

Your Weekly Business Bulletin from Thanet & East Kent Chamber

Thanet & East Kent Insider

11th December 2010 Issue No.: 136

1. Transport & Tourism Report

The Thanet & East Kent Chamber's business networking breakfast last Friday on Transport & Tourism produced a stellar cast of speakers who kept their audience fully awake in the best traditions of the BBC to "inform, educate and entertain". As one delegate put it: "To have four such star names addressing us makes you feel special indeed". The first speaker was Charles Buchanan, Managing Director of Manston Airport and a key figure in the regeneration of East Kent. Introduced by the Chief Executive of Thanet & East Kent Chamber with the words: "We know that for every one million passenger movements, one thousand jobs are created", he did not disappoint. Charles told us that the airport already employs 117, of which 94% are from the local area. Over the six months of the summer period, the airport welcomed 21,000 passengers, all represented potential customers for East Kent retailers and businesses. In the longer term, the airport is looking to grow to five million passenger movements a year. Astute readers will know that the number of unemployed in Thanet allegedly looking for work stands at around 4,000. A successful airport could in theory reduce unemployment to zero and thereby wipe out the local audience for Jeremy Kyle's daytime television show. The airport's plans include the ambition to act as a feeder airport for a European hub such as Amsterdam. This would give passengers a wide choice of connecting flights. It would then be perfectly feasible to travel from Manston to Beijing with just one change.

2. What About P&O Ferries?

The next speaker to address the packed Walpole Bay Hotel was Chris Laming, Communications Director of P&O Ferries. He confirmed that P&O Ferries had invested 360 million Euros in two super ferries due to enter service shortly on the cross-channel route from Dover. He noted the depressed revenues from cross channel services since 2007 and the enforced restructuring of ferry companies that had ensued; this had included a reduction in staff at P&O's Channel House HQ. Prior to 2007, revenues had shown consistent growth of 5% - 7%. The recession saw profits "fall off a cliff". Chris assured us that P&O Ferries is in the business for the long term. Despite the high costs of operations and the huge capital expenditure involved, P&O ferries is determined that its passengers should enjoy the best possible travelling conditions and that required new ferries. The Spirit of Britain is due to enter service on 9th January 2011. It can accommodate 160 trucks and 250 cars. It will set new operational standards as it will be able to sail in winds of up to 50 knots, reducing down time and increasing efficiency. With a similar cost base to the current much smaller ferries, the Spirit of Britain and the Spirit of France, which will enter service later in the year, will revolutionise ferry travel to France. With the rate of the Euro to the pound currently favouring in-bound tourism, East Kent businesses that offer a warm welcome to continental visitors can expect to benefit significantly from the confidence-boosting investment by P&O Ferries.

3. What's This About People's Port?

The third Speaker was Neil Wiggins, Chairman of Dover People's Port Trust Limited (DPPTL). He outlined the background to the offer made by DPPTL to take over the ownership of Dover Harbour. He confirmed that the formation of the trust stemmed from a community initiative to maximise the benefits of the port for East Kent businesses. DPPTL had been successful in raising the finance of £400 million and had secured the services of legendary City figures Sir Patrick Sheehy and Algy Cluff among others who had committed to DPPTL's objectives of maximising local revenue from the 13.35 million passengers who pass through the port in a year. He declared that on completion of the handover, an immediate fund of £50 million would be available for investment in Dover and the surrounding area with a further £50 million to follow not long afterwards. DPPTL has attracted a broad range of support. Many on the far left of the political spectrum see the movement as a measure that imitates the early days of the cooperative movement and are excited by the democratic appeal of a serious effort by the community to take responsibility for its immediate industrial environment. Many on the far right are delighted that the ownership of a

strategic national asset might remain in British hands and are impressed by the BBB- to BBB+ grade of the professional financing available; allegedly superior terms to those on the HSI sale to Canadian pension funds. International organisations such as the Global Logistics Institute have welcomed the DPPTL proposals. The government of Australia is also examining the model to see if the pioneering proposals can be accommodated in its current strategic review of its own 42 home ports. See www.peoplesport.org.uk for more details.

