

Your Weekly Business Bulletin from Thanet & East Kent Chamber

Thanet & East Kent Insider

15th January 2011 Issue No.: 139

1. Flu Vaccination

As noted in previous editions of the Thanet & East Kent Insider, Chamber member The Spencer Wing in Margate and Ashford has been offering on-site flu vaccinations to local companies. We promoted this service extensively as a Predict and Prevent measure for which many Chamber members have been grateful. Such has been the success of the scheme that last Thursday Annie Churchyard advised us that supplies at The Spencer Wing have now been exhausted. With next year in mind, we congratulate those Chamber members who took full advantage and remind all our readers of a new proverb for the twenty-first century: "It's the early bird that gets the vaccine".

2. Thanet District Council Consultation

We are grateful to Louise Askew, Economic Development Officer at Thanet District Council for drawing our attention to the consultation questionnaire available at www.thanet.gov.uk/budget until Friday, 21st January 2011. Here you have the opportunity to state your preferences as to where you think Thanet District Council should spend its income. Please bear in mind that if you are a Council Tax payer in Thanet, just 14% of your payment is allocated to Thanet District Council. The rest is earmarked as follows: Kent County Council 71%, Kent Police Authority 9%, Kent Fire and Rescue 5% and Town & Parish Councils 1%. Some readers will deduce from this that you are nearly twice as likely to have your business robbed than burned down; but, of course, it is not as simple as that. After all, your headquarters could be robbed just before it catches fire. If you feel that the largest business support organisation in Thanet, the Thanet & East Kent Chamber, should have a louder voice in Thanet's economic development, there is ample opportunity to state this on the web based questionnaire. If you would prefer to make your comments direct to the recipients of the biggest proportion of your Council Tax payments, then you may wish to state your views in person to your local Kent County Councillors, see item 4 below.

3. Connecting Carers

Connexions Kent supports teenagers in making choices about their careers, training opportunities and lifestyles. Liaising with employers, parents and carers is essential if the organisation is to continue the success of its programmes in Thanet and East Kent. With this objective firmly in mind, the Thanet branch is holding an open evening in Cliftonville from 4.00 pm to 7.00 pm on Wednesday, 16th February 2011. If you are interested in attending, please call Lauren, tel: 01843 593395 or text 07501 228500 with your name and contact details. More information on the services offered by this Chamber member can be found at www.connexionskentandmedway.co.uk.

4. Kent County Councillors

The Thanet Local Board is holding a public meeting at 7.00 pm on Tuesday, 25 January 2011 at St Saviour's Church of England Junior School, Elm Grove, Westgate-on-Sea, Kent CT8 8LD. Doors open at 6.30 pm. These meetings provide an opportunity to liaise directly with your local Kent County Councillors over all aspects of the services for which KCC is responsible. We expect the following to attend: Cllr Bill Hayton, Chairman; Cllr Robert Bayford, Leader of Thanet District Council; Cllr Robert Burgess, Cllr Elizabeth Green; Cllr Charles Hibberd; Cllr Michael Jarvis; Cllr John Kirby and Cllr Chris Wells. There will be time for questions. The Thanet & East Kent Chamber will be fully represented. If any Chamber member has particular issues and is unable to attend in person, please forward your comments to admin@tekc.co.uk and we will do our best to raise them either at the Thanet Local Board or, if appropriate, during a separate meeting with the Leader of Thanet District Council.

5. Census News

If you are one of those people who dislike answering questions, the Thanet & East Kent Insider has three pieces of advice for you. Firstly, do not appear as a contestant on Who Wants to Be A Millionaire. Secondly, do not work for a Chamber of Commerce because we not only to listen to the questions, but we have to find the answers without the prospect of a million pound bonus. Finally, prepare yourself for the 2011 Census which is due to take place on Sunday, 27th March 2011. Whatever your view of the exercise, census data is a vital source of information for business and informs important decision-making on almost every aspect of our lives including health, transport, education and housing. It is in the interests of every Chamber member to assist Kent County Council, the Office for National Statistics and all public authorities involved to ensure the speedy and efficient collection of data. You might like to inform your colleagues and clients of the date and ensure that all employees are aware of the postcode of their main workplace; information that is critical in planning routes to work. Further details are available on-line at www.census.gov.uk, by email to research@kent.gov.uk and by telephone to tel: 01622 221627.

