

Business

Jingle tills for Housing Units

CHRISTMAS trading in independent gifts and home store Housing Units was up nearly 10 per cent on the same period last year.

Nick Fox, a director at the Wickentree Lane, Hollinwood, store, told *Chronicle Business* that nursery and flooring departments were the top performers, while the Christmas decorations and gifts department enjoyed a 15 per cent increase in the 2012 pre-holiday period compared with 2011.

"Retailing is a lottery, impacted by weather, economy, mood and trend — but we saw a near 10 per cent increase in general sales over the same period in 2011," he said.

Mr Fox added: "The key factors seem to be loyalty of customers and a continuous and Herculean effort by staff to get the right merchandise in the store at the right time.

"We also ensure our prices reflect best-possible value.

"Significantly, the best performing departments are two which we have expanded and invested in in 2012, so we are particularly pleased that we read the markets correctly."

Firms in less distress

BUSINESS distress levels in the North fell in the second half of 2012, with the result that more than half of all companies in the region are now in a stable condition.

According to the latest Business Distress Index, only three per cent said they were struggling to pay the bills.



Leaders event raises £4,000 for Mahdlo

MORE than £4,000 was raised for Mahdlo, the Oldham Youth Zone project, at an Asian Business Leaders event at Blue Tiffin, Royton.

Organised by Kash Ashraf, a Mahdlo board member, and Muzahid Khan, the event attracted 140 business people from across the whole spectrum of the borough's business community, including Mahdlo chairman Terry Flanagan and major patron Norman Stoller.

Mr Stoller praised the event, and the "amazing" support of everyone who attended.

Dr Basma Ellahi, head of the clinical department at the University of Chester, was the host at the dinner and Azmat Muhammed, chief executive of Institute of Recruiters, was the guest speaker.

Ticket sales, a raffle and an auction saw £4,000 handed over on the evening to Mr

Flanagan who expressed his gratitude in an inspiring speech about the youth zone project, which has already attracted more than 2,000 young people and goes from strength to strength.

Pictured, from left, are Philomena Chen, UK Trade and Investment; David Benstead, chair, Oldham Business Leadership Group; Kashif Ashraf; Dr Basma Ellahi; Azmat Muhammed.



STRENGTH to strength . . . Hazelnut Bakery

Selling like hot cakes

Bakery business is on the rise

DESCRIBED as one of the hidden gems of Saddleworth, the Hazelnut Bakery, a specialist cake shop in Delph village centre, is celebrating its first birthday.

The shop has built a reputation for baking delicious cakes made from the best locally-sourced ingredients that are beautifully designed and crafted with incredible attention to detail.

The bakery is known locally for creating the cake models that marked the closure of the BAE Systems Chadderton site and the centenary of Greenfield Primary School.

In the year since the then deputy mayor Councillor Olwen Chadderton opened the shop to the public, the business has gone from strength to strength.

Chris Jenkins, who runs the bakery with his wife Hazel, said: "Many businesses have suffered during the recession but, our reputation for quality has meant that even though many people have less

money, they would prefer to save up and buy something special like the cakes we offer."

2012 was a memorable year for the pair, who have created hundreds of cakes since opening their shop. Their services are so much in demand that they have received bookings as far in advance as the summer of 2014.

In addition to decorating their exquisite cakes, creative director Hazel Jenkins teaches sugarcraft skills at monthly cake decorating classes.

Hazel said: "People love making cakes at home and we can show them how to decorate these to a professional standard. Having our own shop gives us an ideal space for teaching classes and we also stock a wide range of cake decorating equipment."

The King Street shop has

hosted more than 20 parties since its launch.

"We mostly do cupcake decorating parties for children's birthdays, but we offer a range of party packages for both children and adults who are looking for something different to do to mark a special occasion" — and it is Hazel who is responsible for making sure everyone has a great time.

To celebrate its first birthday the bakery has unveiled a new shop sign, which was made by Oldham company Sign Creations and Media Ltd, and has launched a new range of treats for its Saturday cafe.