4. What About Coach Travel Then?

Having covered air and sea transport, it was quite appropriate that the final speaker should be Peter Howe of Carol Peters Travel. As Managing Director of this popular local coach operator, Peter oversees the operations of a fleet of 16 vehicles encompassing minibuses and coaches. As a family company, Carol Peters Travel ensures customer service is its top priority. With a new coach costing around £250,000, Peter is aware that every new vehicle represents an investment in tourism and a significant addition to the East Kent offer. Business confidence is high due to strong links with partners, especially with Warner Leisure Hotels which he notes are “exclusively for adults”. Anyone who has travelled with Peter’s company will surely agree that the emphasis on comfort and service is a distinctive feature. The company offers extended continental holidays as well as day trips. How about a trip to Harrods sale on 3rd January 2011 for just £13? Telephone 01843 591007 for details.

5. Questions From The Floor

The first question from the floor was from Terry Painter, Managing Director of Terence Painter Properties. Terry suggested the formation of a Chamber Transport Advisory Group which could offer independent advice from the private sector to inform strategic decision-making. This was welcomed unanimously and arrangements are currently in hand to convene the first meeting. Terry also outlined the activities of Margate Renewal Partnership as a ‘driving force of creativity and culture’. As very much a community-based organisation, the partnership is helping to improve the street scene in Margate and is making significant progress in making the town an attractive place to visit for residents and tourists. Further questions and guidance from Richard Knox-Johnston, Chairman of Protect Kent, Mike McFarnell of White Cliffs Country Tourism Association and Michael Wheatley-Ward of the Sarah Thorne Theatre Club kept the meeting up to date on recent developments and ensured that discussions continued among many delegates long after the meeting formally closed at 0900 hrs.

6. People Mismanagement

We are grateful to Lynn Marchant of Kent Mindful Employer for bringing to our attention the ACAS Model Workplace exercises which allow you to benchmark how good your organisation is at People Management. These are available in short modules on the website at <http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=2806>. Fans of The Office will be grateful for examples of people mismanagement as the website also shows clips of David Brent’s excruciating attempts at modern management techniques. Anyone who recalls the early training films by Video Arts featuring John Cleese will know how useful it can be to witness how not to do it. David Brent’s idea of how to motivate his staff does require some improvement. “The bad news is some of you are going to lose your jobs. The good news is that I have been promoted and so every cloud ... “.

7. Winter Golf

Stonelees Golf Centre is offering readers of the Thanet & East Kent Insider unlimited golf each Monday or Tuesday from now until the New Year for £16.50. If you see yourself as the new Tiger Woods, telephone 01843 823133, but be careful as you reverse out of your drive on the way to the course. Do not hit a fire hydrant, a hedge or a tree. Emulating your heroes can go too far, you know.

8. The Power of Silence

Ian Duncan Smith may not have been entirely successful with his declaration that “the quiet man is here to stay”. He left his post as Leader of the Conservative Party shortly afterwards. More successful in the quiet stakes has been Silent Gliss, one of Thanet’s great companies with a string of awards for its innovative products. The latest offering

from the fertile minds of this world-class Margate based manufacturer is the Motorised Metropole. No, this isn't a movable hotel that slides along the seafront, but it is a delightfully quiet electric curtain track system that allows you to sit in your favourite armchair with a gin and tonic and operate your curtains remotely with a smile of supreme contentment on your face. This must be the ultimate example of one-upmanship when you invite your neighbours in for a Christmas drink. Linked to a timer and light sensor, this could also add a significant level of security to your home or office. Burglars do not associate moving curtains with an empty house. For details, give Silent Gliss a call, tel: 01843 863571.

9. Reduce Absenteeism, Increase Profit

Annie Churchyard, a Registered General Nurse at East Kent's leading private hospital, has contacted the Thanet & East Kent Chamber with some excellent health advice and a special offer. If your employees contract flu, they could be off sick for up to three weeks leading to considerable disruption and expense. The Spencer Wing is offering local readers of the Thanet & East Insider the opportunity to have a flu vaccination for just £10 per person. Recognising the need for employees to attend to their business, Annie is offering to visit Chamber members to administer the vaccine. As she puts it: "I could visit you on site and give any employees their vaccinations there, taking only a moment of their working day." As this Chamber has often declared, Predict and Prevent serves your bottom line much better than Find and Fix. To reduce your company's absenteeism this winter, give Annie a call at the Outpatient Department of the Spencer Wing, tel: 01843 23455.

