



by Stewart Barnes of QuoLux

Gearing up for Christmas period

THE run up to Christmas is crucial to the financial performance of many firms. Stewart Barnes of QuoLux discusses how one high profile local business is planning for both seasonal and overall business growth.

It's almost three years since I last wrote about Highgrove Enterprises, the Tetbury-based commercial operation His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales created to generate income for his Charitable Foundation.

The Prince of Wales has long been associated with charitable work, organic and sustainable principles, and safeguarding traditional British crafts and techniques.

In the last 35 years he has also transformed the grounds at his Highgrove home, near Tetbury, into some of the most inspired and innovative gardens in the United Kingdom. With her specialist retailing knowledge, experience of working within charities and exposure to historic houses and gardens, Christine Prescott, CEO, has built a retail footprint for many of the products and traditions championed by The Prince of Wales.

Chris, supported by her senior management team, has greatly expanded the retail operation to maximise returns at Christmas.

New product lines and themes have been successfully launched this season at Clarence House.

An expanded Christmas Shop and restaurant at Highgrove opens from Wednesday November 23 to Friday, December 16. Its shopping experience is a high spot in the festive calendar, promising a special experience and the opportunity to find unique gifts for friends and family.

This year, Highgrove Enterprises has gone much further and invested in 'pop-up' shops.

A key feature of its business plan, new shops have been opened at Cribbs Causeway in Bristol and more recently, in the St David's Shopping Centre in Cardiff. Sales of 'Gift in a Box' with its tour of the gardens followed by a Champagne afternoon tea are at an all-time high, continuing to provide much needed income for The Prince's Charitable Foundation. Finally, Highgrove Enterprises is leveraging its excellent license relationship with Fortnum & Mason and is selling its food range alongside the latter's at Mitsukoshi stores throughout Japan. All of these innovative initiatives are a game changer for the business. But, Chris is the first to realise that she cannot do it on her own and continues to recruit and invest in a senior management team and support staff.

As your thoughts turn towards the festive season, please do consider visiting Highgrove and supporting The Prince's Charities either from a corporate perspective or from a personal one. Business people and families alike will enjoy what is on offer. Tickets can be booked on the Highgrove website at highgrovegardens.com.



Optimum Oils' successful apprentice Liam O'Grady with, left, Nicola Smart, accounts administration, and administration manager Kerry Pullen

Optimum delighted with apprenticeship

BY BUSINESS REPORTER ANDREW MERRELL

OPTIMUM Oils was looking for a school or college leaver to shape and train in the skills gaps within its business. An apprenticeship was an ideal way in which to recruit this type of individual and after completing the recruitment process decided upon Liam O'Grady, who was looking for something other than university after college studies.

Liam was keen to start his career rather than going to university, but was also drawn in by the ability to continue learning whilst earning. He has recently completed his apprenticeship advanced business administration apprenticeship, but he is still working for Optimum Oils and continuing his studies with Cirencester College to help his professional development. This involves working towards a

Level 4 Customer Service qualification. For its part, Optimum Oils has been pleased with the apprenticeship programme. "Apprentices are a great benefit to any business. "Our first and only experience (so far) has been a good one with our apprentice showing commitment, enthusiasm to learn all aspects of the role and an eagerness to get the job done right," said Kerry Pullen, a manager at Optimum Oils,

which has its head offices at Ullenwood Court, Ullenwood, near Cheltenham. Cirencester College is advertising several apprenticeship opportunities across the county and beyond. The college is a key partner in this newspaper's Apprentice 1,000 campaign which seeks to encourage and promote the creation of 1,000 new apprentices in the county in 2016. According to the College it is

committed to providing high quality, professional apprenticeships at intermediate, advanced and higher levels for Gloucestershire and the surrounding area in: accountancy, advertising and marketing communications, business administration, creative and digital media, customer service, financial services, interactive design and development, IT application specialist, marketing, social media and digital marketing, supporting teacher and learning in schools, team leadership and management. The colleges apprenticeship team are industry experts and happy to speak to employers thinking of taking on an apprentice. Whether your organisation is small or large Cirencester College can tailor an apprenticeship to fit your requirements of your business. Contact the team on 01285 640994 or email apprenticeships@cirencester.ac.uk.



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