



Front Row L-R Audrey Wales MBE, Thomas McKillen, Minister Arlene Foster, Mayor PJ McAvooy and Anne Donaghy
Back Row L-R Eugene McKeever, Chris Wales, Mark Nodder, Alan Stewart and Catherine McKeever

CHAMBER WELCOMES MINISTER FOSTER

Arlene Foster MLA, Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment was the guest speaker at a business lunch on 10th April.

The lunch, held in the Adair Arms Hotel, was organised by Ballymena Borough Chamber of Commerce and Industry and there was an excellent turnout from the local business community.

Thomas McKillen, Chamber President welcomed the Minister to Ballymena. He said "In Ballymena we don't sit back waiting for people to help us. We are quite prepared to roll up our sleeves and do

what we can to help ourselves. An excellent example of that is the revitalisation work which has been going on in the Church Street and Bridge Street areas. As a result of this work we are starting to see some green shoots of recovery. That does not mean that we will not accept help when it is offered.

Thank you for coming to Ballymena today and I look forward to hearing what you have to say".

After an excellent lunch Alderman PJ McAvoy said *"The number one priority for Council and indeed for all in the Borough is the economy. For us, it is about creating jobs, increasing skills and education, growing our local economy as a regional hub and delivering on NI plc. Minister, you and your team have been more than supportive to Ballymena and we seek your continued support"*.

Minister Foster then addressed the guests. She said *"I am spending the full day in the Borough. I was at Michelin this morning and then in Broughshane. Broughshane is an example to everyone of what can be achieved. I will be meeting with Council and also visiting Wrightbus"*.

She continued *"Organisations like Ballymena Borough Chamber of Commerce and Industry are the backbone of the local economy. Experience and know-how means the Chamber can provide a network of support and guidance on the ground."*

I am very disappointed that the Prime Minister has deferred any decision on Corporation Tax powers until after the Scottish referendum. I do not understand the decision – it is a mystery and we need all the tools in our armoury to develop the NI economy".

The Minister went on to outline the range of support that Invest Northern Ireland offers businesses in the Borough. *"Between April 2007 and March 2012, Invest NI made 506 offers towards job creation and business development projects in the Ballymena Council Area. These offers totalled over £18m of assistance, contributing towards over £87m of investment, safeguarding 1589 jobs and promoting 338 new jobs. Businesses in the area are also benefiting from Invest NI's Jobs Fund, supporting business owners to create new sustainable jobs"*.

After her speech the Minister answered a series of questions from the audience. She agreed that NI businesses, especially smaller businesses needed to be encouraged to export, not only to ROI but further afield. She said that better air links from Belfast were vital to tourism and industry and she was working to get direct air links with Canada and Germany. She also pledged her full support for the forthcoming WPFG.

To conclude Thomas McKillen and Audrey Wales made a presentation to the Minister thanking her for speaking at the lunch.



Thomas J McKillen
President

WELCOME TO THE MAY EDITION OF THE CHAMBER NEWSLETTER

It has been another very busy few months for the Chamber Management Committee.

We ran a number of very successful events which were well supported by members. The highlight was a lunch in April at which Minister Arlene Foster MLA was the guest speaker – there was an excellent turnout for this lunch which was enjoyed by all who attended.

I would also like to thank Ballymena Borough Council who has agreed to be principal sponsors for the 2013 Ballymena Borough Business Excellence awards.

The Northern Ireland Open Challenge is being held at Galgorm Castle Golf Club, the World Police and Fire Games are coming to NI and Carfest is being held in Ballymena once again. We have been working with the organisers of these events, and will continue to do so with the aim of getting maximum economic benefit for the whole Borough.

I hope you enjoy the Newsletter.

BALLYMENA BOROUGH COUNCIL TO BE PRINCIPAL SPONSOR FOR 2013 BUSINESS AWARDS

Ballymena Borough Council has agreed to be the principal sponsor for the 2013 Ballymena Borough Business Excellence Awards.

The awards are organised annually by Ballymena Borough Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Announcing the sponsorship deal, Thomas McKillen, Chamber President said *"I am delighted to announce that Ballymena Borough Council will be the principal sponsor for the 2013 Business Awards. The Council was also principal sponsor in 2012 and I thank them for their continued support of the awards."*

We've seen growth in interest, attendance and applications for the awards every year since we started, with last year 440 people attending the Gala evening. It's always great to see the mix of businesses at the awards, representing sectors from retail to manufacturing to services. And it allows Ballymena to showcase the best businesses and practices to outside bodies perhaps looking to locate new businesses.

