

WEST KENT BUSINESS EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2011

THE AWARDS CATEGORIES

- **Best Growing Business**
Judged by NatWest
- **Best New Business**
Judged by Genesa Ltd
- **Best Retailer**
Judged by Henry Paul Funerals
- **Community Award**
Judged by Town and Country Housing Group
- **Customer Care and Service**
Judged by Halliwell/Elizabeth Finn Homes
- **Employer of the Year**
Judged by Loch Associates and enablese Ltd
- **Enterprising Business**
Judged by West Kent Chamber
- **Excellence in Marketing**
Judged by Deeks Evans
- **Innovation**
Judged by West Kent Partnership
- **Outstanding Business Person**
Judged by Synergee Ltd
- **Young Entrepreneur of the Year**
Judged by Kent Trainers



■ The awards are organised by the Courier in association with the West Kent Chamber of Commerce and supported by our ambassadors BSK-CIC and Heart Kent

A City girl who chose the path of fashion

FORMER City market trader Paula Fry readily confesses to a life-long love of all things stylish and glamorous.

So, when she lost her high-flying job in London, she used her redundancy money to set up Love Is Boutique in Tunbridge Wells, one of this year's entrants in the Best Retailer category.

She knew that her business had to be different so she set up a shop specialising in designer dresses and vintage clothing and accessories, including handbags, jewellery and shoes.

It would be too easy to describe her as a trader in secondhand clothes, but in some respects that would be true.

Many of the garments date back to a bygone age, which tend to surface when "granny's wardrobe" is being cleared out.

Other items go on offer because they no longer fit the owner.

The system works on a sale-or-return basis.

If the goods are sold, the shop takes a commission; if they



IN BUSINESS: Lynne Meek at the Love Is Boutique, Church Road, Tunbridge Wells

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remain unsold they are returned to the owner.

People who leave clothes with the shop automatically become "members" which now number 700.

Items appearing on Love Is Boutique website have been sold to buyers all over the world, but especially those living in Australia, the USA and Scandinavia.

The question is, does she miss the City?

"I have absolutely no regrets," said Paula.

"I'm now doing exactly what I really always wanted to do."

Just a fortnight before nominations for awards close Still time to get your entries in

By Keith Lewis
business@courier.co.uk

THERE are two more weeks before the deadline for entries to the 2011 West Kent Business Excellence Awards, so there is still plenty of time to throw your hat in the ring.

Easy

It is easy to register and enter and costs nothing.

If your business is at the cutting edge, you may win one of the category awards, or even emerge

as overall winner.

As past winners can testify, the benefits are considerable in terms of business reputation with existing and potential customers, with your own employees and within your own industry.

Now in its fourth year, the West Kent awards, are a chance to step forward and put yourself and your company to the test with our team of distinguished judges.

There is no downside.

This year there are 11 categories to accommodate businesses of all shapes and sizes and from a

wide range of sectors.

Five of them – Best Retailer, Best New Business, Excellence in Marketing, Enterprising Business and Young Entrepreneur of the Year – are new in 2011.

Steady stream

While we have received a steady stream of entries to these categories we would like to see more.

Details of how to enter are printed on this page.

Remember, the deadline is Friday, August 26.

IT'S SO EASY TO ENTER

It's really easy to enter – there are just five questions to answer.

■ To register and enter online, go to www.thiskent.co.uk/businessawards

■ To register and enter by post download the forms from the website (on the awards homepage under enter by post) or order forms from Jenny Walker on 01245 605301 or jenny.walker@essexchronicle.co.uk

■ In case of any difficulties, contact programme organiser Alan Pocock on 01245 400877 or alan@apteventspro.co.uk

'My secret was just listening to customers'

WHEN Peter Lamb bought the property next to Frant Station at auction, he intended to set up a farm shop specialising in local produce.

However, since Lamb's Larder opened its doors for the first time 18 months ago, he says things have gone rather better than anticipated and the store now offers wide range of everyday convenience goods.

Peter Lamb, who has entered his store in the Best New Business category, says the secret of his success is communication.

Took the trouble

He said: "I took the trouble to listen to what the customers wanted, rather than stock items that I thought they should buy."

He likens his store to a US mini market because of the wide variety of goods on offer.

In addition to locally-sourced fresh meat, fruit, vegetables and bread, shoppers can buy day-to-day items, such as ketchup, soup and toilet rolls.

It has become indispensable for people disembarking from the London train and many commuters pop in on their way home to pick up one of the ready cooked meals stocked by Lamb's under a franchise deal.

And now that the store is licensed, it is also possible to pick a good bottle of wine to wash it down.



IN BUSINESS: Peter Lamb with his grocery store in Bells Yew Green

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■ **Category sponsor**
KENT Trainers is proud to sponsor the 2011 Young Entrepreneur category. If you see some of yourself in BBC1 Apprentice winner Tom Pellereau, or runner-up, Helen Milligan, and you have demonstrated this through your own business, then you should be entering this category.



Director Sally Jones said: "At Kent Trainers, we consider entrepreneurial spirit to be crucial to growth and employment in the UK and feel that those who are brave enough to take calculated risks should be encouraged."

Kent Trainers is one of the leading training providers in the South East.



■ **Category sponsor**
Chartered accountants Deeks Evans has a history of providing personal service to its clients stretching back 50 years. The awards represent an opportunity not only to meet other influential people in the local business community, but also to become involved in a process that helps encourage smaller firms to grow and develop. Deeks Evans has developed a wide range of specialisms, including will drafting, lasting powers of attorney and probate, which it regards as natural extensions of inheritance tax planning. Karen Braddel, who will be judging entrants in its category, is the firm's private client partner.



Its software development skills are a key part of the company as it had always developed database systems internally to manage its business. The IP security know-how was developed six years ago on the back of export projects.



■ **Category sponsor**
Tonbridge and Pontefract-based Genesa has three core business streams; it is a national internal cable installer for a major telecom provider, it distributes and supports IP security products for CCTV and access control, and develops bespoke software applications such as job order management, security pass solutions for airports and workflow management.



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■ **Category sponsor**
Town & Country Housing Group, a previous winner, is one of the leading housing associations in the South East, providing more than 8,300 affordable homes. Given its own area of experience and commitment to the community, Town & Country feels that it is particularly appropriate to sponsor the Community Award category. It provides good-quality housing and excellent customer service. Its charity arm – Town & Country Foundation – works towards making a positive difference to community and family life. It runs initiatives on financial inclusion, learning and skills, health and well-being, neighbourhoods and community cohesion.



Based in Pembury, Henry Paul Funerals is an independent funeral director, providing bespoke commemoration to Tunbridge Wells and its surrounding communities. The ethos of the firm is to celebrate individuality in death as in life.



■ **Category sponsor**
The West Kent Chamber of Commerce and Industry can trace its history back to the launch of the Tradesmen's Association, which was formed in Tunbridge Wells in 1858. Now based in Tonbridge the chamber supports firms across the West Kent region.



The chamber has moved with the times and is now a vibrant and lively networking organisation offering local companies support in many ways. Members enjoy numerous benefits.



For more information contact chief executive Jackie Matthias on 01732 366653 or e-mail jackie@wkcci.com

