

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

Your Weekly Business Bulletin from Thanet & East Kent Chamber

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13th November 2008

1. Dartford Crossing

Chamber Member, County Financial Services, has contacted the Thanet & East Kent Insider to point out that the charge for motorists using the Dartford Crossing is increasing from £1.00 to £1.50 per car. James Galbraith points out that such an increase cannot be justified in terms of supplier cost. James is quite right. Introduced in 1963, the toll charge was designed to cover the cost of construction of the tunnel and latterly the bridge. It is interesting to note that these costs were paid by the end of 2002 and that the legal authority to charge for the crossing expired in April 2003. We understand that the government justifies continuing the charge to motorists for using the Queen's Highway on the basis that this is no longer a toll, but "a congestion charge". Oddly enough, the 50% increase applicable from 0600 hrs on 16th November 2008 does not apply to Scotland. We are grateful to our colleagues at the Thames Gateway Chamber for informing us that "There are no charges on any road bridge crossing in Scotland." Apparently since February this year, the Abolition of Bridge Tolls (Scotland) Act 2008 has meant that even the Forth Road Bridge in Scotland is now free for motorists. Readers familiar with this Chamber's long-standing campaign for the repeal of the Rating (Empty Properties) Act 2007 will know that it is only companies in England and Wales that are obliged to pay this pernicious tax. The whole of Scotland is exempt and is therefore not witnessing the lamentable demolition of offices, warehouses and factories, the almost complete cessation of new builds and the serious deterrent to inward investment that the new business rates regime has caused since its introduction on 1st April 2008. If anyone can think of a reason why motorists in England and Wales are subsidising drivers in Scotland, please let this Chamber know. The charges for multi-axle goods vehicles will rise from £3.20 to £3.70 and for 2-axle goods vehicles from £1.80 to £2.00. Please note that the exempt period from 2200 hrs to 0600 hrs remains.

2. BBC and Margate

On Monday, 10th November, this Chamber was interviewed by BBC Radio Kent for the morning news bulletins. A PriceWaterhouseCoopers report had apparently commented adversely on the effects of the credit crunch on Margate High Street. After playing some pre-recorded views from traders and shoppers, the reporter asked for the Chamber's official comments. We take the view that there are far too many people criticising Margate and effectively saying to potential visitors, "It is miserable here, don't bother coming to my shop". Although the Westwood Cross development has undoubtedly taken away much of the traditional trade from retailers in Margate, the prospects are bright and will be brighter still when the full effects of massive inward investment show Thanet to be the fastest growing area in Kent. Work on building the Turner Contemporary will start in the next two weeks. Employment prospects in Thanet deriving from Thanet Earth, the China Gateway, the London Array, Thanet off-shore Windfarm and the construction of the new campus for Thanet College are without parallel in this part of the world. Thanet has the highest concentration of blue-flag beaches in the UK and Ramsgate can claim more listed buildings than Canterbury. With new central funding coming on stream in the New Year designed specifically to bring the benefits of new job and training opportunities to residents, there is perhaps a once in a generation justification for supporting this Chamber's claim that "It's happening now, it's happening in Thanet and East Kent".

3. Events and Networking

"Prevent, Predict and Prosper" is the title of a business breakfast scheduled for 26th November 2008 at the Oak Hotel, Ramsgate. Featuring presentations from Dr Mark Gilman and Chris Argent, delegates will be treated to insights derived from years of research and experience; all designed to help you be more efficient, more productive and more successful. This is an excellent opportunity to hear two first class speakers, enjoy a full breakfast and make new contacts. A snip at just £15.00. For details of this event, email admin@tekc.co.uk with the subject line "Gilman Argent Business Breakfast". On 4th December 2008, Rob Thrower, Thanet College Relocation Director, will be joined by the college principal, Sue Buss, for a presentation entitled, "Thanet College: New Campus, New Opportunities". The speakers will outline the £82m project to build a new college and indicate the opportunities for local companies to supply the many products and services required. For details of this event, email admin@telc.co.uk with the subject line, "Thanet College Presentation".

4. Training

If there is one consistent message from political parties of all persuasions on recommending actions in a recession, then it is "Training is vital to your business". Keeping up to date with new approaches and skills is surely a critical factor in surviving a downturn. Chamber member, Profile Development & Training, is offering fully-funded courses for employers looking to support Team Leaders and IT Skills. Any company with fewer than 250 can qualify to receive free training up to NVQ level 2. For details, give Andy Givens a call on tel: 01843 869100 or to his mobile, tel: 0771 253 2240. Other Chamber members ready, willing and able to train your staff include Thanet College, tel: 01843 605036 and ask for Alan Kirkham; Want To Learn, tel: 01304 366829 and ask for Tim Springett; EPEC Management Services, tel: 01843 864969 and ask for Bill Pitt; Kent Forklift Training, tel: 01843 823463 and ask for Stuart Ainslie; Moore Communications tel: 01843 230449 and ask for Jo Moore; St John Ambulance, tel: 01732 876417 and ask for Sheena Roberts; T G Aviation, tel: 01843 823656 and ask for Mark Girdler; Christ Church University tel: 01227 782867 and ask for Amanda Hutson; Engee Accountancy & Credit Management, tel: 01843 599179 and ask for Norman Gray; Kent Scuba Ltd tel: 01843 297430 and ask for Shaun Connell.

