

Business in Bloom



Fears of a high street slowdown continue to dominate the headlines, but Guildford town centre remains a hub of activity.

Do the area's firms have enough bite to fend off the credit crunch?

The credit crunch continues to dominate headlines along with a mounting fear we are hurtling towards a recession. But despite the doom and gloom Surrey and Hampshire businesses remain surprisingly upbeat. **Caroline Bullock reports**

THE panic in world financial markets has led to sharp falls in share prices and to the contraction of credit market.

But against this uncertain economic backdrop, if the hordes of shoppers continuing to hit Guildford High Street every week are anything to go by, the town does not appear to be suffering to the extent of the slowdown as other parts of the country.

With shops as busy as ever, restaurants still heavily booked and businesses reporting steady growth it would seem that mounting fears nationally that a prolonged slowdown will prompt recession-like conditions are not shared in this area.

Indeed, businesses, while not resting on their laurels, are confident that they can weather this particular storm and the optimism is strong across all sectors from manufacturing to public relations.

"Looking at the statistics in the quarterly economic survey the results are very encouraging," said Pauline Hedges from the Surrey Chambers of Commerce.

"Businesses are telling us there are more orders in their books and that they are taking on more staff."

"We are pleased that the county does not seem to be as depressed about the current economic situation and the future."

"The only two concerns that were raised from businesses we have spoken to were corporation tax and inflation."

While services such as publication relations and marketing may seem traditionally to be the first casualties when busi-



Pauline Hedges from Surrey Chambers of Commerce is pleased that business continues to thrive despite the tough economic climate.

nesses are tightening the purse strings, Guildford-based PR firm The Wordbox Group is evidence that this isn't the case locally.

Managing director Jane Newick has taken on a number of new accounts in the last few months and interestingly these are in the food service sector and luxury goods sector, usually the first ones to be affected when consumers cut back on spending.

She added that the tendency for people running SMEs during difficult times to cut back on everything is generally counter productive and has welcomed the calm approach of local business, who may have the benefit from past

experience, to resist any knee jerk reactions.

"Reducing marketing spend can delay essential innovations. This means that when the economy picks up they find they have fallen behind their competitors and have a lot of ground to make up very quickly if they are to retain their market share," she said.

"We are reading so much doom and gloom at the moment but the reality for us is very different."

"This month we have won three new accounts, two in the food service sector and one in luxury goods."

"Eating out and spending on high value luxury items are usually the first to be affected

when consumers cut back on spending so this certainly seems to be bucking the trend."

And she believes it is important that business remains upbeat.

"To me, a recession means zero per cent economic growth, not that everything suddenly stops overnight, we therefore shouldn't get too carried away with all the negative headlines, we don't want to talk ourselves into a recession."

"From speaking to our clients, most seem very optimistic about the year ahead. However, if conditions become tougher we may all have to work smarter to retain the business we have."

And a particular buoyancy can be seen in the franchising with this industry in the region worth £2.6 billion.

This represents a 15% increase on last year's performance of £2.25 billion and means that the franchising industry in the area outstripped that of the UK economy almost five times over.

Maggie Duerden is typical of the growing number of business people benefiting from the flexibility and support of the franchise model, having recently set up a MAD Academy franchise in Dorking, Reigate and Holmby St Mary areas, offering music and activity classes to young children. She has not found the current economic climate any barrier as she starts out in the franchise market.

"I'm starting the classes this month and have several bookings for the term already. I know it may take a while for the classes to fill up but it's looking positive from the feedback I've had so far."

Stunning bloomers, fully kept-up for you!

Did you know your business could enjoy the benefits of an eye-catching display of blooms, fitted and fully maintained for you, totally trouble free?

Sponsor a **Guildford in Bloom** basket and help make Guildford more gorgeous.

Prices are £60 each for a fabulous planted basket, which Guildford Borough's Parks & Countryside Service will look after you.

Call Parks and Countryside Services on 01483 444715 for an application form or email parks@guildford.gov.uk

GUILD FORD BOROUGH cleaner safer greener

HONEYPOT ANTIQUES CENTRE

QUALITY & VARIETY FOR THE DISCERNING BUYER

Milford Road, Elstead
(B3001 Farnham Road, just 2 miles from A3)
Open 7 Days - Mon-Sat 10-5, Sun 11-5
www.honeypotantiques.co.uk
Telephone: 01252 703614

David Fuller

7 CHURCH ROAD, Gt BOOKHAM
CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF SERVICE

The Complete Gentleman's Outfitters
Tel 01372 454710
E-mail: enquiries@davidfuller.co.uk
Website: www.davidfuller.co.uk

EXTRA-LARGE SIZES

TROUSERS from 34" to 62"
SUITS & JACKETS from 38" to 62"
SHIRTS up to 23" collar

FINE CLOTHES FOR THE BIG MAN

MIX & MATCH SUITS. FORMAL HIRE WEAR

City Cabs & Cars Ltd.

Reliable, Fast, Efficient Service

Established Over 25 Years

- Saloons, Estates & Multi-seaters
- Airport
- Courier Parcel Service
- Business Accounts Welcome

- Genuine 24 Hr, 7 Days a Week
- Licensed & Vetted by Guildford Borough Council
- Competitive Low Rates to Airports
- Lady Drivers Available

Guildford
01483 888 666

5 High Street, Guildford
Fax: 01483 451140

Are you Single?

Looking for love in YOUR life?

Searchmate Guildford offers a confidential, safe, bespoke introduction service to find the one to change your life!

Just call **01483 579234**

www.searchmate.co.uk/Guildford
e: guildford@searchmate.co.uk

Fineweave Flooring Specialists

CARPET • WOOD FLOORING • VINYL • KARNDAN • RUGS •

For all of your flooring needs



End of Season CLEARANCE

save up to 50% (While Stocks Last)

FREE CHOOSE - AT - HOME SERVICE

We can bring the showroom to you. We will select a range of products suitable for your needs and budget and bring them to your home where we can measure the required area. We will then prepare a Full, No Obligation Estimate for you.

Top Quality Products at Clearance Prices – a winning combination. To make way for our new 2008 ranges, we have several Clearance products including Carpet, Wood and Vinyl available at **Knobout Down's prices.**

www.fineweave.co.uk **FLEET: 186 Fleet Road** **01252 614 446**

OLIVER WOO Bespoke Tailors

- Classic English tailoring... hand-made in Hong Kong
- with stores in Guildford, Tunbridge Wells and Brighton.

Contact us on 01483 506484 or visit us on-line at www.oliverwoo.com | 1 Friary Street, Guildford, GU1 4EH **OLIVER WOO**