

IN BUSINESS

NEWSLETTER
JULY
2004

Check our website for information: www.sevenoakschamber.com
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WELCOME TO NEW BUSINESS IN TOWN

The town centre has seen a number of new retailers coming to Sevenoaks. The Chamber would like to extend a warm welcome to:

OIL & VINEGAR, High Street

BLUE MOON ART GALLERY, High Street

PHASE EIGHT, Blighs Meadow

WHITTARD OF CHELSEA, Blighs Meadow

REGENCY KITCHENS & BEDROOMS, London Road

DANISH COLLECTION LIMITED, Upper High Street and of course we look forward

to the opening in September of MARKS & SPENCER SIMPLY FOOD, Blighs Meadow.

We were pleased to hear that following our award to THE CHINAMAN for the best Christmas Window display last December, they have received the Villeroy & Boch Christmas Window competition runner-up prize and also the coveted OVERALL NATIONAL PRIZE WINNER IN THE ROYAL WORCESTER 'JAMIE OLIVER' WINDOW COMPETITION.

"WELL DONE TO THE GIRLS"

The premises formerly occupied by "Simply Italian" in London Road are currently being refurbished. We look forward with anticipation to see what the new theme will be and what the menu will have to offer.

Additional development will be taking place next to McDonalds in Blighs Meadow. We hope Phase 2 of Blighs - which is the London Road side won't be too long in the process!

GET SWITCHED ON.....

DO IT ONLINE

In November every employer in the UK should have received a letter from the Inland Revenue with important information about filing end of year returns online (P35 and P14s) and paying electronically.

The letter stated whether their records showed your company as a large, medium or small employer (based on the number of employees) on 26 October 2003. It also gave details of how to appeal against their decision.

If your Company hasn't received this letter, get in touch with your PAYE office.

Remember you can pay electronically or file online before the law says you have to. To register for online filing, go to: - WWW.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/efiling/help/empreg.htm#1

Support for new and small employers

The Inland Revenue's Business Support Teams are doing presentations on how to register, enrol and file online.

To find out about events phone 0845 60 70 143 or go to WWW.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/bst

Other ways of obtaining guidance are to ring the Revenue's Employer's Helpline on 0845 7143 143.

Lines are open Weekdays 8am-8pm and Weekends 8am-5pm.

STEP Scheme 2004

Companies are being sought for this year's STEP Scheme, which matches the skills of local undergraduates to specific business or technological projects in Kent.

STEP traditionally runs during July and August but more flexible full or part-time placements ranging from four weeks to 12 months can be accommodated. The work undertaken by the students is tailored to the needs of the Host Company.

The programme is being run by Abacus Events & Business Support on behalf of Business Link Kent. More information about STEP can also be found at WWW.step.org.uk and those interested in Taking part should contact Carol Smith on 0845 644 4601.

ENJOY A GLASS OF PIMMS

Sevenoaks Vine Cricket week 2004.

The Vine Cricket Week has enjoyed the support of sponsors for each day for 20 years. This year there is to be a larger marquee and the opportunity for local business to support the week and entertain guest by taking a table/or tables for 8 or 10 guests, however if you don't mind sharing a table smaller parties can be accommodated.

The cost is £30 per person plus vat.

This year the Sevenoaks Chamber of Commerce members have the opportunity to be entertained on Thursday 15th July at the Vine's. Old

Tonbridgians game. There are fixtures/lunches all through the week.

First class food is guaranteed in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere. Enjoy a glass of Pimms before lunch and watch cricket on one of the oldest and most historic grounds in the world. Car sponsors on the day are planning to give guests a test drive around the ground during the cricket interval.

For reservations or more information please contact David Notley – Sevenoaks Vine Cricket Club on 01732 456292 or E-mail:

david.notely@monroesystems.com

Changes to the Disability Discrimination Act.

It's time to get your business ready.

New provisions in the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) are being introduced from October 2004. They ensure that disabled people gain better access to small businesses. If you are an employer with fewer than 15 staff, or provide goods and services to the public, this is what you need to do;

As an employer you must ensure that your business does not provide less favourable treatment to disabled people in the areas of recruitment, training and promotion – or within the working environment as a whole.

As a service provider you are already required by the DDA not to discriminate against disabled customers. You will now be required by law to tackle physical features of premises, for example steps or high counters, that prevent disabled people using your services, or to consider how you might provide the service in another way.

