

Your Weekly Business Bulletin from Thanet & East Kent Chamber

Thanet & East Kent Insider

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1. Update On Flybe & Manston

Flybe has contacted the Chamber with a progress report on the growth in bookings on the daily Manston-Edinburgh route which Flybe began on 27th May this year. Connectivity has been a significant factor in attracting passengers. As Chief Commercial Officer Mike Rutter put it: "The ability to travel on one ticket from Kent to Northern Ireland, elsewhere in Scotland and the far reaches of the United Kingdom is proving very attractive. We are confident that passenger traffic will be in both directions and be a further boost to the Kent's tourism and leisure industry." What Flybe describes as "the call of the highlands" may well be responsible for the high number of through passengers booking onward flights to the Shetlands and Orkney islands. With the school holidays almost upon us, we can expect further growth in bookings as more 'staycation' holiday-makers choose to take their holidays in Scotland and East Kent. Regular readers of the Thanet & East Kent Insider will know that Flybe has announced daily flights connecting Manchester to Manston beginning on 6th September 2010. Travellers who carry their green credentials in their briefcases will be impressed to learn that at last January's 2010 Business Travel Awards, the independent panel of travel buyers and journalists judged Flybe to be the winner of the title of Best Environmental Contribution by a Company and joint winner with Air Berlin of Best Short-Haul Airline. Interestingly enough, Manchester Airport received the prize for Best UK Airport. Flybe currently carries more UK domestic passengers than any other airline and looks well set to expand its services from the 38 UK and 32 European airports where it now operates. With Manchester City getting ever closer to rivals Manchester United, local fans of both teams can be expected to take full advantage of the new 70 minute flights from Manston to Manchester. At the time of writing the quickest train journey from Broadstairs to Manchester Piccadilly Station takes four hours and six minutes and over five hours for the return, which is a long time if your team has just lost.

2. Academy FM

Kent's newest radio station, 107.8 Academy FM, has now been on the air for nearly four months. At the board meeting of last Thursday, there was unanimous praise for the progress made to date under the day-to-day management of Pete Willson. A strong feature of Thanet's community radio station is the opportunity provided to school children from Thanet and beyond to receive professional training in the operations and management of live broadcasts. Benefiting considerably from the patronage of East Kent's major benefactor, Roger De Haan, the station continues to attract listeners and welcomes enquiries to its offices and two purpose-built studios located at the Marlowe Academy in Broadstairs, tel: 01843 598558.

3. How Are We Doing?

The Thanet & East Kent Insider has consistently advised caution in assessing the impact of one month's unemployment figures, preferring to look at the year-on-year results before declaring a trend. The data released last Thursday by the ever excellent Research & Information department at Kent County Council does give some cause for optimism. At last, Thanet Wards record more falls in unemployment than increases, 16 against 7. Tunbridge Wells leads the upturn in the annual improvement in Kent with a remarkable 16.9% fall in those claiming "unemployment related benefit" in June 2010 compared to June 2009. Tonbridge & Malling is not far behind with 16.4%, followed by Sevenoaks with 14.8%. That these three districts are showing double digit gains suggests that the banking, insurance and financial sector may indeed be in recovery. The figures will be viewed with some satisfaction by a certain Stephan Winkelmann, President and CEO of Automobili Lamborghini, who opened a new agency in Sevenoaks at the beginning of last month. He may not have had Margate High Street in mind when he declared: "We recognise the Kent region for its affluence and economic development", but Margate Central has indeed recorded an annual fall in unemployment of 7.4%. All districts in Kent recorded positive annual gains except Shepway which sadly remains depressed with a 1.8% increase in registered jobless. An overview of the picture in East Kent is pictured in the table below.

4. The Facts

	June 2010		Change since June 2009	
	Unemployed	% of workforce	Number	%
Margate Central	352	12.3%	-28	-7.4%
Thanet Villages	75	2.1%	-22	-22.7
Thanet	3,911	5.4%	-59	-1.5%
Ashford	1,742	2.6%	-134	-7.1%
Canterbury	2,117	2.3%	-192	-8.3%
Dover	2,134	3.5%	-54	-2.5%
Maidstone	2,224	2.5%	-141	-6.0%
Shepway	2,413	4.2%	42	+1.8%
Kent	32,062	3.2%	-2,044	-6.0%
South East	134,135	2.6%	-17,989	-11.8%

