

Your Weekly Business Bulletin from Thanet & East Kent Chamber

Thanet & East Kent Insider

5th March 2009

1. Easy to Find Space

Evans Easyspace has a number of commercial premises available for enterprising companies looking to review their current property commitments. The portfolio ranges from a small office of 192 sq ft to a workshop of just under 2,000 sq ft. All are located conveniently between Thanet and Canterbury at Lakes View, Hersden and are available for rent at competitive prices which include buildings insurance, service charges, business rates, electricity, water, furniture and telecoms. For more information and a dedicated tour, contact Russell Barnsley by email to russellbarnsley@evanseasyspace.com or by telephone to his personal mobile tel: 07753 799333.

2. Finance & Grants

On Friday 10th April 2009, the Thanet & East Kent Chamber will be hosting another of its popular workshops on Finance & Grants. The South East Grants Advisory Service (SE-GAS) will outline the full range of publicly-funded grants available to local companies wishing to expand their business. Delegates will learn of the criteria required and the free, expert assistance available that in the last 12 years has produced a 95% success rate for applicants and has secured £27m in grants for local companies. SE-GAS will be joined by a speaker from County Financial Services who will comment on the current state of the mortgage market and summarise the private sources of funding available. Open to all readers of the Thanet & East Kent Insider, this workshop will interest anyone looking for financial support for their business or for a review of their mortgage commitments. For details, email admin@tekc.co.uk with the subject line "Finance & Grants Workshop".

3. Beer

The visit to the Chamber on 3rd March by the Minister for the South East, the Rt Hon Jonathan Shaw MP, focused attention on the real issues facing the East Kent coastal business community. The Minister was left in no doubt that pub closures, the disastrous empty rates legislation and public investment in infrastructure were among the major concerns of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the area. The Minister promised to bring these matters direct to the cabinet. It is encouraging to note that yesterday five Ministers attended a meeting at the House of Commons to hear submissions from the pub industry. The presence of the Rt Hon John Healey MP, big chief at the Department of Communities and Local Government, ensured that the social effects of 39 pub closures a week were considered. Angela Eagle of HM Treasury was made well aware of the iniquitous tax regime which actively promotes the sale of cheap alcohol in supermarkets and penalizes responsible drinking in licensed premises under the supervision of responsible adults. The meeting was chaired by John Grogan Labour MP for Selby who is unafraid to speak his mind when he feels government policy is wrong. He has been a vociferous opponent of plans to privatize the Post Office. The British Beer & Pub Association tells us that since the 2008 budget, 2,000 pubs have closed resulting in the loss of 20,000 jobs. For a copy of the latest figures, email admin@tekc.co.uk with the subject line "Pub Closures".

4. The Past is the Future

Or as George Santayana put it, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it". In other words, if Adolph Hitler had read about what happened to Napoleon, he would never have invaded Russia. In the present economic crisis, there is much to be gained by learning from the past. One thing that is certain about history in Thanet is that there is a lot of it. Just under half the ancient sites in Kent are in Thanet, although it covers just 7.25% of the land area. The first written account of Thanet is by Pytheas in 325BC. This Greek traveller from Marseilles made no mention of the Thanet & East Kent Chamber of Commerce, but then he was more famous for being a geographer and astronomer and it may be that his visit did not coincide with one of our networking breakfasts. He did write about "the people tall and not so yellow haired as the Celts on the continent". This holds true today. At last Tuesday's Chamber business breakfast, see item 7 below, not one of the delegates had yellow hair, although many other colours were on show. The phenomenal heritage in Thanet represents a considerable commercial opportunity for any business looking to promote in-bound tourism and a healthy retail trade. On Thursday 12th March 2009, the Oddfellows Hall in Ramsgate will host a meeting entitled "Destination History" when enterprising ideas will be discussed on how to harness the past to secure a better future. For details, email laura@laurasandys.org.uk or telephone 07936 340184.

5. Ring the Changes

Our picture this week was taken earlier this evening at the launch of the new restaurant of Chamber member, the Bell Hotel, Sandwich. Comfortably seated in "The Old Dining Room", guests were treated to a sumptuous meal that was sourced entirely from local produce. Hotel Manager, Matt Collins, noted that "All our meat is from animals that have been reared in a traditional manner in Kent and is fully traceable." The delighted guests were suitably generous later in supporting the nominated charity for the evening, fellow Chamber member The Martha Trust, see www.marthatrust.org.uk for details. After living in 34 different hotels, Matt is now settled in Sandwich and admits to being completely overwhelmed on his first visit there and to the Thanet coast. In an article in the Sun newspaper on 2nd August 2008, the redoubtable Jeremy Clarkson wrote "Torture isn't allowed under the Geneva Convention. But it is still practised on anyone in a British hotel bathroom." He concluded the article with a fulsome compliment to Sandwich's leading hotel, "To understand what I'm on about, all British hotel managers should be sent to the Bell Hotel in Sandwich." It doesn't get much better than that, Matt. Congratulations to you