The law requires businesses to make reasonable adjustments. For example, improving access could be as simple as removing obstacles to help somebody with restricted mobility. Or replacing a round doorknob with a lever handle, to make it easier for a person with severe arthritis to get in.

Visit the Disability Rights Commissions website at WWW.drc.gb.org for further help and advice.

CODE CHANGE

Are you still using tax code numbers with suffix "A" or "H"?

For a number of reasons some employers still have employee tax codes with suffix "A" or "H". These are no longer valid and the Inland Revenue will not be able to recognise them from 2004-2005.

The Inland Revenue will be able to identify some of the codes but makes no guarantee that all will be corrected within the timescale. If any codes "A" or "H" are still being used you should request a revised coding from your local Inland Revenue Office without delay. You will need the employee's name, National Insurance number and current code number.

New Town Clerk

The new Town Clerk of Sevenoaks took up her new post in April this year. **Sarah Arding** joins Sevenoaks Town Council from Swanley Town Council, where she was Assistant Clerk. The

Chamber of Commerce extends a warm welcome to Sarah on behalf of its members. Sarah is looking forward to meeting and working with many people, who do so much to make Sevenoaks such a pleasant town in which to live, work and visit.

EMPLOYER TALK 2004

Employers Talk is a chance to speak to IR experts face to face and to listen to key speakers give IR's latest news and payroll developments.

You can do this in just one morning or afternoon at events across the UK.

Events are free but capacity is limited so book your place.

Tuesday 6th July 2004

Tonbridge, The River Centre.

Call Val Barclay on 01622 760321 for more information.

Sevenoaks Volunteers

When Sevenoaks Volunteer Bureau was founded in 1972 it was one of the first five in Britain.

Today, newly renamed as Sevenoaks Volunteers, and having recently celebrated 30 years of service to the local community, it has a renowned reputation in the Voluntary Sector for promoting and developing volunteering. Last year Sevenoaks Volunteers, loyally funded by several local authorities, including the Town Council recruited more than 200 volunteers; over 250 local organisations call on it for their manpower needs.

Hundreds of public-spirited people of all ages and backgrounds are attracted to volunteering, but often don't know how to get started, or what is entailed. Sevenoaks Volunteers HQ in Buckhurst Avenue assess peoples talents and needs, and introduces them to organisations where they will flourish. The activities are endless: befriending; practical support for the ill, lonely and house-

bound; mediation work; youth mentoring; conservation; hospice assistance; or maybe driving people unable to use public transport. Sport and the arts also cry out for willing hands. Volunteers themselves discover immense satisfaction, not only from the point of social conscience, but often for personal reasons; there is fulfilment for those who, due to many factors (age, disability, isolation, job status, race) face exclusion in other areas.

The professionalism of Sevenoaks Volunteers in recruiting, training, placing and supporting volunteers was demonstrated last year when, while gaining accreditation for full membership of Volunteer Development England, it received an award for outstanding achievement as one of the Bureaux attaining maximum possible scores in its assessment. Anyone wanting to volunteer, or any community or statutory organisation seeking helpers, can get further information from (01732) 454785 or e-mail

info@sevenoaksvolunteers.org.uk

HOME OFFICE NEWS

Changes to the law on preventing illegal working

The Government has changed Section 8 of the Asylum and immigration Act 1996 with effect from 1st May 2004.

A new booklet explains the new checks that will be required on new employees before being given a job. By making these checks, you will ensure that you are only employing those who are able to work legally, and that you do not place yourself at risk of committing a criminal offence.

There were ten new countries joining the European Union on 1st May 2004. Nationals from all of these countries will be free to come to the United Kingdom to work. Nationals from eight of these new Member States who find job in the United Kingdom will be required to apply to register with the Home Office under the new Worker's Registration Scheme.

The Government is providing detailed guidance on how to comply with the law on preventing illegal working. To obtain detailed technical information on the section 8 changes visit the Home Office website; <http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/default.asp?pageid=17>

For further information and booklet call the Employers' Helpline on 0845 010 6677.

Client Alert

Stressed out employees **Should employers be worried?**

"Stress", anxiety and "depression" all seem to be commonly used words on doctor's sickness absence certificates and this begs the question as to what is meant by such terms. Do employers have any responsibility or duty of care? Do such absences fall within the criteria of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995? In brief should employers be worried?

