

West Lothian Business **CONNECTIONS**

THE MAGAZINE SERVING WEST LOTHIAN'S BUSINESS COMMUNITY • **SPRING 2008**

PLACES TO GROW

New property developments for the creative and hi-tech sectors

.....

WOMEN IN BUSINESS

Ten years supporting female-led business and enterprise

.....

GROWTH FUNDS

Helping West Lothian firms achieve their ambitions

A close-up portrait of a middle-aged man with thinning hair, smiling broadly. He is wearing a dark suit jacket, a white dress shirt, and a patterned tie. The background is a soft-focus blue and green.

A STRATEGY FOR GOOD

Clyde Blowers' Jim McColl OBE assesses Scotland's economic future

PLUS
The latest key economic indicators

.....

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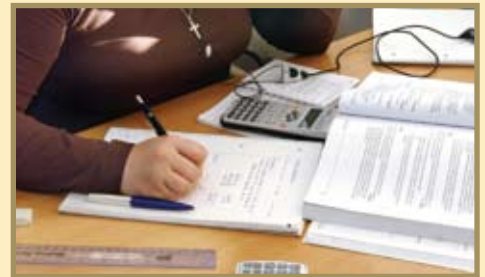
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HELLO



Cllr Martyn Day,
Executive Councillor
Development & Transport,
West Lothian Council



Duncan Walker,
President,
West Lothian Chamber
of Commerce

The Scottish Government Economic Strategy, launched last November, provides the context for West Lothian's 2008 economic conference, which takes place on 22 April. Be sure to make this a date for your diary, when you can hear Enterprise Minister Jim Mather outline the challenges facing Scotland and the Government's key strategic priorities. Providing the business perspective will be Clyde Blowers' CEO, Jim McColl OBE. For a preview of his views, turn to page 4.

For local businesses rising to meet the challenges of the new strategy, there's a raft of help and support for aspirational firms from the West Lothian Business Gateway. On page 12 you can read how Livingston company Alpha Plus (Scotland) Ltd used local support networks to help grow its business – and find out more about new funds for business which come on stream later this year.

The presence of company head office operations is good for a local economy, helping to put an area on the map and being more firmly embedded in an area once established. It's good news therefore that West Lothian's strategic central location has convinced more than the area's fair share of companies to control their Scottish, UK, and worldwide operations from here. Read more on page 7

Celebration is high on this issue's agenda, as we feature local business excellence exemplified in the Chamber's recent Business Excellence Awards. Read about our winning companies on page 8.

Local business women have cause to celebrate this year, with the tenth anniversary of the West Lothian Women in Business group. Read our interview with Women in Business Chair Carole Reddiex on page 10 and find out how women's enterprise has gone from strength to strength over the last decade.

Business Connections magazine is unashamedly upbeat and positive about the local economy. West Lothian is a great place for business, located between Scotland's two major population centres with excellent skill levels in its workforce and a high quality of life.

To keep up to date with what's happening in West Lothian, why not sign up to receive our monthly e-mail magazine **Business Connections Online**, bringing you all West Lothian's business news, developments, events, economic facts and figures, and new business support initiatives. Forward your copy to others if they have an interest in West Lothian and please keep sending us news of your own company successes.

Cllr Martyn Day, Executive Councillor, Development & Transport, West Lothian Council
Duncan Walker, President, West Lothian Chamber of Commerce

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KEY ECONOMIC INDICATORS

NEW STRATEGY, NEW ERA

The Scottish Government launched its Economic Strategy last November – ‘a can-do strategy for a can-do nation’. West Lothian’s economic conference in April will be an ideal opportunity for local business and policy makers to assess its likely impact and consider the contribution that West Lothian can make.

With a deft turn of the political hand, First Minister Alex Salmond pushed through his inaugural budget. In a stirring speech, Mr Salmond raised the bar for Scottish accomplishment. “It will take determination and sustained effort across the whole economy; through research, development, risk-taking, and individual achievement. And through common endeavour and the combined talents of all Scotland’s people, we will meet the challenge.”

At West Lothian Economic Partnership’s annual economic conference, to be held on 22 April, Jim Mather MSP, Minister for Enterprise, Energy & Tourism will outline the need for the strategy, the challenges faced by Scotland’s economy and the key strategic priorities. Leaders from the local business community will have their say on how they can participate in delivering that strategy.

