

## The Countywide Economic Partnership

# Mears Group gets the bigger picture



### Gloucestershire born company tackles wider social issues to transform futures nationwide.

At Mears, the measurement of success goes far beyond the facts and figures to the positive impact the company has on both the individuals and communities within which it operates and serves.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) undoubtedly springs to mind, but according to Phil Stephens, a Director of Mears Ltd, the leading social housing repairs, maintenance and domiciliary care services specialist, the company has taken the concept to an entirely different level where the results will be felt for generations.

*"The very nature of our business means that to a large extent we are operating in some of the most deprived areas of the country. Crime, worklessness and social inequality are issues faced on a daily basis by our clients and tenants. Through our regular daily activity we have been able to positively influence, improve and indeed combat some of the negative factors that affect the lives of many of our residents."*

### Transforming futures

It sounds too good to be true but areas such as the Whitehawk Estate in Brighton are testament to the effect that Mears has had in transforming futures for individual residents and the local community. Working together with the client to introduce an innovative community-based programme called 'Our Neighbourhood', Mears has encouraged tenants to embrace a new found sense of pride for their estate which previously had a reputation for high levels of crime, community disparity and neighbourhood degeneration. As a result the local police team, now based at a community office shared with Mears and the local council, has seen a significant drop in the levels of property damage and vandalism in the area.

*"We have found that many of the same issues are experienced throughout the country," continues Stephens. "We're not for one minute suggesting that one solution fits all, but we have seen that it is possible to take elements from one area of best practice and adapt them to benefit another."*

A good example is the Mears Academies programme, set up to teach vocational

skills to social housing residents, young people and school children. With the sixth academy launched last month in Birmingham, the concept has received high praise from one of Britain's most respected businessmen, Sir Gerry Robinson who believes the academies are: *"an invaluable initiative to give opportunities to those that need them most."*

*"Worklessness, particularly during this current economic time, is an issue for many areas," explains Stephens. "Through our academies we hope to impart core vocational skills that can help people with their future employment prospects."*

### Transforming outcomes

It's certainly an interesting concept, transforming outcomes for individuals through community based initiatives and the integration of services delivered to individuals within the home, and this bigger picture perspective demonstrates that the company has come a long way from its roots as a small, private building contractor.

Still headquartered in Gloucester, the company operates from over 140 branches nationwide, boasts a £420m turnover and employs 8,000 people. But, as argued by the company's Chairman, Bob Holt, in a previous interview, this philanthropic approach to business has and continues to be a key platform from which the company will continue to grow and succeed.

*"Given our role within communities across the UK, we are seeing firsthand some of the issues people are struggling against," says Stephens. "That coupled with our understanding of what needs to be done to make a difference means we are best placed to provide a solution and it goes beyond the nine to five approach."*

**"It's simply our business philosophy to make people smile. That's what we aim to do, at every level."**

Phil Stephens, Director, Mears Ltd

# Wake up and smell the Coffee!



Chris Creed, Managing Director of Creed Foodservice, Penny Manuel, Director of SOHO Coffee Co., and Nick Brookes, Group Account Manager for Creed Foodservice

## Creed Celebrates Major New Partnership with Leading Coffee Shop Chain

**Creed Foodservice**, the Staverton-based food wholesaler, is celebrating its first year as nominated sole supplier to **SOHO Coffee Co.** – one of the South West's leading coffee shop chains and another of Gloucestershire's business success stories.

The contract – which is worth approximately £1m – was won against tough national competition and has helped boost the family-owned company's annual turnover to an anticipated £37m. SOHO Coffee Co., which began life 10 years ago as a stand alone coffee shop in Cheltenham, has also enjoyed a rapid growth period and now has six additional outlets in shopping centres throughout the West Country and South Wales, and stores at five major UK airports. SOHO also has a site at the Roadchef motorway services at Strensham Southbound on the M5 near Tewkesbury.

*"SOHO Coffee Co. is renowned for product innovation and has built its reputation on organic Fairtrade coffee and top quality, handmade sandwiches, baguettes, salads, and cakes,"* explained Nick Brookes, Group Account Manager for Creed Foodservice. *"Our relationship with SOHO is very proactive and we work very closely when developing new menus and identifying new trends in the foodservice sector."*

As well as supplying a wide range of multi-temperature foodservice items to SOHO – including dry goods, frozen foods, fresh

fruit and vegetables, fresh meat, speciality breads and patisserie – Creed Foodservice also helps customers stay ahead of the game by offering sector and category insight and proactively sourcing new products.