5. Success Stories

Last Monday, Thanet & East Kent Chamber escorted a Ramsgate-based politician around local companies. Our brief was to visit some successful enterprises with a strong growth record which are looking to expand. Our first port of call was Claires Bridal House. Excellent customer service lies behind the rapid growth of this shop at 82 Northdown Road, Margate, tel: 01843 293587. Nothing is too much trouble for Claire Greenleaf and her team which perhaps explains why she is actively looking to expand her range of services and acquire additional premises. Mach Associates was next in line. Bruce Hodge and his team are market leaders in providing communications software for the ski holiday travel industry. Microsoft Certified Partner and ISO 9001 status guarantee clients high standards in every aspect of their operations. Bruce welcomes calls on tel: 870 321 9986. BSW Timber Systems were the next in line. With exciting plans for rapid growth, this company is preparing to manufacture large numbers of timber-framed houses. Drawing its materials from renewable sources, BSW's business plan is very much in tune with increasing environmental concerns and low energy solutions. If you need a roof truss or a timber-framed house, give Managing Director Philip Wright a call on 01843 590777. Our final destination was for lunch at the always excellent Tarter Frigate in Broadstairs. There we met Paul Cowham, Managing Director of Sota Solutions. Paul's company is keen to work in partnership with local firms in order to maximise the benefits of the internet and promote greater use of high speed broadband links. Paul is always happy to discuss your needs, tel: 01795 413500.

6. The Great British Pub

Pubs are often at the heart of our towns and villages. The loss of a good pub damages the cohesive forces that maintain our social lives and dissipate the commercial pressures under which we labour. The British Beer & Pub Association tells us that in the period 2000 - 2005, pubs were closing at the rate of two per week. Revisiting that body of data now produces the frightening figure of 35 pub closures a week. The Licensing Act of 2005 added yet more costs to pubs and helped to widen the gap between supervised drinking in pubs and unmonitored drinking from cans of cheap lager bought from a supermarket. On average, Britons now drink 17 per cent less than the French, and 19 per cent less than the Germans. Comparative data for 20 European countries show the UK as only 14th in terms of the consumption of alcoholic drinks. Despite the heroic attempts by the Chief Executive of this Chamber, average consumption by men fell from 17.2 units a week in 1998 to 14.9 in 2006. For women, it fell from 6.5 units to 6.3. This Chamber will be organising a Beer & Pub Forum to harness ideas on how to make our government more aware of the great British Pub which plays such an important role in the East Kent coastal business community.

7. Michelangelo and friends

If you approach Broadstairs by road from the west from the West, you may see a sign advertising "Picasso Potatoes". In case you are thinking, "Is that that how artist with the staring eyes really spelled his name?" the answer is "No". Of course, it should have been written "Picasso". However, it does make you wonder if the forthcoming arrival of the Turner Contemporary is going to produce a succession of artistic vegetables on display in Thanet. Can we expect some Leonardo Da Vinci aubergines or a few Salvador Dali damsons? Perhaps our good friends at Thanet Earth can persuade their Dutch growers to cultivate some Vincent Van Gogh tomatoes.

8. Business Consultancy.

It is always difficult to see yourself as others see you. This is an area where an experienced advisor can save you an enormous amount of time and effort and perhaps bring innovative solutions to seemingly intractable problems. John Harrington of Harrington Associates, tel: 07974 374683, and Martyn Young of Atlantic Business Resources, tel: 0781 353 7456, are two such people and will be pleased to receive calls from Chamber members who are looking for a new perspective. A key issue they address is looking at how good planning can prevent future problems. In the picture below, the workmen fitting posts into pavement must have taken great pride in their work and tremendous satisfaction from having beautified the cityscape with such appropriate and well-made cast iron fittings that act as a most effective barrier to the passage of commercial vehicles. No doubt expecting the congratulations of their supervisor to greet them on their return to the depot, it must have been something of a shock when they tried to drive away.



9. Sponsors

We are grateful to Adecco Recruitment, tel: 01843 609292; Girlings Solicitors, tel: 01843 220274 and Evans EasySpace, tel: 0800 039 3900 & 07753 799 333 for sponsoring this edition of the Thanet & East Kent Insider.



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