5. Golf

Last week's edition of the Thanet & East Kent Insider promised a report on the opening of the new clubhouse extension of the Stoneless Golf Centre. This enterprising sports facility in Ebbsfleet Lane offers golfers of all abilities an opportunity to try their hand at the sport and to socialise in a warm atmosphere where formality is at a minimum. Guest of honour at the opening ceremony was Ronnie Corbett. The very picture of sartorial elegance, he delighted a packed house with a brief but perfectly formed speech prior to unveiling a plaque commemorating the event. He referred to his long standing admiration of the Ramsgate club and mentioned that he was also a great admirer of the spirit in which the game is played; exemplified by the management of Stonelees and the behaviour of great players of the past. He mentioned Tom Watson's words after triumphing over Jack Nicklaus by one stroke in the 1975 Open Championship at Carnoustie. Jack's congratulations allegedly included the magnanimous comment that he had been beaten by the better golfer and he offered Watson fulsome praise. Tom Watson remarked later that not only is Jack Nicklaus the greatest golfer ever to have played the game but he is also the greatest loser. Humility is not always associated with sports stars. The players in the losing Dutch team at the recent World Cup final are presumably not golfers and certainly not members at Stonelees. Last week's edition also included a promise to relate if Ronnie Corbett made any self-deprecating remarks about his diminutive stature. This well-loved comedian did in fact allude to his height of 5 ft 1½. He told his audience that he thought he might be late as he had been cleaning the floor of his budgerigar's cage that morning when the door had unfortunately snapped shut. He had thought he might be stuck there all day, but then he remembered, "Ring the bell, ring the bell."

6. More On Apprenticeships

Jayne Lawson of Chamber member King Ethelbert School has drawn our attention to some new opportunities available to anyone unemployed or a school leaver. Pie Music Factory of Ramsgate, registered charity no. 1097561, is inviting applications for 12 apprenticeships. The training consists of running workshops for young people in a variety of music styles. Pie Music factory writes: "These placements are not paid positions and do not affect your ability to claim jobseekers allowance. You will however receive access to £40 per week expenses allowance." In addition, the same organisation is offering a 6-month course of 10 hours a week accredited by the National Open College Network (NOCN) organized on similar terms but which focuses on key skills in the music industry. This course is claimed to prepare students "to go onto higher education at Thanet College or other colleges." For details, contact Pie Factory Music, telephone 01843 596777.

7. Kent Children

Amy Watson, Business Planning Officer in the Strategic Planning & Review Team at Kent County Council, has contacted the Thanet & East Kent Chamber to ask members if they are interested in contributing to the Kent Children and Young People's Plan 2011-2014. This will be the third official version which will then go for consultation in the Autumn. If you have any ideas, proposals or suggestions to improve the lives of children in Kent, feel free to contribute. Full details are on the website at http://www.kentrustweb.org.uk/children/kct_cypp_2011_14.cfm

8. Hotel Cleaner Finds £33,000

Hoteliers in Thanet and beyond will no doubt be asking themselves if they could find more employees like Essa Khan of the Serena Hotel, in Gilgit, Pakistan. This humble cleaner who earns around £150.00 a month found a bag containing over £33,000 when cleaning the room of a departed Japanese guest. According to reports, Mr Khan immediately handed the money into the hotel manager and said; "My duty with the hotel and my family upbringing teaches me nothing else. Times are hard for everyone, but that doesn't mean we should start stealing and taking things which do not belong to us." The manager said afterwards that the guest in question had no idea where he had left the money and was much relieved to discover its whereabouts.

9. Mechanic's Revenge

Following last week's account of a heart surgeon and a mechanic which left surgeon as the clear victor after his final words: "But you try doing it all with the engine running", a narrative has reached the Chamber of the mechanic's revenge. We have our doubts about this story, but readers must judge for themselves. Apparently some years later, the self-same highly-rated surgeon returned to the mechanic's garage having pulled off the nearby motorway with his engine misfiring rather badly. The mechanic stepped out of his tiny office onto the forecourt and immediately recognised the smooth-talking professional who had previously got the better of him. After listening contentedly to the surgeon's problem, he politely asked him to release the bonnet catch of his limousine and to start up the engine. As the mechanic listened to the erratic coughing of the motor, he withdrew from his trouser leg pocket a small screwdriver. Bending down over the carburettors, he made some minute adjustments which magically restored the engine to a perfectly smooth and quiet running mode and with a flourish returned the screwdriver to the pocket in his overalls. Unwilling to show his undoubted surprise at such manual skill from such oily hands, the surgeon said coldly: "Perhaps you could let me know if there is any charge and I will be on my way." He reached into his pocket for some change. With a casual "Certainly, sir", the mechanic retreated to his office, returning within a minute with a handwritten bill. The surgeon continued to jingle some coins in his hand expectantly until he read the invoice. "What! I don't believe it. £58.75 for a moment's work, just two twitches of your screwdriver. I don't get paid that much and I'm a heart surgeon." "I know you are", said the mechanic, "and if you prefer I can write you out the bill again. One pound for the labour for turning a few screws in your engine and forty-nine pounds for knowing which screws to turn. The rest is VAT". The surgeon meekly opened his wallet and paid the bill in full. The mechanic returned to his office with a broad smile on his face promising himself an extra biscuit with his tea that afternoon.

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