One of the key ingredients in this successful partnership is the added value aspect of Creed's offering.

*"We aim to offer SOHO, as we do all our customers, a high degree of flexibility in terms of product ranges, locally produced wherever possible, product innovation, and realistic, convenient delivery times."*

*"SOHO Coffee Co. is a fantastic local business to work with, and the fact that we are based just a couple of miles from their central production unit also means that the food miles remain as low as possible,"* added Nick.

Penny Manuel, Director of SOHO, comments: *"SOHO is an ethical business and we always put the desires of our customers and concern for the environment at the forefront of everything we do."*

*"Not only are we passionate about ethical issues such as organic, fair-trade and local produce, but we handpick our suppliers extremely carefully, and are delighted to be working with Creed Foodservice,"* she added.

## Georgia on my mind



HMS GLOUCESTER is currently on deployment in the South Atlantic and the crew has undertaken a demanding period of exercises culminating with a second visit to Port Stanley.

Whilst at anchor, 15 members of the Ship's Company assisted the Falkland Islands Government in a ceremony at the Argentinean cemetery to commemorate the fallen of the 1982 Conflict. This was a visit by families of servicemen lost from the General Belgrano many of whom were visiting the graves for the first time. All those taking part were thoroughly humbled by the ceremony.

Prior to this the ship had berthed at Valparaiso, Chile and Iain Lower, Commanding Officer, had been delighted to involve a team in a 'Corporate Social Responsibility' programme. The crew set out to paint, clear and clean a local school, Escuela Gran Bretana. This school caters for disabled children and those with learning difficulties and is situated in one of the poorer areas of Valparaiso.

In just a few hours the sailors managed to make a huge difference to the atmosphere within the school, brightening it up and making it a much happier place. Everyone was pleased to be involved and all were proud of the work that had been completed.

After leaving Port Stanley the crew looked forward to visiting South Georgia, a location of outstanding beauty and home to a variety of wildlife ranging from seals and reindeer to tens of thousands of birds and penguins.

Preparations for their homecoming, just before Christmas, are gathering pace.



# NVQ recognition for lorry drivers

The four people at the front are Mike Farmer, Regional Director of the Road Haulage Association, Bob Oldmeadow, MD C&G Services, Linda Weaven, and Roger Cullimore, MD of MCC.



**Moreton C Cullimore**, the Gloucestershire-based concrete, gravels and transport group, has been celebrating the success of 20 of its drivers who have passed their NVQ Level 2 in LGV (Large Goods Vehicle) driving skills in the past year, thanks to training and assessment by Stonehouse-based training specialist **C&G Services**.

The drivers include one woman, Linda Weaven, and one young driver, Michael Baverstock, who earned his HGV licence at 18 under the Young Driver's Scheme. They each received an NVQ certificate and a souvenir model Land Rover - a limited edition in Cullimore's livery - from Managing Director Roger Cullimore at the firm's offices in The Perryway, Frampton on Severn.

The ceremony was attended by Mike Farmer, Regional Director of the Road Haulage Association and Bob Oldmeadow, Managing Director of C&G Services, along with staff from Cullimore's and C&G.

Roger Cullimore commented "Many of these drivers have been with us a long time and we know they all do an excellent job, but these certificates give them some proper recognition for what they've achieved. Not everyone realises what a difficult job a driver has to do on today's busy roads, with all the rules and regulations they have to follow."

"The drivers have all had to demonstrate a wide range of skills to achieve their NVQs" said Bob Oldmeadow. "We're proud to have been able to help them achieve this."

# Gloucestershire company helps Brawn become F1 World Champions

Tewkesbury-based energy and environmental controls company, the **Automated Building Controls Group**, (ABC Group) are celebrating their role in helping Brawn GP secure the 2009 Formula One Constructors' Championship.

The ABC Group is one of the UK's fastest growing independent building and energy management companies and they provided Brawn GP with the high calibre environmental engineering needed to simulate race conditions at Brawn's UK engineering and testing centre in Northamptonshire.

"Our touch screen technology interfaced with Brawn's state-of-the-art race simulators so that they could replicate the stresses placed on the car's gearbox and transmission systems under extreme environmental conditions." said ABC Director, Matthew Morrall. "This enabled Brawn GP to test the car's response, under extreme stress, to the wildly different air temperatures, humidity levels and weather conditions that they would be encountering at race tracks across the world."