Providing the business perspective, Jim McColl, CEO of Clyde Blowers, one



Strategy highlights

Jim Mather, Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism, took the opportunity of the new budget to outline the Scottish Government’s strategy devised to meet Scotland’s future economic challenges. Central to achieving those aims are a series of five ‘Strategic Priorities’:

- **Learning, Skills and Well-being is aimed at the whole population as a desire to raise the competitive edge of the collective workforce.**
- **The Supportive Business Environment demands more encouragement for enterprise to set up, remain and expand in Scotland.**
- **Infrastructure, Development and Place is there to capitalise on Scotland’s enviable environment by making efforts to improve communications and logistics for business and leisure.**
- **The priority for Effective Government helps those who would benefit from simplified procedures as they relate to business.**
- **Equity encapsulates the stated desires for cohesion, solidarity and sustainability in economic growth, across the whole country, geographically and socially.**

of the world’s most successful and innovative companies, will challenge the bravehearts of Scottish business to rise to the rallying call. **Connections** asked him if this was the dawn of an economic Bannockburn, or the false hope of a fiscal Flodden.

Does Scotland have the motivation and the will to rise to the challenge of this new economic strategy?

JM/ If by challenge you mean to match the UK’s growth by 2011, and match that of the ‘Arc of Prosperity’ countries by 2017, then yes, Scotland has the motivation. Our banking sector is internationally renowned, as are the many oil-related businesses that started in the North Sea and transformed into world companies.

Until last year I was Chairman of the Entrepreneurial Exchange in Scotland, an organisation for ambitious growth-orientated entrepreneurs. We started



“West Lothian is undoubtedly well-placed to play a key role in the Nation’s economic future.”

this in 1994 with 50 founder members. It now has over 400 members who each head up major companies representing a collective turnover of over £18.5bn.

The enthusiasm I have seen with these people is very strong. So the motivation is there.

As a businessman, what would you say the business community could benefit from in terms of Government support to make this work?

JM/ Businesses realise that there is a need to look at themselves first before relying on the Government as a crutch. However, there are good reasons for needing support, and hopefully the Government is now making moves to improve this.

Businesses deserve particular help to grow outside Scotland, which is after all a small country. Direct support that focuses on market intelligence and contacts is something that should be

provided more effectively, by people with business experience of their own.

It’s also worth noting that the Scottish Government is a big procurer. It would be right in my view to channel such opportunities to smaller businesses and make it easier for them to pick up the work. Currently, it’s difficult for smaller companies to break through.

What, in your opinion, is the best way of making Scottish business ambitious, and what encouragement would you like to hear from Government?

JM/ The Government seems to be showing itself as business friendly. It recognises that enterprise and economic growth are the way to a better quality of life for all. It’s right that it should be talking up the business case and encouraging companies to grow.

Talking the talk will also help foster

the right kind of culture at school level. My own experience of bringing enterprise to education is that it pays off, as the children saw it as stimulating and good fun. They thought they were getting a break from the 3 Rs to do this, but of course they were actually utilizing them as part of the exercise.

Scottish business is ambitious, so the Government’s task is to positively reinforce this culture in as many ways as possible.

Does West Lothian have anything unique to offer in this new economic future?

JM/ I have been involved with initiatives across Scotland, and West Lothian Council is viewed in very high regard in terms of its customer care, support delivery and its positive attitude to business. If this could be replicated across the country, I believe it would have real impact on the Scottish economy.

The area is undoubtedly well placed to play a key role in the nation’s economic future. In fact, it’s reported that there is no other part of Scotland with as high an investment in research and development per head of population.

Finally, is that a Scotland Clyde Blowers sees itself as part of?

JM/ Yes. I have been focussed on creating a compelling vision for the company and we know where we want to go. Ironically, the Government had for a time been planning for a population decline, and now they’re entering a realisation that the population needs to grow if the plans are to work. This does mean encouraging overseas students or workers to settle here – particularly those from China which will be a major investor in the coming years.

West Lothian’s economic conference takes place at West Lothian College on 22 April 2008. With the goal of an economically pre-eminent Scotland on the agenda, it’s a rallying call that few would choose to ignore.

 **CONTACT**
To book your free place at the conference, call Brenda Cumming on 01506 777938 or email brenda.cumming@wlchamber.com

LOCATION, LOCATION, RENOVATION

Confidence remains high in the West Lothian commercial property sector. There's an attractive list of places to set up shop. Many are new, and one is very old indeed.