I'm glad to say that Chamber has had an excellent working relationship with Ballymena Borough Council over many years and I thank them for their continued support, not only of the awards but Chamber in general. I look forward to this business focused approach continuing into the future".

Mayor of Ballymena, Alderman P J McAvoy said *"As principal sponsor of the awards, Ballymena Borough Council is fully committed to creating the environment that commerce can operate in. These awards demonstrate the commitment to excellence shown by many businesses within the Borough. Ballymena can be a place for business excellence and we are proud to be home for some globally recognised organisations. Ballymena Borough Council is delighted to be the principal sponsor at the awards for 2013, and will continue to work in partnership with the local business community to support growth and prosperity for our people and our place – Ballymena."*



Photo L-R: Mayor PJ McAvoy, Anne Donaghy (Town Clerk and Chief Executive), Chris Wales (Chamber Business Development Manager) and Thomas McKillen (Chamber President)

Minister Arlene Foster MLA visited Ballymena recently and I took the opportunity to invite her to attend the Gala evening in October, and we are now in communication with her office".

Alison Moore, who heads up the organizing committee for the awards, added *"Planning is already well under way for this year's awards. Once again Chamber will be employing Insight Mystery Shopping to carry out the judging and the Tullyglass House Hotel, an excellent facility we are fortunate to have in Ballymena, will again be hosting the gala evening. The date for this year's award ceremony is Thursday 10th October – which may seem a long way off but it will soon come round so put this date in your diary now. I am confident that this will be another brilliant evening".*

If you require any further information about the Business awards please contact Chris Wales at office@ballymenachamber.co.uk or 07876 758 797

MICHELIN BALLYMENA'S HEAD OF ENVIRONMENT AND PROTECTION AWARDED OBE



Paul Kinkead, Head of Environment and Protection at Michelin's truck tyre plant in Ballymena, has been awarded an OBE in The New Year's Honours List for services to environmental protection in Northern Ireland.

A past pupil of Royal School Dungannon and a graduate of Queen's University Belfast, Paul Kinkead is a Chartered Chemical Engineer and has worked at Michelin's Ballymena site since 1986.

In 2011, he was appointed to the Senior Management Team with specific responsibility for managing the Environment and Protection Department for the site. He is also the Michelin UK Country Manager for Industrial Hygiene and Chemical Safety.

The honour was awarded to him in recognition of his achievements in the environmental field, both within Michelin and on a national level. As well as his work within the Company, Paul was also an active

board member for the National Industrial Symbiosis Programme (NISP) for three years, and has delivered his Recycling Methodology to more than 200 companies in Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland. Moreover, Paul is an industrial member of the CBI for Environmental matters, annually hosting and facilitating several seminars on Sustainability, Environmental Regulation and Zero Waste to Landfill at the Michelin site in Ballymena.

In September 2010, Paul was appointed to the Northern Ireland Waste Programme Board whose mission is to raise the NI recycling performance to at least 50 per cent. Paul chairs the Commercial & Industrial Waste Task Group on this Board, on behalf of the Environment Minister.

On receiving the OBE, he commented: *"It is a prestigious honour to be personally recognised for my on-going environmental work. Working at Michelin for the past 25 years has enabled me to expand my career from engineering into environmental management and I am lucky to have had so many opportunities to work in a field which I am truly passionate about."*

WHY MORE AND MORE BUSINESSES ARE CONNECTING TO FIRMUS ENERGY NATURAL GAS...



Michael Scott
firmus energy General Manager

From its inception in 2005, local natural gas provider, firmus energy, has come a long way.

The company started with just four employees, no customers and the momentous task of building an underground pipe network to allow thousands of homes and businesses outside of Belfast to connect to and enjoy the benefits of natural gas for the first time.

In just seven years they have achieved this major engineering feat, laying more than 750km of pipe and even in the midst of a recession, its development is now more rapid than ever. The company also competes in the natural gas supply market in greater Belfast and in total supplies almost 50,000 homes and businesses across Northern Ireland with natural gas.

firmus energy has around 90 employees based at its Antrim headquarters. Since winning the licence in 2005 to bring natural gas to 10 towns and cities across Northern Ireland, including Ballymena, firmus energy has applied to the Utility Regulator on several occasions to extend their network even further and now supplies natural gas to more than 20 towns and cities, including most recently Portstewart, Warrenpoint and Ballyclare.