Stress, anxiety and depression can arise from significant pressure or demands being placed upon employees, which they struggle to cope with. Stress has also been associated with a number of serious health conditions such as heart disease, high blood pressure, ulcers and thyroid disorders.

Stress can have an effect upon employer's business as a whole, such as: reducing productivity, poor decision making, tension and conflict between colleagues, increased sickness absence and loss of motivation and commitment.

HOW TO REDUCE STRESS?

Good management of a business can do a lot to reduce stress by having good communication, close employee involvement, support and training, clearly defined objectives and targets as well as opportunities for staff to contribute ideas.

WHAT SHOULD WE DO IF SOMEONE IS OFF WORK WITH STRESS?

An employer should seek to provide help, support and training if necessary to the employee. Some employers may be able to provide confidential help-lines or counselling. Employers should look at the workload of the individual who is suffering to see if reasonable adjustments can be made.

CAN AN EMPLOYER DISMISS SOMEONE ON LONG TERM ABSENCE?

Yes, but subject to full consultation with the employee in question, considering whether medical evidence is required, investigating the nature of the illness and considering whether there are any other suitable alternative roles or assistance available. A business with Permanent Health Insurance benefits will need to tread particularly carefully.

“They have to be clever and smarter, attract the right people and give out the right messages. Skill one is doing the business, skill two is about how you grow the business and marketing is top of that. Unless your message goes out seven times, people don’t remember you.

Mr Craven, who is giving similar seminars for Barclays up and down the country, praised the attitude of the delegates, “But the reality is not this morning, it’s what they do this afternoon and tomorrow.”

Matt Ferrett, Barclays area manager, said the seminar has been thought-provoking, inspirational and good fun. He expected the bank to host other seminars this year or next.

Asbestos – are you up to date with changes in the law?

Asbestos was widely used in buildings right up until the mid 1980’s and only ceased in 1999. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the Government have tried to bring controls to bear on companies to recognise and understand the severity of the problem, with little success.

But the gloves are off now and the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations (CAWR) has been brought in to finally combat the problem. Now, anyone who owns, manages or has responsibility for non-domestic premises has a legal duty to either manage the risk of asbestos or co-operate with those who do.

So what does that mean?

“Usually a survey will be needed to establish if you have asbestos in the building.

Then an assessment of the material and the risk of exposure to any asbestos has to be prepared,

backed up by a management plan, including permits to work for maintenance purposes”.

“But most importantly, until sample tests are carried out unknown materials must be presumed to contain asbestos”.

This does not mean you have to remove all asbestos. If it is in good condition, it is perfectly safe and can be left alone, with periodic monitoring, to check it remains so.

The full regulation is quite complex but most specialist asbestos surveying companies will hold discussions to outline what is required of the duty holder.

For further details see www.pvsurveys.co.uk

BURDENS ON BUSINESS

The extent to which businesses are hampered by red tape introduced since Labour came to power in 1997 was underlined by a survey just released.

The time small and medium sized companies spend dealing with human resource issues has more than trebled. Firms spend on average 10 hours per week on red tape taking valuable time away from running the business & 8 out of 10 think this has cost financially in the past year. Eight out of ten also believe that growth of their business has been hit says the survey of 3,600 small & medium sized companies.

This problem is particularly acute as small businesses do not have specialist departments to deal with the deluge of regulations and many bosses think the Government is using firms as a 'tax collector' with tax credits, stakeholder pensions & student loan repayments. It is also felt that family friendly policies such as extended maternity rights are hitting firms.

The British Chamber of Commerce estimates that regulations introduced since 1997 cost £30billion up to £10billion in the past year alone.

TOP 10 BURDENS ON BUSINESS

Working time directive (limits the working week) began 1999 cost £11.2bn
Data protection (restricts use of personal information) began 1998 cost £4.63bn
Pollution directive (makes firms cut vehicle emissions) began 2001 cost £4.3bn
Control of asbestos (monitors asbestos use) began 2002 cost £1.4bn
Disability discrimination (makes firms cater for disabled) began 1999 cost £1bn
IR35 (makes firms pay NI on contractors' pay) began 2000 cost £973m
Employment Act (imposes host of family friendly rights) began 2002 cost £565m
Working tax credits (cuts tax for working parents) began 2000 cost £465m
Stakeholder Pensions (makes firms provide pension) began 2001 cost £404m
Flexible working rules (gives staff flexible working rights) began 2003 cost £404m

The above is cost since introduction - source British Chambers of Commerce Burdens barometer.