It's been neglected for decades, but 18th century Blackburn House is about to make a stunning comeback as West Lothian's first bespoke development for the creative sector. The sumptuous Georgian mansion, between Livingston and Blackburn, has been totally restored to provide almost 9,000 sq ft of space, tailored for the creative industries. There's provision for everything from offices to digital media creation suites. Blackburn House is even available as a film location.

George McNeill, who is project managing for the Cockburn Conservation Trust, says the long road to completion of the £3.6m project is almost run. "I'd been aware of the potential of the property since the 1980s, but it had deteriorated so badly that even our surveyors could only conduct their initial inspection by independent hoist, peering through holes in the roof."

Determination has obviously been a critical factor in breathing life back in Blackburn House. That and the patience of various funding bodies – including the £47,000 invested by West Lothian Council, plus a European Regional Development Fund grant of £750,000 which ultimately helped secure a record Heritage Lottery Fund grant of nearly £2m.

The building will be managed by Caledonian Arthouse, which has a successful track record with a similar creative centre in Glasgow.

From "Category A" listing to "Grade One" new build, there is a whole raft of innovative developments under way, reflecting the need to satisfy continued demand for commercial space in West Lothian.

Cala is currently hard at work on a near 32,000 sq ft development at Almondvale Business Park. Also in Livingston, Miller Developments has broken ground on eight new pavilions

at Alba Business Park, representing a £10m project investment.

West Lothian property group Murphy Young recently sold its business centre portfolio to concentrate on the refurbishment of Fleming House, to create a new 15,000 sq ft Business Centre in Livingston's Kirkton Campus. The company will work from the site, managing the project and the construction of two brand new centres in Coatbridge and Cumbernauld. On a smaller local scale, but also with

Property hotspots

Other significant developments underway in West Lothian include:

- **Ashwood Scotland Ltd – 30,000 sq ft office space, at Starlaw Tailend (M8J3A).**
- **The Max scheme at J4M8, a speculative 650,000 sq ft distribution development.**
- **Heartlands Business Park, Whitburn – a joint venture between Ecosse Regeneration and Royal Bank of Scotland.**
- **Work starting at Riddochhill to remediate sites and prepare for new business activity.**

national ambitions, entrepreneur Shaf Rasul has opened his first E-Net Park in Linlithgow, a development of 30 business units aimed at high-tech tenants. Plans are in hand for further sites across Scotland.

In Bathgate, Provost Tom Kerr, recently launched work on the £2.8m Evans Business Centre in Easter Inch. The year-long development will provide a mix of 44 offices and light industrial units to suit a variety of SMEs. There will be workspace for over 200 people. "West Lothian Council is committed to supporting new and growing businesses," he said.

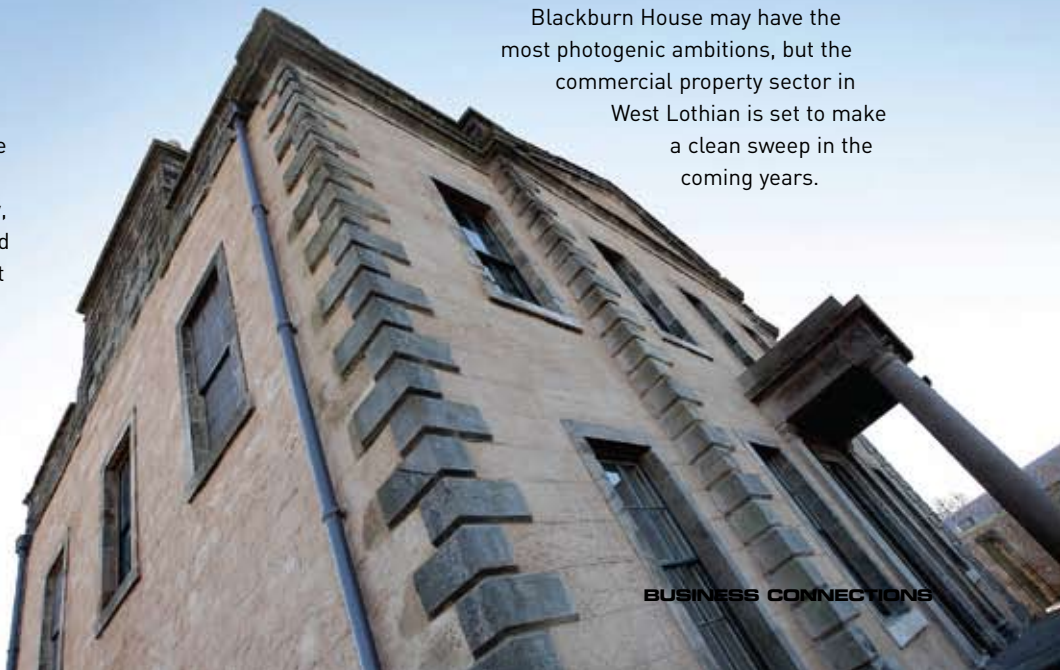
To deliver on the goals set out in West Lothian's economic strategy, which see the future in the knowledge-based jobs of science and technology companies, Scottish Enterprise has responded to the exacting requirements of such businesses by investing in a new £6m cleanroom facility at Starlaw Park in Livingston.