General Manager, Michael Scott, is focused on further development of the network and bringing the cost, efficiency and environmental benefits to even more homes and businesses. Michael explains, "To date, we have invested more than £70 million in the local natural gas infrastructure and we continue to look for new opportunities to grow our network, which is very important for the future generations of Northern Ireland."

At a local level, firmus energy connected its first natural gas customer in Ballymena seven years ago, and now has more than 2000 customers in the area, including a number of key businesses such as Michelin, Moy Park and Galgorm Resort and Spa. firmus energy has laid around 95km of pipe in the Ballymena area, bringing the firm's local investment to £7.5 million.

Michael is keen to emphasize the cost and environmental benefits of using natural gas. "Price is always important for our customers as it directly impacts on the company's bottom line. The efficiency of natural gas and the more competitive pricing compared to other fuels, means that businesses can make substantial savings by switching to natural gas and according to the Utility Regulator's August 2012 report, our customers are enjoying the cheapest natural gas in the UK.

"By displacing oil, natural gas from firmus energy has reduced CO2 emissions by more than 300,000 tonnes helping businesses and homes to significantly reduce their carbon footprint.

"We have ambitious plans for firmus energy over the next few years but our main focus is to ensure that we continue to provide natural gas at the lowest possible cost whilst giving the high level of service our customers deserve."

To find out more about firmus energy or connecting to natural gas, please visit www.firmusenergy.co.uk or call 08456 08 00 88.

CARNVIEW FARM SHOOTING COMPLEX TO HOST WPGF EVENTS



Left: Tania Rothwell (WPGF 2013 Development Officer) presents an "Official Venue Plaque" to Alderman PJ McAvo, Mayor of Ballymena. Looking on L-R: Christine Butler (Council Tourism Officer), Rodney Kernohan (Chamber of Commerce), James McKeown (Carnview Farm Shooting Complex) and Patricia McEldowney (Council Economic Development Dept.)

The World Police and Fire Games are being held in Northern Ireland from 1st to 10th August and are expected to attract 10000 competitors and 15000 family and supporters.

The games are held every two years and are one of the largest sporting events in the world.

There are 42 host venues across Northern Ireland and Carnview Farm Shooting Complex has been selected as an official venue for the shotgun events.

Rodney Kernohan from Ballymena Borough Chamber of Commerce and Industry said he was absolutely delighted that these events were being held in Ballymena. He added "The WPGF will bring a massive boost to the Northern Ireland economy."

Chamber and Ballymena Borough Council have been working closely together with the WPGF organising committee over the past year to ensure that Ballymena Borough benefits as much as possible from the games. We have developed a website (www.wpgf2013ireland.com) to promote the Borough to WPGF visitors. Northern Ireland is renowned for its hospitality, nowhere more so than Ballymena and we are confident that these games will leave a legacy to benefit Northern Ireland in the years ahead".

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRM NAMED BEST IN UK BY MCDONALD'S



Chamber member Marcon Fit-Out has been named as McDonald's UK Contractor of the Year at an awards ceremony in Birmingham.

The local company, which employs 30 people at its Kilbegs headquarters in Antrim, was awarded the top prize for its work in reimagining McDonald's restaurants across the UK. Working with McDonald's since 2008, the fit-out firm has successfully reimaged over 30 restaurants in the last 12 months across Northern Ireland, Scotland and the North of England. The consistently high quality delivery and level of service in each project saw the firm scoop the top prize. Since 2008, Marcon Fit-Out has delivered over 100 individual schemes for McDonald's.

The Antrim firm's environmental credentials also helped secure the award. The company's specialist joinery manufacturing facility uses sustainably sourced materials in all of its joinery work.

Speaking after collecting the award, Mark O'Connor, Director, Marcon Fit-Out, said: "It's a huge honour to be named as McDonald's UK Contractor of the Year and we're incredibly proud to have won the award. Everyone at Marcon Fit-Out has played a key role in winning the award and I'd like to thank our staff and suppliers for helping us achieve this success."

"We've carried out some fantastic projects for McDonald's since commencing work with them in 2008 and we're delighted that our work in the last 12 months has been recognised by the company."



Photo L-R: Mark O'Connor, Director, Marcon Fit-Out; Joanne Jones, Northern Ireland Director of Franchising, McDonald's and Mark McElroy, Director, Marcon Fit-Out.