John Hazelwood, Chairman of Gloucestershire First, is full of praise for the ABC Group, saying, "Gloucestershire has a well-deserved reputation for its technology and advanced engineering sectors and I want to congratulate the ABC Group on their involvement in what is a great achievement for UK motorsport".

# Lakes Bathrooms launches invisible business

An invisible coating may seem an unlikely money-spinner, especially in today's tough marketplace. But the AllClear® stay-clean coating launched last year by Tewkesbury-based Lakes Bathrooms has provided the opportunity for the shower enclosure specialist to launch a brand new business.

AllClear Coatings is the name of the new venture and Lakes Bathrooms say that it plans to build on the success of its invisible stay-clean coating in the bathroom industry to expand into other markets.

### Limitless innovation

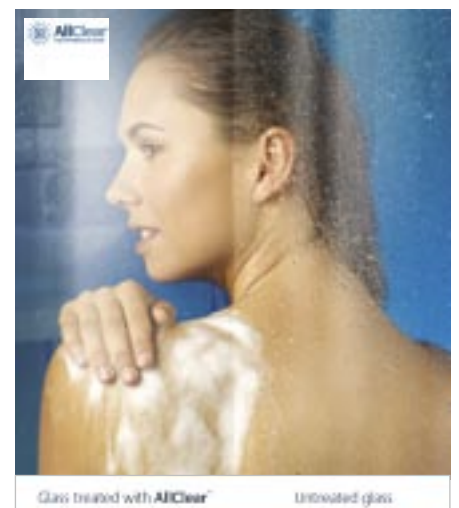
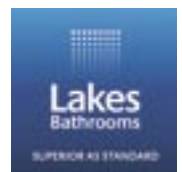
"Kitchen worktops, windows, mirrors and other household applications are obvious places for our stay-clean coating," explained sales director Robin Craddock. "We also realise that there are an almost limitless number of other commercial ways to use the AllClear product, such as to treat car windscreens, in washrooms and other industrial cleaning environments, on hospital surfaces, on glass roofs and other inaccessible architectural features. The opportunities are endless and we plan to focus on these with our new AllClear Coatings business."

AllClear is a super-fine, invisible coating that repels water, limescale, dirt and other deposits on any treated surface. Its hydrophobic quality means that water droplets merge and fall, leaving a streak free surface. The claimed benefits are that treated surfaces require cleaning only with a cloth and fresh water so the need for chemical cleansers is removed. This, Lakes Bathrooms say, makes for quicker and cheaper cleaning, improved hygiene and reduced environmental impact.

Application of the coating to Lakes Bathrooms' shower products is done via a process called 'vapour-deposition' in a specialist patented chamber. The new company will initially concentrate on hand application whereby bottles and kits of the AllClear products are sold in quantity for treatment of various surfaces on site or in third party production.

"We already have enquiries and interest in AllClear from a range of different market sectors," said Craddock. "We don't want to take our eye off our successful existing business so have recruited Leigh Fletcher, a

specialist from the glazing market, to specifically drive our coating sales. This is an extremely exciting time for our business and we're ready to seize the potential."



# ARRK helps Channel Five's The Gadget Show make concept of the future a reality



SLA Room

Global prototyping specialists, ARRK Product Development Group, was delighted to be able to help the makers of Channel Five's "The Gadget Show" bring one of their presenter's futuristic gadgets to life

using its Rapid Prototyping technology.

The presenters of the show, Suzi Perry & Jason Bradbury, were each tasked with creating a wearable gadget of the future. With some ideas in mind they turned to product design and innovation consultants "Smallfry" to help make their ideas a reality. It was at this point that Suzi Perry's

team, having decided to develop a pair of futuristic MP3 shoes, approached ARRK to produce a number of prototype components to house all the necessary electronics within the soles of the high heeled shoes.



With both presenters competing against the clock and each other to come up with a winning gadget, once ARRK had received Suzi's team's CAD Data the team quickly set about building a number of components for the shoes using their fleet of in-house Stereolithography (SLA) and Selective Laser Sintering (SLS) machines. Within hours of the builds being initiated the parts, built out of high clarity resin and glass filled nylon powder, a tough, durable material, were dispatched for final assembly.