Hazel concluded: "It's so nice to have Saturday as a treat day. It reminds me of being younger, when my dad would take us all into town and buy us a cake if we had been good!"

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BY MARTYN TORR

Roll up, roll up, for the biggest show of the year

Entries deadline looming

ENTRIES are now starting to flow in for the fifth One Oldham Business Awards.

With the deadline for entries rapidly approaching, the business community is awakening to the fact that, if they want to be part of Oldham's biggest business event of the year, they have to act quickly.

Entry forms are available online — www.oldhambusinessawards.co.uk — and the local authority is to post entry forms with the business rate demands in the next few weeks.

These will be physical reminders that the entry deadline is looming but they can be used as entry forms, too.

Flood

Louise Slater, from the council's business team, said: "The entries are now starting to come in and we always seem to get a real flood in the last couple of weeks.

"I'm hoping that we can persuade people to enter now and to ease the burden in the last week.

"Every year of the awards — and we are into year five now — the nominations and entries have risen and there is no reason to suppose this won't be the case again.

"The presentation dinner is the night for business in Oldham with 460 people at the event.

"All the finalists — and we are talking about 30 companies, businesses and organisations — receive free tickets to the dinner and will be visited by a professional video team to shoot a film for the big night."

Student Jade joins the awards team



JADE Sherlock, a student at the Peter Jones Academy at The Oldham College, has joined the One Oldham Business Awards team.

The 18-year-old is helping co-ordinate entries in the 10 categories that will be presented at the glittering awards dinner at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, Oldham, on Friday, May 10. For each of the last three years the awards team have been assisted by the young people of Oldham — students from The Oldham College, Oldham Sixth Form College and University Campus Oldham — to help judge the categories.

This year students from the Sixth Form College, coached by Anton East, will be performing a number from the hit musical "Chicago!" to open the show.

Steering group member Kash Ashraf said: "I am delighted Jade has joined the team.

"Jade will be a bright addition and is already making her mark.

"We have always tried to encourage our young people to get involved and we have supported their attendance at the presentation dinners.

"Our young people are the future of Oldham and have already played an invaluable role in the process and I'm sure Jade will continue."

Jade said: "It's an exciting challenge and I am looking



KASH ASHRAF

forward to encouraging people to enter.

"Business people are extremely busy at the moment — especially in the current economic climate — but I hope per persuade them to get involved."

Construction still up against a brick wall

FIGURES published by the construction industry in reveal that the North-West suffered a 13 per cent fall in output in 2012, meaning the region will remain in recession.

This mirrors the UK trend over the past five years, which has seen the construction industry go through one of its most difficult periods since the Second World War — and this predicted to con-

tinue for 10 more years. The Construction Skills Network (CSN) report — the industry's annual forecast prepared by CITB-ConstructionSkills with input from employers across the UK — shows the difficulties the North-West's construction sector faced last year.

The report also shows that the outlook for the rest of the year will continue to be discouraging.

Hi-tech on the High Street



READY for business . . . Stephen, Alison and Paul

A NEW computer shop and drop-in advice centre, Infinity Computing Ltd, has been launched in the centre of Uppermill.

The business is run by husband and wife team Stephen and Alison Branran plus Paul McFarlane, all of who live in Uppermill, and is offering businesses and individuals an extensive range of services from friendly advice on how to send an email to the design and build of personal computers.

Speaking from the new office and showroom in 3 Smithy Yard, Stephen (36), said: "We can do everything from build a business or gaming com-

puter through to showing people how to use programs like Excel or Microsoft Outlook to send an email.

"We believe there's a gap in the local market and people and businesses in Saddleworth are looking for good-value IT support and easy-to-understand advice, plus a place they can pop into if they have a problem that needs solving"

Alison hopes people will appreciate having this service on their doorstep adding: "I want people to see us as an asset in what is already a busy high street."

ENTER NOW!

Deadline for entries for Oldham's biggest business night of the year:

FRIDAY MARCH 22, 2013

Entry forms from:
www.oldhambusinessawards.co.uk