



## Centre for learning

Retail know-how on hand: Page 6>>



## Spreading the word

Family day success: See back page >>

**WHY THURROCK? FOCUSING ON SUCCESS AND INVESTMENT IN OUR BOROUGH 9**

■ Lucy and Matthew Harris have established their successful business in an adapted and iconic building in North Stifford.



# key as company moves business in London

live events such as the British Open golf championship and Glastonbury as well as more long-term projects within a wide variety of sectors including military and construction.

- The company took the decision to move to Thurrock in September after recession depressed equipment sales, prompting it to expand its substantial and growing rental business.

Generally, the rental business calls for shorter delivery times so location of stock is more critical. The company opened a new depot on the Thurrock Trade Park, Oliver Road, West Thurrock, to support the growing demand for the rental of electrical distribution equipment by businesses in the London and South of England.

And with many opportunities available to it in London and the

South East, Thurrock is proving the right place to be.

Founder and Managing Director of *ide Systems* Ian Thomas explains why his company chose Thurrock: "Although these are tough times for our industry, the rental side of our business is continuing to grow.

Where companies are reluctant to buy new equipment or are finding it difficult to raise funds for investment, they are increasingly turning to the rental option.

"That means we need to be close to the market and Thurrock, with its excellent location close to major transport routes proved ideal.

"I should also add that when we were recruiting people we found Thurrock residents had the skills we needed and I am really pleased with the appointments we have been able to make."

# Community that offers opportunity to grow enterprise

**T**HE recession may have affected many businesses, but at least one company in Thurrock is on the up and up and positively relishing the advantages of inflation.

Balloon Art Studio is run by partners Darryl White and Jodie Norris, both 31, with a combined 32 years of experience within the balloon and party industry.

Darryl is originally from Northern Ireland where he ran a balloon décor and special effects business for a number of years before selling up and moving to England in 2004 when he met Jodie, a qualified florist and teacher who taught City and Guilds in Balloon Artistry at a leading London College.

The pair met in 2004 and spent the best part of the following five years teaching their skills to new and established balloon-based businesses, a journey which took them around the globe from the Americas, across Europe to the Far East, Australia and everywhere in between.

Last year they returned to Thurrock, where Jodie grew up.

Not only was it a place she knew and loved, the couple regarded it as the perfect place for a new business as Darryl explains.

"Travelling and living out of a suitcase does take its toll after a while. We wanted to establish some firm roots here in the UK so we have based ourselves in Thurrock and are dedicating our time to Balloon Art Studio and Air Art Productions."

"We knew we had a local community to work with and start our business but then we have London right on our doorstep, literally minutes away, with the massive opportunities for a business like ours that thrives on consumer demand for new ideas and innovation."

**T**HEY have proved an almost instant hit in the Borough and earlier this year the couple's innovation saw them collect the New Company of the Year honour in the Thurrock Business awards.

Originally seen as nothing more than a child's toy, the balloon has blown up to be a significant industry. Today, balloons are part of every event from birthdays to weddings, fun days to festivals.

The balloon designs themselves have also developed over the years –as have the skills of the people who use them. Balloon Art studio still supply traditional arrangements on tables, entrance arches and stage displays, but their work is continually breaking new boundaries.

One reason for this is a growing demand from the corporate world – a demand that is now so strong that the



■ Darryl White and Jodie Norris.

company has launched a dedicated corporate department called Air Art Productions. They have worked on projects including TV commercials, fashion Look Books, launches and promotions and much more, including two appearances on TV (ITV's This Morning Show & BBC's Blue Peter)

"Getting to the point of being able to service a wedding or a large corporate event has been a tough task as they are two very different markets which is the reason for setting up Air Art Productions," explains Jodie.

"This allows us to focus clearly on each sector with equal measures. We are very particular with the quality of our work and the skill level of our staff. If it is not quite right it has to be done again as a quality services is earned and therefore needs to be maintained.

"Our staff go on an external and internal training program when they first come on board and after that ongoing training is provided to ensure that levels are kept high."

The couple believe that Thurrock is an ideal location as they can not only service the many communities in and around the borough, but are also only 30 minutes from the centre of London, 10 minutes from the M25, and, for their overseas customers, just 40 minutes from Stansted Airport.

"Who knows what opportunities lie ahead?" says Darryl.

"That's what makes running a business exciting. However, our plans for the future are clearly set out and will mean staying and growing the business here in Thurrock. We aim to offer more employment opportunities in the future which is always good for the area and growth will also mean the need for larger premises."