With both presenters having to demonstrate their wearable gadgets in front of a live audience and judge, the ARRK team were delighted that Suzi Perry's MP3-playing shoes were chosen as the programme's winning gadget.

## Charlton Networks: 0 to 12 in 12 years



Steady and sustainable growth over the last 12 years has been the key to the development of Charlton Networks.

Now based at the Canterbury Business Centre, Tewkesbury, the company provides a range of packages that deliver consultancy, design, installation and support services for IT computer network systems. This is the third home for the company in the County having launched the business from the back-bedroom of their house after Richard Perry, Managing Director, had decided to take voluntary redundancy. With roots firmly in Gloucestershire Mary, his wife and a working director, named it after Charlton Kings, where they were living at the time.

Charlton Networks initially focused on

corporate and large data networks across the country. Over the years the company skills were applied to working with both corporate clients, encompassing a wide range of solutions and services, and to small and medium sized businesses based in and

around Gloucestershire. The aim is always to deliver a tailor-made service to clients, who rely upon the team for critical support and management of IT infrastructure.

### Accreditation

As the business grew so did the number of staff and there is now a 12 strong team. Continued expansion is anticipated. The company has strong associations with leading manufacturers and carries a number of accreditations which include Microsoft Certified Partner, Cisco SMB select partner and HP authorised reseller. Investors in People accreditation has been held for 5 years.

The company moved to Tewkesbury in 2005 and runs the Canterbury Business Centre with nine suites in operation for various tenants. Charlton Networks acquired Cedar

Electronics, a hardware repair company in 2006 and formed Charlton Telecom in 2007. It can now provide the whole spectrum from planning networks, providing the hardware and software and installing and supporting it as well. It provides a one-stop-shop for business communications IT infrastructure.

### Corporate Social Responsibility

Richard and Mary are both active within the Institute of Directors and other business groups working to help provide an even better business environment within the County. In addition they have launched, with Evans' Jones and Ladders Solicitors, the 'Business in Gloucestershire' Golfing Society with profits donated to local charities. Beneficiaries so far have been Linc charity which is part of the Cobalt Unit activity in Thirstaine Road Cheltenham, Cotswold Care Hospice based in Minchinhampton and The Gloucestershire Community Foundation.

Plans are being prepared for improvements to the Business Centre. The website has been revamped and expansion of the workforce continues with the recruitment of a new engineer. Gloucestershire is good for business and Charlton Networks good for the County.



# Gloucester City Centre Regeneration



**The South West RDA (Regional Development Agency) has announced £11.2m of investment to help regenerate Gloucester City Centre.**

The 'Economic Linkages' project, which will receive £7m, will dramatically improve the public areas and streets between Gloucester City Centre and Gloucester Quays – the city's £400m new retail outlet development – and is part of the RDA's wider investment in the city as an area of significant economic potential. The balance of £4.2m will pay for the completion of the Gloucester Docks Project.

The Linkages project represents the culmination of three years' work by the RDA, Gloucester Heritage Urban Regeneration Company (GHURC) and Gloucestershire County Council.

Despite significant budget cuts within the RDA earlier this year, the Agency remains

committed to helping Gloucester City Centre achieve its full economic potential.

Ian Knight, area director at the South West RDA, said: "Gloucester has a smart, stylish and modern retail centre in Gloucester Quays, where business is already flourishing, despite the tough economic climate. We need to make sure Gloucester City Centre can share in this success – and improving links between the two areas is key.

"Attractive, well-lit streets will encourage people to wander between the two areas, spending more time and money in the City. Turning these streets from a run-down, little-visited area into a vibrant pedestrian thoroughfare will also bring new businesses into the area.

"The fact that this project has made it through a tough process following substantial budget cuts at the RDA, shows the economic significance of Gloucester's Docks and City Centre."

The work will be carried out in two sections – the RDA will improve the Gloucester Docks section, and the County Council will improve the Kimbrose Triangle/Southgate Street section, using RDA funding alongside funding from the County and City Councils.

Work on the Docks section will start immediately and be complete by summer 2010. The Kimbrose/Southgate Street section will commence early in 2010 and be complete by the end of next year.

New paving, lighting, street furniture and signs will be put in to create a pleasant walking route between the two areas, where pedestrians will have priority over vehicles. It's hoped the smarter look and feel will see more people using the footpaths, and new businesses attracted into the currently vacant and run-down properties along the route.

This important work will build on the economic benefits already being realised as a result of the regeneration of the Docks and the Quays.