Joanne Jones, McDonald's Northern Ireland Director of Franchising, said: "It's fantastic to see a local company win the UK Contractor of the Year award and I'd like to extend my congratulations to Mark O'Connor, Mark McElroy and everyone at Marcon Fit-Out."

The McDonald's UK Contractor of the Year awards aims to recognise and reward outstanding service from suppliers across the restaurant's business.

FRONT PAGE BAR CROWNED NORTHERN IRELAND'S BEST NEIGHBOURHOOD PUB



The Front Page Bar in Ballymena is celebrating after being crowned Northern Ireland's Best Neighbourhood Pub at this year's Pubs of Ulster's Pub of the Year Awards, which were held in the majestic surroundings of Belfast City Hall.

Above: Mark Stewart, Chairman of Pubs of Ulster (NI), presents Team Front Page from Ballymena with the award for Northern Ireland Neighbourhood / Community Pub of the Year.

Judges' praised The Front Page for being the life blood of the local community, raising money for charity and supporting local teams and initiatives. The judges' were also impressed by the pubs perpetual commitment and passion to improving and enhancing the locality and their ability to inspire and motivate others.

Commenting on the awards, Mark Stewart, chairman of Pubs of Ulster said: *"This year's Pub of the Year Awards has once again highlighted the quality that exists in the local pub trade right across Northern Ireland. We have world class pubs right on our doorstep and the awards allow us to recognise this by rewarding the excellence that exists in the industry. I would like to thank all the pubs who entered this year's awards and congratulate all the winners, especially The Front Page, for showcasing the very best that the local pub trade has to offer."*

The Pub of the Year Awards is the culmination of an extensive search for the best pubs in a range of categories across Northern Ireland.

Finalists were selected following an extensive judging process and were judged, depending on their category, by written submissions, interviews or by independent mystery shoppers. An independent judging panel comprising of Martin Breen, editor of the Sunday Life; Gary McDonald, business editor of the Irish News; Adrienne McGill, business editor of the News Letter; Paul Connolly, managing editor of the Belfast Telegraph and Louise Murphy, editor of Hospitality Review then decided on the overall winners.

Stephen Reynolds, proprietor of The Front Page said, *"The Northern Ireland Neighbourhood / Community Pub of the Year Award recognises The Front Page in Ballymena as a thriving, town centre, cross community Pub...providing employment and making a contribution to the success and diversity of the retail, service, hospitality and tourism offer of the local economy since 1990. It's a wonderful accolade for Ballymena and for everyone at "Team Front Page" including its staff and patrons."*

SKILL EXCHANGE UK

Skill Exchange UK Seeks to Drive Employment, Growth and Competitiveness, by Promoting Employer "Skill Recycling" through Localised Online Skill Exchanges.

Launched in Michelin Tyre PLC, Ballymena, Skill Exchange UK is an independent, not for profit organisation developed in conjunction with Leading Employers, ACAS and the TUC. It provides a simple but highly innovative service aimed at local employer 'skill recycling', an efficient and more sensible alternative to skill wastage, by facilitating local placements for under used staff into other firms that can benefit from the 'loan' of skilled staff at low cost.

Through the MP for North Antrim Ian Paisley, Ballymena has been selected as the first location for a Skill Exchange UK hub, with three more arriving in Northern Ireland within the next 6 months. The other 3 locations are Belfast, Londonderry/Derry and Craigavon. By the end of 2013 there will be 35 Skill Exchange hubs across the UK.

The funding partners for the Ballymena Hub are Michelin Tyre PLC, Wrightbus, JTI, Moy Park, Dunbia and the Northern Regional College. Because of the founding member's contributions, all other businesses within Ballymena will be able to join and use the hub's services free of charge. Supporting partners include Ballymena Council and Ballymena Borough Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Ian Paisley the Member of Parliament for North Antrim commented *"Skill Exchange UK have created an innovative and game-changing idea that will redefine many of our attitudes to employment and skills.*

As the Skill Exchange network grows, the transfer of knowledge and skills will occur all over the United Kingdom and I am proud that Ballymena and North Antrim will have lead the way in this exciting and refreshing network.

It is my sincere belief that it is not just the multi-national corporations, but also the SMEs and colleges within the area who will benefit from the hub. The sharing of people and skills will be a vital attribute for many of our areas businesses, and I look forward with great anticipation to watching the hub grow and prosper into a network that will benefit the whole community."

Over the next three years a further 100 local skill exchange hubs will be created based on travel to work areas across the UK. This will enable employers to share skills, offer work experience opportunities, share information and practical ideas that will assist capacity issues, improve staff development and retention, allowing more efficient deployment of people and skills.