10. Saying Ta-Ta To Your Pension?

Mick Rendell of Acorn Bowman FIM Limited is offering guidance to companies which have yet to take address the new pensions regulations due to come into law in 2012. As previously outlined in the Thanet & East Kent Insider, for the first time, employers will be required to enrol all eligible employees in a pension scheme and will be required to pay pension contributions for those workers who stay in it. A Pensions Regulator will have full powers to police and enforce these new regulations. If you do not currently have a qualifying scheme, you may find that the government's National Employment Savings Trust (NEST) is not the most appropriate for your company, especially as the government's scheme is being administered by the Indian-based Tata Group which may know little or nothing about your particular circumstances. The Chairman of the Tata Group is Ratan N Tata who is also the Chairman of Tata Motors, Tata Steel, Tata Consultancy Services, Tata Power, Tata Global Beverages, Tata Chemicals, Indian Hotels and Tata Teleservices. He is a brilliantly successful businessman who has increased revenues since his arrival in post by twelve times to USD 67.4 billion in the financial year 2009-10. He is much admired by the Indian government as Minister's Council on Trade and Industry, President of the Court of the Indian Institute of Science, President of the Council of Management of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, trustee of Cornell University, trustee of the University of Southern California and a member of the Global Business Council on HIV/Aids. He is also on the board of directors of Fiat SpA and Alcoa and on the advisory boards of Mitsubishi Corporation, the American International Group, JP Morgan Chase, Rolls Royce, Temasek Holdings and the Monetary Authority of Singapore. But, will he pop round to your office in East Kent to discuss your particular needs? Mick Rendell will. Give him a call, tel: 01843 609365.

11. Old Is Also Good

Companies that pioneer innovation such as Chamber members TV One, Infratil, Silent Gliss and Cummins have enjoyed enormous success through their investment in Research and Development from which we have all benefited in East Kent. A respect for age is compatible with a forward-looking strategy. Richard Ingrams founded The Oldie Magazine with a specific brief to be 'unpredictable'. He also was adamant that the pages of the magazine should be "Where books and the arts are reviewed without mercy." Despite the ambition to confound our prejudices, sometimes the objective assessments seem all too obvious. It might come as no surprise to regular travellers that at The Oldie Travel Awards 2010 at the East India Club last month, London Gatwick was designated the "Worst Airport". Equally, those in the know may indeed find it predictable that the Best Small Hotel Award has been given to Chamber member The Royal Harbour Hotel, Ramsgate, tel: 01843 591514. Built in 1799, this magnificent establishment has a management that believes in giving the customer what the customer wants before the customer asks. In all 19 en-suite bedrooms, broadband is complimentary as are hot water bottles in winter, evening snacks,

mineral water, tea/coffee making facilities and a video/CD library. Just in case you are wondering, off road parking, a breakfast cooked to order and an honesty bar are included as well. It is no wonder that the judge, Mark Palmer, was so impressed that he declared the Royal Harbour Hotel's room 4 to be "the best in the country". As East Kent's most generous benefactor, Roger De Haan, proved at Saga, there is money in age but you have to know your customer. Packaging the product with quality helps too.

12. Next Week

Next week's edition will carry a special report on manufacturing together with some details of the record number of new members to have joined the Thanet & East Kent Chamber.

13. Can You Believe It

A Chamber member has contacted the Thanet & East Kent Insider with an account from a recent long-haul flight. We have our doubts about this story, but readers must judge for themselves. He was sitting in the business class seats, (if you are speculating on who this Chamber member might be, that cuts down the odds a little) when a female member of the cabin staff approached the two passengers sitting in the pair of seats across the aisle. The one next to the window was obviously a travelling salesman who must have used his accumulated air miles for an upgrade. On his right sat a stern minister of religion complete with a clerical collar and a look on his face that spoke of a distaste for the sins of his fellow men. The stewardess asked the salesman if he would like a drink. He replied rather glumly: "A gin and tonic, please", rather regretting that he did not have the courage to engage in a longer conversation before the unremitting scowl of his near neighbour. In answer to the same invitation to a drink, the minister replied in a loud voice: "I would sooner commit adultery than allow alcohol to pass my lips". On hearing this, the salesman regained his spark and piped up with: "I didn't realise that there was a choice" and promptly handed back his untouched drink. The Thanet & East Kent Insider did not discover what ensued and we are much too polite to ask. Merry Christmas everyone.

14. Our Sponsors

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It's happening now, it's happening in Thanet & East Kent.

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Thanet & East Kent Chamber Limited

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