The new facilities will fill the gap for the region's innovative but fledgling businesses, growing up in nearby incubator units. The development will allow affordable access for West Lothian's growing micro- and opto-electronics sector and nanotechnology industry, who don't have the resources to commit to building or kitting out their own premises.

Office space and shared administrative support will all be part of the deal. Scottish Enterprise Edinburgh and Lothian is fitting out the 40,000 sq ft building, and will shortly hand over to Cumbernauld-based specialists Sematek UK, who will install bespoke facilities and handle letting the five units.

Blackburn House may have the most photogenic ambitions, but the commercial property sector in

West Lothian is set to make a clean sweep in the coming years.





LOCATION

just a few months ago. Gordon Fraser says being one of Scotland's biggest companies works well for them. "If we were based in England, the chances are that we would be dealing with an English bank, and dealing at a regional managerial level. Here we have a very close relationship at the highest level with the Bank of Scotland. That is a huge advantage for us."

For Walker Group, being quoted as one of the largest companies in West Lothian has more bearing on prestige than profit. Bruce Walker says they are involved in commercial projects throughout Scotland. "What's important is our national profile."

"In terms of why we're here, we've got a real loyalty to West Lothian. We've carried out a number of projects on our own doorstep, such as in Bathgate at the old BMC site, and we're involved in the Livingston Gaviesside proposals too. We've a number of charitable connections as well."

Reasons may be diverse, but it makes commercial sense for these companies to run their operations from West Lothian.

Head office operations are also good for the local economy. According to Dave McDougall, CEO of West Lothian Chamber, HQ operations help to put West Lothian on the map and are more likely to stay in the area once established. They also bring a more diverse range of job opportunities, including managerial, accountancy, design, R&D and marketing.

"Research* has shown that companies frequently locate their R&D and higher order activities close to their headquarters, which brings high value-added, well-paid jobs to the area," said McDougall. "And once business headquarters have selected a location, they rarely move unless the location has become completely untenable," he added.

As far as these corporate flagships are concerned, the message from their captains of industry is 'Drop anchor here'.

*[Avenell, 1996]

COMMAND POSTS

West Lothian's centre of geographical attention has convinced more than the area's fair share of companies to control their Scottish, UK, and worldwide operations from here.

Some of the country's biggest rising stars in business, many on the Insider 500 rankings, have their headquarters in West Lothian. Names such as Kwik-Fit, Schuh, Walker Group, Craneware and Macdonald Hotels are familiar to the area's corporate community.

Funky footwear brand Schuh has put many steps on the road since its days as a retail department within the former Goldbergs chain, and managing director Colin Temple can still remember the cramped early days on Edinburgh's North Bridge.

"We needed to get somewhere out of town and Livingston suited us really well. We lived in Glasgow and Edinburgh and this was in the middle. Since then, it's been quite nice in terms of our evolution."

Another powerful brand, Macdonald Hotels, has also put its best foot forward and found West Lothian ideal for its corporate operations. Gordon Fraser, the group's finance director, says their Bathgate headquarters is also the happy result of evolution.

"We operated out of what's now the Cairn Hotel and we had a team of nearly 100 quality staff on board. To keep that team together, we decided to keep the business in Bathgate."

Logistically, West Lothian is ideal for Schuh HQ, too. The company can service all of its retail outlets on a next day basis – and Colin Temple says that their Livingston base has many more advantages too. "Schuh has a loyal and available workforce on the shop floor. Importantly our creative staff departments are not subject to

the 'carousel' effect experienced in the south-east, where talented staff rotate between employers. Because we're so well placed for a great diversity of sophisticated lifestyle opportunities, our staff are loyal and content, knowing they can live in whatever surroundings suit them best."

For those choosing a modern, luxurious home environment, Walker Group (Scotland) – also headquartered in Livingston – provides new-build high-end homes and commercial properties.

