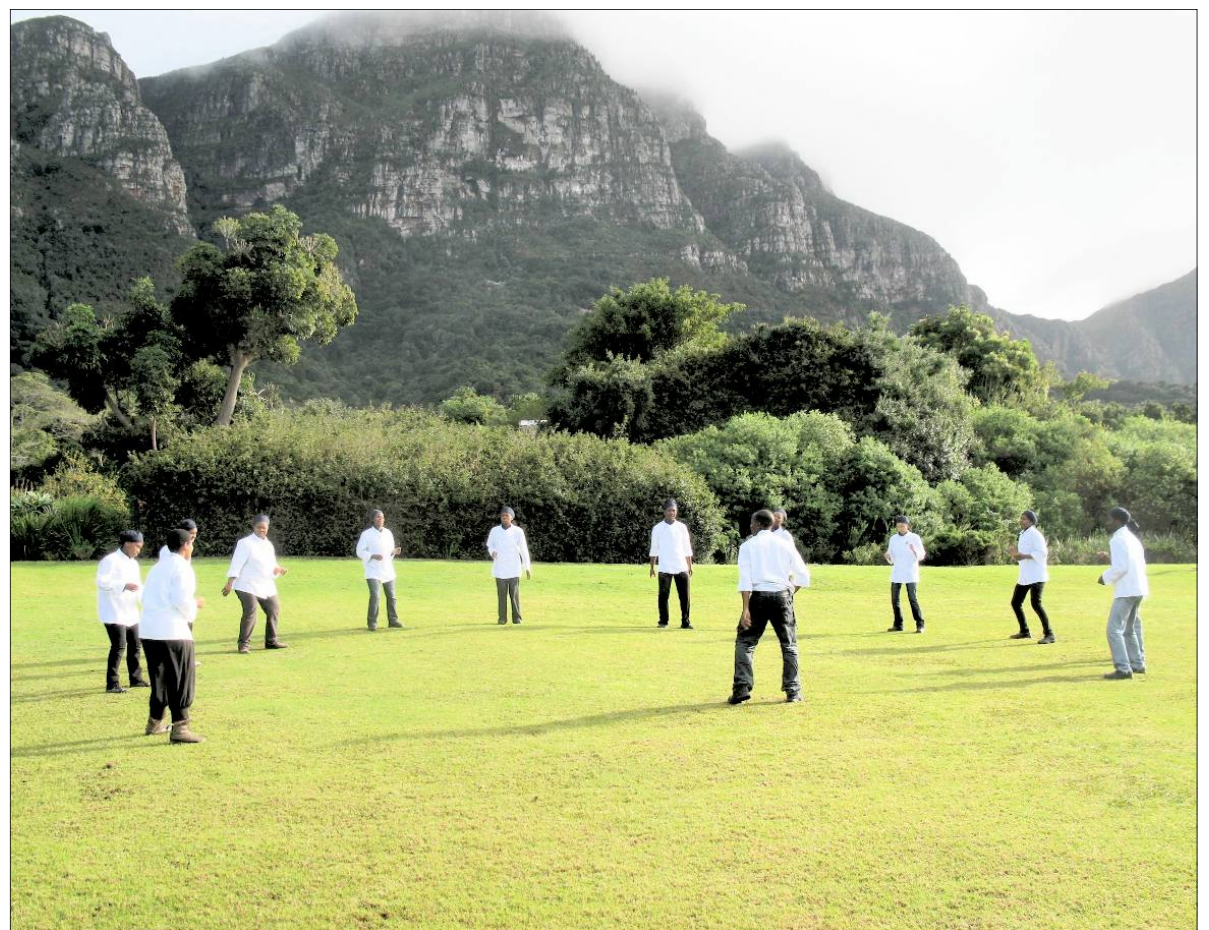
Many ICT students suffer from deeply impoverished upbringings. Some have had drug problems, some have been incarcerated, many have experienced physical violence, come from broken homes and have young children. But they also possess a glorious spirit and hunger for change.

Each ICT student is carefully selected and given a full bursary. Otherwise none would have the means to attend. ICT searches for students willing to commit themselves to hard work, personal sacrifice and to overcoming the many challenges necessary to attaining a productive and self-sustaining life.

ICT's curriculum and teaching methods are experimental. Students eat more fresh vegetables and fruit in the first three weeks of class than they've eaten in their entire lives. There is a daily physical exercise programme. There are lessons and exercises in proper communication, teamwork and social responsibility. Students write weekly self-evaluations, not just reporting of the lessons they've learned, but of the transformation taking place inside themselves. Guest chefs, business people and inspirational speakers are invited to the class to share their experiences of struggle and triumph. All of which provide students with a sense of purpose and the increased determination to succeed.

Many ICT graduates are employed in such establishments as 95 Keerom, Carne, The Bay Hotel, Willoughby & Co, Ellerman House, La Mouette, Savoy Cabbage, Hudsons on Somerset, One&Only, Cape Town Hollow Hotel, & Union, Spar and moyo.

Equally as extraordinary is that ICT has an all-graduate teaching staff. "Young South Africans teaching young South Africans," says Berman. "We're



very proud to grow teachers as well as cooks."

As a non-profit and public benefit organisation, ICT is operated on a shoestring budget. Funds are provided by philanthropic donations from individuals

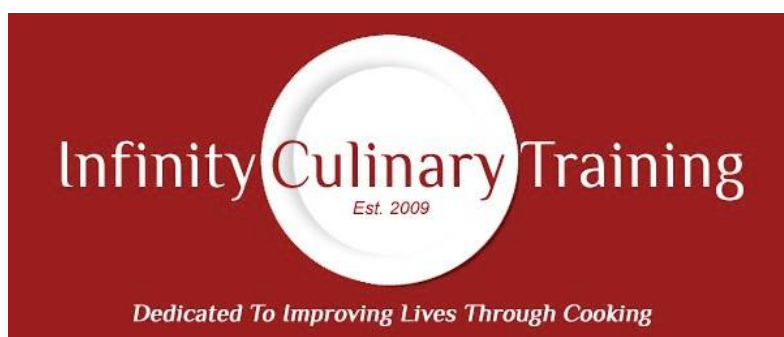
and businesses within South Africa and the United States.

"We're always struggling for funds just to keep our doors open," says Berman.

He then gets a glint in his eye.

"Which means that I have to employ the very lessons of perseverance we teach our students."

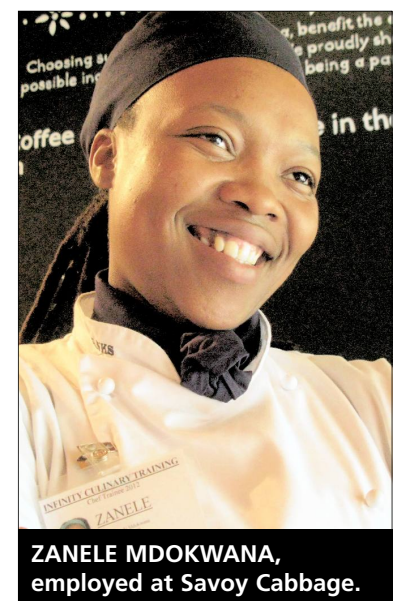
To learn more about ICT, or to see how you can get involved, see [www.ictchefs.org](http://www.ictchefs.org).



KHANYISA MAKAFI, employed at moyo.



TAMMY-LEE BIRD, employed at Hollow on the Square Hotel.



ZANELE MDOKWANA, employed at Savoy Cabbage.