and your team for a splendid evening and a successful launch of your new restaurant. For information on The Bell Hotel, email reservations@bellhotelsandwich.co.uk or telephone 01304 613388. Readers of the Thanet & East Kent Insider have also recommended the following hotels and restaurants: Express By Holiday Inn in Minster 820250; G Casino in Broadstairs tel: 01843 579999; Kent International Hotel in Ramsgate tel: 01843 588276; Keston Court Hotel in Broadstairs tel: 01843 862401; Ramada Hotel in Dover tel: 01304 872841; Royal Harbour Hotel in Ramsgate tel: 01843 591514; Walpole Bay Hotel in Cliftonville tel: 01843 221703 and Thorley Taverns which has 29 outlets in Thanet tel: 01843 602010 including the Tartar Frigate Seafood restaurant tel: 01843 862013 and the Fayrency Hotel tel: 01843 868641.



6. A Load of Bananas

If you think that the Fairtrade initiative is a load of bananas, then that is just what you will receive if you attend a celebration of Fairtrade Fortnight scheduled to take place at Victoria Gardens, Broadstairs, at 1100 hrs on Saturday, 7th March 2009. The event will also include wine tasting, craft stands, a children's storyteller and a special visit from Rosa Helena Lopez De Soto, a Colombian coffee grower, Rosa grows some of the world's finest coffee beans at her farm in the remote heights of the Andes. She is a member of the Aguadas Co-operative in Colombia and for 10 years has been one of the beneficiaries of the Fairtrade initiative which has allowed her family to enjoy healthcare, education and, to put it bluntly, have enough food on the table to feed herself, her husband and her two sons. If you want to find out more about Fairtrade or just like eating bananas, Victoria Gardens on Saturday is the place to be.

7. Thanet Works

Last Tuesday, the Thanet Works Chairman, Jo Gideon, gave an overview of the aims and objectives of the Working Neighbourhoods fund that has been awarded to Thanet. Over £4m is available to be spent on initiatives that put an emphasis on "challenge, innovation and step change". The boost for local business takes the form of raising skills, improving opportunities and addressing head on the 23.4% of Thanet households with no adult in employment. The Directors of Thanet Works will look favourably at bids for funding that offer fresh thinking and new approaches. In a lively question and answer session, Jo and fellow Director, Colin Maclean of Kent County Council, responded to a question asking why companies should offer a job to a feckless, post-adolescent with few or no skills to offer. Jo explained that Thanet Works is designed to find a solution to just such hitherto intractable problems. If the appropriate projects bid for funding, then a wide range of solutions are available. Unlike most other publicly-funded initiatives, Thanet Works is not restricted by specific outcomes that must be achieved by individual projects. In effect, a small percentage of failures must be accepted if imaginative programmes are to succeed. Breakfast and hospitality was provided by Court Stairs Manor in Pegwell Road, Ramsgate. Delegates enjoyed a full English breakfast and magnificent views across the gardens to the sea. For details of what Court Stairs has to offer, telephone 01843 591850. For details of Thanet Works and how to submit a bid for funding, email admin@tekc.co.uk with the subject line "Thanet Works Pack".

8. A Texan in Canterbury

A few years ago, a friend of mine was tasked with meeting a potential inward investor from Texas. He was visiting Canterbury to examine the area as a possible location for a warehouse from which he could export goods to Europe. Tom met the Texan at Canterbury East Station and began his tour of Canterbury. The first stop was Westgate Towers. Tom gave a brief history of this fortified medieval building and explained how it had been used as a prison and most recently a museum. The Texan interrupted with, "How long did it take to build?" Not entirely convinced of the accuracy of his reply but unwilling to be unduly flummoxed, Tom replied "50 years"; to which the Texan retorted, "In Dallas, five years". The next port of call was the Whitefriars Shopping Centre. Tom related how the new shopping centre had revitalized that part of Canterbury. He was about to enter a lengthy explanation of the archeological finds that had come to light when the foundations were dug but was interrupted with a sharp, "How long did it take to build?" Tom replied without much conviction, "About 5 months I think." The Texan added, "In Dallas, five weeks". Tom then escorted his visitor to the centre of the city and they arrived outside a pub, The Old Buttermarket. Tom related that the name had been changed from The Olive Branch to reflect its position in what was once the buttermarket of Canterbury. He was on the point of launching into a lengthy explanation of the superiority of draught beer over larger, when the Texan turned round and saw Canterbury Cathedral, the mother Church of Anglicanism, world heritage site and home to the oldest community in the English-speaking world that can trace its history to the arrival of Augustine in 597 AD. "Wow, what is that?" gasped the Texan. After a moment's pause, Tom turned to him and said nonchalantly, "Funny, it wasn't there this morning".

9. Sponsors

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It's happening now, it's happening in Thanet & East Kent.
For details of membership, email admin@tekco.co.uk and be happy.