Bruce Walker, the Group Managing Director, says his company is also able to attract talented staff from all over Scotland. "Facilities in Livingston are getting better every year," he says.

"It's a young demographic in Livingston, and we have a loyal young team. We've been here since 1974 – probably the new town status at the time was a key factor – and I can honestly say that the staff available, the accommodation, and communications are the main reasons why we came here – and they're all still here."

Schuh has a slightly different experience, having come to West Lothian a little later than Walker Group. "There's no other site for us. We are something of a hybrid operation – we have 22,000 sq ft of office and distribution property on a 50,000 sq ft site. In that respect we are unlike any other, and there isn't a turnkey solution for us. Moving is not an option."

Bathgate based Macdonald Hotels has moved on vigorously, at least in corporate terms, raising their portfolio to 50 properties with two new hotels opening in Manchester and Cheshire



CONTACT
For information about
relocating to West Lothian
contact Jim Henderson, business
growth adviser at West Lothian
Council on 01506 777963

THE CREAM OF WEST LoTHIAN

The annual Business Excellence Awards, organised by West Lothian Chamber of Commerce, have a reputation for bringing out the best in local businesses. And the 2007 ceremony, held at the Scottish National Equestrian Centre (SNEC) in Ecclesmachan last November, proved to be no different.

West Lothian's business community showed once again that it can deliver the goods when presented with a challenge, as West Lothian Chamber of Commerce demonstrated when holding its 2007 Business Excellence Awards.

The great and the good gathered on St Andrew's Night to honour the winners of six award categories – together being contested by 18 of the area's best-performing businesses, schools and organisations.

Enterprising School Award

WINNER: Mid Calder Primary
HIGHLY COMMENDED: St Margaret's Academy
SPONSORED BY: Jerzees-Russell Europe
FINALISTS: Woodmuir Primary, Mid Calder Primary, St Margaret's Academy.
PRESENTED FOR: recognition of efforts within West Lothian's schools to develop, build and deliver an enterprise culture.

Mid Calder Primary has successfully generated a culture of enterprise across the whole school while keeping a strong sense of fun. Pupils and teachers worked (and dressed up) together to make a 2007 calendar under the project name Calendar Kids, sales of which topped 650, smashing the school's own target of 300.



Corporate Social Responsibility Award

WINNER: Maximillion
HIGHLY COMMENDED: Livingston Kuk Sool Won
SPONSORED BY: Ethicon in the Community
FINALISTS: Oatridge College, Maximillion, Livingston Kuk Sool Won.
PRESENTED FOR: a demonstrable and continued commitment to social responsibility through business practices, business culture and being a role model for best practice in social responsibility.

Maximillion is an event management business specialising in conferences and incentive trips at home and abroad; team-building events across the UK; and training & development for companies. Over the last year, Maximillion's greatest focus has been the environmental impact of itself and its customers. MD John Strachan says: "We've been working on our Corporate Social Responsibility for some time now, and it's an area which we believe is important in giving us a competitive advantage."



Entrepreneur and Business Start-Up Award

WINNER: Tumblezone
HIGHLY COMMENDED: NAS Recruitment Services
SPONSORED BY: West Lothian Council – Business Gateway
FINALISTS: Enhance People, Tumblezone, NAS Recruitment Services
PRESENTED FOR: showing innovative endeavours and entrepreneurial potential in business, as well as being a good role model for other start-ups.

Tumblezone provides safe play areas for children from early-age to 11 years, including go-karts, an inflatable football area and themed party rooms. After its first year's trading, Tumblezone welcomed 66,000 children and turned over £445,000. Co-owner Ann Hopkins says: "It's great to know that all the hard work over the past three years has actually paid off. Better still, someone has actually recognised it."



High Growth Business Award

WINNER: Russell Europe
HIGHLY COMMENDED: Bloxx
SPONSORED BY: MBM Commercial
FINALISTS: Russell Europe, Scobie & McIntosh, Bloxx
PRESENTED FOR: demonstrating substantial economic growth over the last two years, and increasing employment opportunities for West Lothian.

Russell Europe has operated out of its Livingston base since 1985, its team of textile experts working with factories overseas to achieve the high standards that are expected with the Russell brand. Simon Cotton, Director, says: "The great thing about winning the award is that it's recognition for the workers here. We have over 100 people working in West Lothian, and it's great to have an outside body recognise the work, effort and expertise they put in to our products."



