

inter-face

Business News from Darlington Borough Council

Extra

April 2009

inter-face Extra – your monthly business news update

Welcome to the latest edition of 'inter-face Extra', which supplements our quarterly edition of 'inter-face' with the latest news and updates for businesses in Darlington. Because there is such a large amount of news stories, we don't always have space to feature them all in 'inter-face' 'inter-face Extra' provides that little bit 'extra', alongside the quarterly production cycle of the 'inter-face' e-newsletter.

The next editions of 'inter-face' are scheduled for **later in April** and then **July 2009**.

Government Announces a Deferral of Business Rates

In response to the current economic situation and the impact of the 5% increase in business rates from 1 April 2009, the Government will bring forward regulations to enable ratepayers to defer 60% of the annual increase in their 2009/10 bills until 2010/11 and 2011/12.

This means that all ratepayers will have the option of spreading part of their 2009/10 increase over three years. The 60% of the annual increase in a 2009-10 bill allowed to be spread over three years will be based upon on the total annual increase in a ratepayer's bill in 2009/10 and businesses will pay 50% of the deferred amount in 2010/11 and the other 50% in 2011/12.

Until the regulations allowing for a deferred payment scheme take effect, businesses must keep paying their legally established rates liability as set out on their current bills. Billing authorities will write to all businesses offering them the option to defer payments once the necessary regulations have been made. Current collection and enforcement procedures will continue to be applicable to ratepayers who miss a scheduled instalment.

The Government will bring forward the necessary regulations and make further announcements as soon as possible, but expects that they will be in place by the end of July.

Take Your Nextstep

Get the help you need, locally.

Guidance and support about training; learning and the world of work is available to people across the North East. Delivered by Nextstep North East, part of CfBT Education Trust, a leading education consultancy and service organisation, the service is absolutely free, friendly and totally impartial.

Customers are eligible whatever their skills level, but people without a Level 3 qualification are entitled to longer term intensive help. Nextstep offers a number of services aimed at helping you progress towards your career goal, these include:

- Help with the conception and writing of a CV that details the customer's key skills and attributes, as well as helping to prepare the customer for job interviews;
- Helping the customer to identify abilities learnt in previous jobs which can be of value when in another;
- Provision of details of training and college courses which are available in the area;
- Helping the customer source information regarding funding which may be useful when training or learning;
- Finding out about the kind of training possible to aid progression at work, if the customer is currently employed, and
- Whilst also providing help with reading and writing; pointing the customer in the right direction to help them improve numeracy and literacy skills - again detailing what financial support is available in the local area.

Nextstep can also provide additional support and help to people regarding possible redundancy.

For further information, please telephone **08000 277 944** (lines are open from 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday) or email: nexstep@cfbt.com or visit www.nextstepnortheast.org.uk

200, Five Star Eateries in Darlington

Café Unique, in Bondgate, Darlington has become the 200th business in the town to be given a five star rating under the Tees Valley Food Hygiene Award scheme. The scheme was introduced in 2007 across the Tees Valley by the 5 local authorities, and ranks food industry businesses according to a series of hygiene standards.

Premises are inspected by council food safety officers on a regular basis and star ratings can rise and fall depending on how businesses have progressed. There are no businesses in Darlington which hold a no star rating and businesses with one or two star ratings have been given the opportunity to attend training sessions to help improve and maintain their star ratings, and in turn improve standards of food hygiene.

Members of the public wishing to check the Tees Valley Food Hygiene star ratings of food premises in Darlington can visit the Councils' section of the 'Scores on the Doors' website at www.scoresonthedoors.org.uk > **Find a Council > Darlington Borough Council.**

Café Unique can be contacted on: **01325 462 055**

South East Asia Advanced Engineering Event

This UK Trade and Investment event offers attendees the chance to discover the business opportunities with commercial specialists from Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam.

One to One consultations are available for attendees to receive direct and practical advice from the relevant UK Trade & Investment country/sector expert. Each representative lives and works in the country. Attendees can choose to speak to as many specialists as necessary.

The clinics will be focussed on Advanced Engineering including:

- Automotive;
- Aerospace;
- Mechanical Electrical and Process Engineering;
- Metals & Minerals, and
- Metallurgical Process Plant.

These One to One clinics take place at: Centre for Life, Times Square, Newcastle upon Tyne. NE1 4EP

Date and time: **Wednesday 22 Apr 2009, 9am-4pm.** Places will be limited, so register your interest by calling the Regional International Trade Office Hotline on **0845 05 05 054** with your contact details and choose which country specialists you wish to speak to.

Get a Slice of Extra Advice

A slice of a £10m government funding cake has been given to The Citizens Advice Bureau, in Bennett House, Darlington, to help extend opening hours during the recession. Thanks to this funding, the Advice Bureau will be extending their opening times by an extra seven hours per week from 31 March, thus, drop-in sessions will be held on Wednesday 11am-8pm and Thursdays 10am-4pm.

All advice workers, whether paid or volunteer, are professionally trained to provide an accurate, quality service and to be supportive to clients.

The service aims:

- To provide the advice people need for the problems they face, and
- To improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives.