6. More About Petrol

The Thanet & East Kent Insider article last week under the headline "Petrol Prices Bring More Shock Horror" seems to have set a trend. In a paragraph detailing the annual rise in the price of a litre of unleaded petrol from 82.9p to 124.8p, we stated that: "the cheapest gallon of petrol now costs £5.67." Three days later, the Daily Telegraph followed a similar line with a few additions: "Petrol could soon hit £6 a gallon for the first time". We are delighted to focus attention on this issue. A rise of over 50% in the retail price of petrol adds to the costs of every business in East Kent. The possibility of Brent Crude soon crossing the alarming threshold of 100 USD a barrel hits at the heart of business confidence and could lead to the outbreak of fuel protests on a scale not seen since 2000; that is the conclusion also of David Wallop, the Consumer Affairs Editor of the Daily Telegraph, see <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/motoring/news/8250860/Petrol-prices-to-hit-6-a-gallon.html>. Local businesses are particularly peeved at the Thanet Surcharge which currently stands at a minimum of 3p a litre compared to outlets in Canterbury.

7. Bye Bye Retirement Age

The government has announced that from next October, companies will be prevented from issuing employees with compulsory retirement notices at the age of 65 unless there is a justifiable reason. The Employment Relations Minister, Ed Davey, is widely quoted by Reuters and others as rejecting the need for compulsory retirement on the basis that “It is high time we ended this outdated form of age discrimination”. The Financial Times has made the point that many large companies have already phased out the 65th birthday deadline and quotes JD Wetherspoon, BT, The Co-operative Group and Marks and Spencer as examples. Our own Chamber research department finds that The Cooperative Group alone has around 123,000 employees. Despite using a Bob Dylan song in its advertising, the organisation enjoys good relations with its staff and customers and takes a self-confessed pride at being: “a trusted brand and ... Britain’s largest farmer.” We also learn that it is more aware than most of our extended life expectancy as senior management has to wait much longer than it did for revenue from one of its main products: The Cooperative Group is Britain’s largest funeral provider. JD Wetherspoon, BT and Marks and Spencer have a combined market capitalisation of just under 21 billion GDP and seem to muddle through alright. It is fair to point out that not all employers have welcomed the measure. The Confederation of British Industries published its five pennyworth last month in a press release that stated boldly: “Companies will face huge uncertainty and greater risk of tribunal claims if the Government does not tackle the unintended consequences of the decision.” Among its main concerns are the dreaded Employment Tribunal claims which the CBI states had risen by 56% the previous year. With one exception, see 8 below, to date the abolition of compulsory retirement age has provoked no danger signals from the members of the Thanet & East Kent Chamber, many of which happily employ workers much older than 65 with great success. As always, we welcome the views of members. Your views are a hundred times better than our assumptions. Please send any comments by email to admin@tekco.co with the subject line “Compulsory Retirement Age”.

8. Guinness, Poetry and Rosebuds

The imminent scrapping of a compulsory retirement age has caused one Chamber member to reflect on mortality or as he put it: “Henrick has a point, I may as well gather some rosebuds while I can. Cheers.”. What a talented and interesting membership we have at the Chamber. Robert Henrick, the 17th century poet, wrote: “Gather ye rosebuds while ye may, Old time is still a-flying; And this same flower that smiles today, Tomorrow will be dying”. Henrick’s father, a rich goldsmith, died falling out of a window. We don’t know if this made his son want to squeeze every enjoyable moment out of the day, but our Chamber member may think so for he continues: “I like a drink or three from time to time. My great Aunt Margaret used to have a full pint of Guinness every day and she lived to be 98 years old.” When the Chamber replied to his email congratulating him on the longevity of his family genes, he wrote back. “Thanks. That’s fine, but Aunt Margaret’s doctor said that she would have made a hundred at least if she hadn’t drunk so much”. Makes you think, doesn’t it?

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**It's happening now, it's happening in Thanet & East Kent.
For details of membership, email admin@tekc.co.uk**

Thanet & East Kent Chamber Limited

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