Employers of any size from any sector will join together to create online local networks acting as a 'clearing house' for good ideas and developing local solutions to local challenges.

The key objectives are to provide local customised skill exchange hubs to:

- Stop skills wastage and redundancy
- Develop and share skills locally
- Generate and exchange new ideas
- Champion new ways of working
- Provide development opportunities



Above: Skill Exchange UK Ballymena Chairman Chris Wales talks to (L-R) DEL Minister Stephen Farry, Ballymena Mayor PJ McAvoy and Ian Paisley MP at the launch of the first Skill Exchange project in the UK.

This will impact on and expand the skills base, improve job markets and job opportunities locally and ultimately nationally. Employers & key Influencers will be creating job opportunities by supporting and sponsoring work experience opportunities, apprenticeships, training and development in the workplace.

In cases where a temporary economic change results in under-utilised employees, then secondment can effectively share or transfer those skilled employees from their employer company to new roles in another company. Salary costs can be shared by both employers through the on line service provided by Local Skill Exchange Hubs.

The Local Skill Exchange Hub Programme will operate across all industry sectors to provide employer members ways to cut costs but retain their key staff by lending or renting them out to other firms and sharing the costs. At the same time substantial benefit will flow up and down the supply chains as skills and experience develop, knowledge transfer takes place and information and best practice are genuinely shared.

This initiative has been backed and supported by many of Northern Ireland's main business and trade organisations. In attendance at the launch event was DEL Minister Stephen Farry, Invest NI, the CBI, Ballymena Borough Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the NI Equality commission, the Labour Relations Agency, Ballymena Borough Council and the Northern Ireland local Government Association.

For further information about the Ballymena Hub of Skill Exchange UK, please visit www.skillexchangeuk.org/ballymena



Above: The funding partners and guests at the launch of the Ballymena Hub of Skill Exchange UK.

CHRISTMAS SOCIAL/NETWORKING EVENT

Ballymena Borough Chamber of Commerce and Industry held its annual Christmas social/networking event in the Adair Arms Hotel on 11th December. There was an excellent turnout of Chamber members and guests.

This is always an informal evening and Thomas McKillen, Chamber President welcomed everyone. He then went on to present the trophies for the 2012 Christmas window dressing competition. The three prize winners were:

**Camerons Department Store, Broughshane Street
McKillens (Ballymena) Ltd., Church Street
Wyse Byse, Church Street**

Congratulations to the three winners!

The judges were very impressed by the quality of the entries this year and "Highly Commended" certificates were awarded to Greers Travel Office Ltd (Linenhall Street), Leaf Designs (Galgorm) and Sallys Floral Studio (William Street),

A presentation was also made to the NI Hospice. A raffle was held at the 2012 Business awards and the magnificent total of £3600 was raised. Chamber would like to thank the following businesses who donated prizes for the raffle: Michelin Tyre PLC, NI Hospice, Galgorm Castle Golf Club, firmus energy, Barrs Butchers, Galgorm Resort and Spa and Millside Restaurant (Gracehill).

The Chamber would like to congratulate the Ballymena Support Group of the NI Hospice. Founded only ten years ago, this group has now raised over half a million pounds for the Hospice. Well done!

Thank you to the Adair Arms Hotel – the hospitality as always was excellent.



Above: Prizewinners, chamber members and special guests who attended last week's Ballymena Chamber of Commerce and Industry Christmas Window Dressing awards in the Adair Arms Hotel. Seated front are representatives of the three winning stores, L-R, Jayne Caldwell of McKillens's, Helen Cameron of Camerons and Sally White of Wyse Byse while looking on are chamber members, representatives of the winning stores and special guests including Mayor of Ballymena Alderman PJ McAvoyn (left) and Ballymena Borough Council Chief Executive Anne Donaghy (right).



Above: President of Ballymena Borough Chamber of Commerce and Industry Thomas McKillen presents a cheque for £3,600 (proceeds of a raffle at the chamber's annual awards dinner in October) to Samina Bonar of NI Hospice at last week's Christmas Window Dressing awards ceremony in the Adair Arms Hotel. Included is Mayor of Ballymena Alderman PJ McAvoyn and Chamber of Commerce members Chris Wales, Ronan McCann, Bridgeen McKeever, Rodney Kernohan and Audrey Wales and Samina Bonar's husband Roy.