The service works to:

- Inform people about the law and how it affects them; about their rights and responsibilities; and about how they may be able to satisfy their needs;
- Advise people on the options available to them and on the potential consequences of different courses of action;
- Support people as they consider what to do, listening to their concerns and helping them move forward;
- Assist people in pursuing their chosen course of action by negotiation, representation and referral to other sources of help needed, and
- Influence those responsible for policies and services by bringing to their notice the problems people experience and recommending changes.

To make an appointment please call **01325 256 999**, extension three (lines are open 10am-12:30pm, on Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays.) or for more information visit www.darlingtoncab.co.uk

'Caring Darlington'

It has been revealed that the town has the highest ratio of nursing and residential homes in the region, one home for every 1,941 residents, giving it the 18th highest number of homes per capita in the UK.

Darlington is the only town or city to have made it into the top 20 in the region, making it a caring hot spot. With one in five people living in Darlington being aged 60 or over, there is no likelihood of there being a slowdown in demand for the homes anytime soon.

How Long is Your Holiday?

From 1 April employees are now entitled to 28 days paid holiday per year, and part time workers are also entitled to the same level of holidays pro rata. Public or bank holidays can be included in the worker's holiday entitlement, as long as the holiday is classed as paid leave.

As this increase is of beneficial gain to the employee, and their terms and conditions of employment, there is no need to reissue a contract, although details of the increase in holiday entitlement must be passed on to employees in writing.

If employees intend to take leave they must give their employer notice of said intended leave, and a period of notice should be set out with employees in writing, but if there is no agreement in place, they must give notice of at least twice the length of the intended leave, with the employer replying within the same length of time.

Employers may restrict against the taking of leave, these restrictions could:

- Be stated in their contracts;
- Have built up via custom/practice, or
- Be negotiated with a union or employee representative.

Examples of restricting leave may include:

- Capping the amount of leave which may be taken at one time;
- Specifying periods when leave may be taken, or
- Shutting down for certain periods, for example; Christmas & New Year or two weeks in August.

For further information, please telephone **0845 6009 006** or visit www.businesslink.gov.uk

School Dinners for All Ages

'Scholars', situated in Bondgate, Darlington, a recently opened restaurant, has in the last four weeks, started offering a "school dining" style experience. When customers arrive at the restaurant they are invited to use named coat pegs, and when it comes to choosing their meal are given the chance to make their selection from a blackboard. A 'naughty bench' is also in place for all those who don't clean their plate, although diners can rest assured that they can still enjoy a pudding even if they don't finish their dinners!

The business opened by Joyce Mead and her husband John on 29 January 2009, aims to bring back customers happier childhood memories, whilst also invoking thoughts of how much they used to look forward to lunchtime during lessons.

The couple hope the restaurant will be popular with shoppers and office workers in search of a quick meal, as well as children's parties and school reunions.

For further information contact, Mrs Mead on **01325 732 118**.

Step it Up

If you had an unlimited budget and a directory of world class consultants, who would you call?

- **a marketing guru?**
- **a web developer?**
- **a systems analyst?**
- **a finance wizard?**

Imagine the benefits of working with someone with a fresh, innovative approach and boundless enthusiasm.

Through Shell Step this is something that you really can afford and achieve.

Everyone has lists of projects that they would like to do, but never have the time or resource to undertake. Each year, undergraduates on the Shell Step programme take on these challenges for small and medium sized organisations and achieve outstanding results for their hosts.

Shell Step projects run for 8 weeks, with undergraduates working on site on predefined projects. The programme has helped organisations investigate new services, research and develop new products, launch ecommerce and interactive websites, build bespoke software, streamline administration processes - the list is endless.

Shell Step provides cost effective, short term, skilled resource.

By providing payment the programme attracts students who need to support themselves during their studies and provides host organisations with a wider variety of skilled candidates.

Businesses with fewer than 250 employees qualify for the Shell Step programme, and could host a placement this June/July from as little as £115 per week.

If you feel that Shell Step is a programme that you would like to find out more about please contact: Jan Harris, Graduate Employability Officer on **01642 384 409**. Or alternatively email Jan Harris on: jan.harris@tees.ac.uk

Redundancy: Know Your Rights

In these times of economic uncertainty, do you know what your rights are – or those of your employees, if you run your own business – in respect of redundancy?

The minimum rights for an employee being made redundant are:

- To be told and consulted in advance, in order to discuss alternatives;
- To be given reasons for the redundancy;
- To be selected according to an objectively fair process, if more than one person is affected by the change and to know the basis of the selection system, and
- To try out any alternative offer of suitable work for four weeks to take reasonable time off, with pay, to look for alternative work or training.

An employer must use objective criteria, for example: attendance records; disciplinary records and standard of work performance, when selecting those to be dismissed. There should also be an appeals process in place for any employee, who feels they do not deserve to be dismissed for the reasons stated. In respect of proposed redundancies, an employer must disclose, in writing, certain information, which includes:

- Reasons for the proposed redundancy;
- Numbers and descriptions of employees affected;
- Proposed method of selecting the employees who may be dismissed;

- Proposed method of carrying out the dismissals, taking into account any agreed procedures, including the period over which the dismissals are to take effect, and
- How redundancy payments, other than the legal minimum, will be calculated.

For more in depth advice and support please contact:

The ACAS Helpline on **08457 47 47 47** or visit www.acas.org.uk

The Citizens Advice Bureau at www.adviceguide.org.uk

Or, Worksmart from the TUC at www.worksmart.org.uk

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