## Selling to the Public Sector

**A 'support-local' campaign was launched recently with a seminar outlining how Gloucestershire companies should sell their services to the public sector.**

Organised by the Gloucestershire County Council and structured with the help of the Gloucestershire First Economic Taskforce, some 60 companies attended together with representatives from local authorities, Business Link, the NHS and the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB).

Introduced by the County Council lead cabinet member for resources, Cllr Ray Theodoulou, public sector procurement experts said they were keen to engage with local businesses to support County companies and save money.

Businesses were given an insight into public sector buying policies and procedures by Claire Smart and Dominique Gregory from the County Council, Imogen Batton from the NHS and Sarah Turner from Stroud District Council.

Welcoming the initiative, Viv Rayner from the FSB said the campaign should be long term to have an impact. "Small firms employing fewer than 10 people comprise 41 per cent of all south west companies in the private sector," she said.

"Many appear to be more successful in their bids outside the County, were often not considered for work within the County and, as a result, the public sector was probably paying more than they needed to," she added.

To encourage more County firms to tender for public sector business, the group provided a check-list to improve submissions:

- Make sure the tender goes in on time and is correctly addressed
- Seal the envelope, it could well be disqualified if it arrives opened
- If it is not clearly marked as a tender it could be disqualified
- Do not try to influence staff, this will lead to disqualification
- Do not put forward alternative bids if you

cannot meet the brief

- Do not qualify your price by offering more or fewer services
- Don't tell them what you want them to know, tell them what is asked for
- Selection will always be on information supplied, not on what is already known.

The Gloucestershire First Economic Taskforce is now looking at further ways to stimulate trade between the public and private sectors, including benefits to be gained from the London Olympics in 2012.



LtoR: Viv Rayner, Sarah Turner, Terry Morgan, Imogen Batton, Claire Smart, Ray Theodoulou, Angela Presdee, Dominique Gregory and Alun Pritchard.



## Creating Property Solutions for Gloucestershire

Gloucestershire First acknowledges with thanks, the generous sponsorship of this newsletter by Robert Hitchins Ltd

### New Super-green Fleet for Epsilon

Gloucester-based electrical safety specialists, **Epsilon Test Services** are 'greening' their vehicle fleet and have just signed a deal for around 150 of Vauxhall's new award-winning ecoFLEX Corsas.

Reduced CO2 considerations were high on Epsilon's shopping list according to Managing Director Tim Beardsmore: "We regularly renew our fleet and always look for practical enhancements. In this upgrade we have taken care to consider obvious priorities like safety and reliability, but also focused on reducing our carbon footprint with the latest energy efficient diesel engines."

The model chosen by Epsilon is the Vauxhall Corsa 1.3 CDTi ecoFlex Club. A big name for a compact car, but it boasts a turbo diesel engine that achieves up to 62.8mpg. This fuel efficiency goes a long way to reducing environmental impact

and this is further improved by Vauxhall's new Diesel Particulate Filter (DPF) which collects and captures soot particles from exhaust gases to prevent them being released into the atmosphere.

*"The Corsa has proven a very popular car with our engineers," said Tim Beardsmore. "Having a first class fleet is all part of our approach to service and standards. We want to ensure that every aspect of our operation reflects our ethos of providing the best possible service, whilst at the same time making sure that factors like fuel economy allow us to keep our costs in check. This means that the value that we can offer our customers is the best in the market."*

Epsilon is taking delivery of its new fleet as fast as they can be supplied, and expect to have the full compliment of their silver, branded cars by the end of the year. The fleet will be operated through a contract

with LEX Vehicle Leasing and the deal was overseen by Nigel Bannister, Group Fleet Manager at Epsilon's parent company, PHS Group.

The Corsa's reduced CO2 emissions place it in the lowest road tax bracket, but more importantly for Epsilon's engineers, the supermini's green credentials will mean a lower NIC contribution for them for the benefit of a company car.

Summing up the new fleet selection for Epsilon, Nigel Bannister commented:

**"Epsilon has chosen extremely well and we have driven the best deal for them. This upgrade is good news for customers, staff and the environment."**

Further information on any of the articles can be obtained from John Courts at Gloucestershire First. Telephone: 01242 864119, email: john.courts@glosfirst.co.uk or by writing to Chargrove Business Centre. [www.glosfirst.co.uk](http://www.glosfirst.co.uk)

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