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***** Welcome to the Thanet & East Kent Insider *****

Your Weekly Business Bulletin from Thanet & East Kent Chamber

Thanet & East Kent Insider
8 July 2008

Minimum Wages

Chamber member, Boys & Maughan reminds us that in line with the recommendations of the Low Pay Commission, increases in minimum wages will come into force in October 2008. The minimum hourly rate will change as follows: adults from £5.52 to £5.73, 18 – 21 year olds from £4.60 to £4.77, 16 – 17 year olds from £3.40 to £3.53. Employers who underpay are set to face tough new penalties.

As I Was on my Way to the Forum

Following the success of our sector-specific forums in IT, Property and Finance & Grants, the Thanet & East Kent Chamber will shortly be announcing new dates for the Chamber Training Forum, the Chamber HR Forum and the Chamber Charity Forum. In each case, we will offer a specialist speaker and the opportunity to represent your commercial interests at local, regional and national level.

Data Checks

Last week, we sent out details of our 2009 Chamber Diary with a data check form to ensure that we print the correct details in your free entry in what will be a definitive business reference for companies looking for new suppliers in East Kent. With our partners at the Channel Chamber, we will cover most of the coastal business community from Herne Bay around to Dungeness. If any Chamber member has not returned the form or would like more details, please email the Chamber to admin@tekco.uk with the subject line "Chamber Diary 2009" and we will contact you promptly. There are opportunities for advertising from 1/16th page to a full page at rates starting at £80.00 + VAT.

Yet More on Business Rates

As long as the best interests of our members are under threat, we will continue to campaign long and hard to safeguard the local business community. Last week, I visited Chatham to see the Area Director of SEEDA, Dr Susan Priest, who is responsible for Kent & Medway. In the company of the Chamber President, Bill Moses, we outlined the devastating effect of the Rating (Empty Properties) Act 2007 on businesses of all sizes in East Kent. Not only is the very survival of some businesses threatened by their inability to expand or contract, but the building of new shops, offices, factories and warehouses by the private sector has come to a virtual stop. Most worrying of all perhaps is further confirmation of local companies demolishing their empty buildings to avoid punitive business rates. These are the very premises that have traditionally been available to start-up companies at low rents. Susan Priest has agreed to raise the issue with the Government Office of the South East (GOSE) and to report back. We trust that this formidable female Priest is not in dispute with her bishop and that divine intervention will bring us some relief from the turbulence – preferably in the form of 100% relief on commercial property.

Bleating with Purpose

This morning at 0730 hours, a strange gathering of besuited individuals mustered at London Ashford Airport, Lydd. They had braved the twisted roads and stray sheep to hear a presentation from LAA's Robin Gordon on progress at the airport. Every accredited Chamber of Commerce in Kent was represented. We heard the facts and figures behind the £20m investment that has been made at what was once, in the days of the Silver Service, the UK's second busiest air terminal. LAA has an additional £20m to invest but is restricted by planning constraints and a vociferous minority of objectors. We learned that LAA is convinced that East Kent can support two regional airports, as evidenced by the success of the pairings at Bournemouth and Southampton as well as Cardiff and Bristol. We also discovered that for a mere £25,000 p.a. or thereabouts, LAA will arrange for you to have a 1/8 share in an executive plane allowing you and 4 passengers the luxury of 40 days of flights per year at cost price plus 15%. After admiring the new facilities, the group discussed KCC's incursion into the private sector with the launch of its own employment agency and travel company. Of course, business rates also entered the debate and there

was general agreement on a Kent-wide action plan. The combined weight of Thanet & East Kent Chamber, Channel Chamber, Invicta Chamber and North Kent Chamber represents a powerful voice for the county.

All Change for 2010

Any employer who files their P35 annual tax return on-line stands to gain a tax-free reward of £75 from HM Customs and Revenue. It can be a complicated process to have the compatible software, but it might be worthwhile getting on board now as this system will become compulsory in 2010. Chamber member Millen Neckler & Co has developed a special package for Chamber members and readers of the Thanet & East Kent Insider. Their user-friendly system also offers you a payroll solution from as little as £1.25 per payslip. For details, contact the very amiable Barry of Millen Neckler who will be pleased to answer calls to tel. no. 01843 599977.

The BCC and the BBC

Our professional organization, the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), featured in the television headlines yesterday evening and provided the lead story on many BBC radio bulletins. What prompted the media interest were the returns from the BCC quarterly survey of 5,000 companies entitled, "Alarming results highlight serious risks of UK recession". There was no "Good Evening and Welcome" from this David Frost. He is the BCC's Director General and can fairly claim nearly 5m workers in member companies. He has some icy words at the prospects for our economy and poured cold water on the notion that in one year we will be back to a period of strong growth. "The Q2 results signal a menacing deterioration in UK prospects". The BCC usually has some crumbs of comfort to offer with its forecasts, but there were no promises of an upturn in the economic cycle. The chilling conclusions were echoed by the BCC's economic advisor, David Kern, who added these icicles to David Frost's freezer, "The Q2 results signal a menacing deterioration in UK prospects. We are now facing serious risks of recession." For details of the results, Chamber members are invited to email admin@tekco.co.uk with the subject line "2008 Q2 BCC" and we will email you the full report.

Moses Speaks for us Today

Chamber member, Kent Messenger Group, featured Thanet & East Kent Chamber President, Bill Moses, in two extensive articles in this month's Kent Business. The first dealt with Bill's direct statement that public bodies such as Business Link "simply consume taxpayers' money, tick boxes and do very little". The second article is an editorial that describes Bill as a "business caped crusader" who is "prepared to speak his mind on behalf of business". It must be admitted that as the former boss of Sally Line and Sealink, Bill knows a thing or two about business and what East Kent needs to stimulate the economy. But as far as we know, he does not have a mask or a cape and wears his underpants inside his trousers. But, come to think of it, what does he keep in that briefcase? See next week's Thanet & East Kent Insider for the revealing answer. If you would like a copy of the articles in question, "Waste of money quangos should fund SMEs" and "Will Moses lead us to promised land?", buy the Kentish Gazette or email the Chamber to enquiries@tekco.co.uk with the subject line "Caped Crusader"; we will know what you mean.

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