Innovation Award

WINNER: Fasteq
HIGHLY COMMENDED: XCalibre
SPONSORED BY: Bank of Scotland
FINALISTS: XCalibre, Robert Callander Opticians, Fasteq
PRESENTED FOR: demonstrating an innovative approach to business growth, such as breaking into new markets, developing new business methods or solutions to business problems.

Established in 2000, Livingston-based Fasteq supports electronic manufacturers by providing hardware and components. Six years on, the demise in manufacturing in Scotland meant that the company had to either lay off staff or re-align its business offering. The latter option has paid off significantly, with the company improving its quality systems and offering a higher level of service than its competitors. MD John Ward says: "You need to be focussed on what the customer needs and be doing this day after day, to the same standard and to the same quality."



Best Business of the Year Award

WINNER: Sibbald Ltd
HIGHLY COMMENDED: Bloxx
SPONSORED BY: Land Securities
FINALISTS: Bloxx, Sibbald Ltd, Russell Europe
PRESENTED FOR: true business excellence over a long period of time, as demonstrated by increased sales, profit and growth, employment opportunities, leadership, staff development and innovation.

Operating for 35 years, Sibbald Ltd has dedicated its business to heavy plant hire and comprehensive, industry-recognised training for companies operating in the construction sector. The company now has a permanent base in Northern Ireland and operates throughout the UK with activities as far afield as Orkney and the Falklands.



Trained in the art of excellence

Sibbald Ltd has been part of the economic fabric of West Lothian for over three decades, displaying a wise approach to business that stands it in good stead for the future.

The entrepreneur in West Lothian born-and-bred David Sibbald has featured strongly since this MD of award-winning training company Sibbald Ltd was a young boy.

At 12, he was selling firewood door-to-door, before graduating to potatoes. But the link with construction and plant machinery stemmed from his farm upbringing. By the time David was 19, he was hiring himself out – complete with an aging JCB – as a machine operator.

Business boomed enough for him to form a company and sell his services more formally, his wife Shona joining him some nine years later to help with its progression. "By 1988," says David, "we were increasingly aware that there was a real gap in the market for training."

To address increasing workplace legislation, Sibbald ran a course for its own staff, and other construction-related companies soon requested the same training for their employees. Almost by default, Sibbald rose to the challenge. "Currently, our firm offers over 100 courses," says David. "This may involve

health & safety lessons in a classroom, or working with small tools such as abrasive wheels or a stillsaw. We can assess on 100-tonne dump trucks, and have a wide range of plant machinery we own to use on courses."

Company expansion has meant that Sibbald is due to move to purpose-built facilities at Blackridge, the new address – Shona's Way – being named after David's wife who sadly passed away just over two years ago.

So why does David think Sibbald was singled out for the top award? "I think it's because we are a stable company, we are well thought-of in our sector, and our accounts have been looking excellent over the last five years. But we also invest a lot of money each year in training our own people. We recruit at the lower level then train them to the higher level, which means that they learn exactly what the company is about.

"We have won specific training awards before, but to be recognised as Best Business in West Lothian is like receiving a Kitemark. It lets my staff know that they are recognised. Without them, I'd be nothing."

WOMEN IN BUSINESS: 10 YEARS ON

West Lothian's business support organisation dedicated to women in business celebrates 10 successful years in 2008.

In 1998, around 30 per cent of start-up companies in West Lothian were run by women. Already a significant minority within the local business community, their growing influence prompted a series of Women's Enterprise courses run by West Lothian Council's Economic Development service.

Such was their success that they spurred the formation of a support organisation – branded West Lothian Women in Business (WLWIB) – aiming to help women at all levels in their professional lives.

Ten years on, WLWIB remains a key feature of West Lothian's business support services, providing help to members through seminars, networking, advice and a highly popular annual awards scheme.

Carole Reddiex, a former WLWIB Businesswoman of the Year and current Chair of the group, is a strong advocate of anything that brings like-minded people together. She is a successful career woman in her own right as Managing Director of Livingston-based Entrotec, a 20-year-old firm manufacturing vandal-resistant door entry systems for the social housing sector.

"I have been involved with Entrotec since the beginning," says Carole, "supplying systems to local authorities across the UK, including 85% of all London boroughs. We worked out of Broxburn initially, then set up in Pumpherston where we were based for 12 years."

Following a move to purpose-built premises in Livingston's Oakbank Park in 2007, Entrotec is going from strength to strength as Carole works to consolidate its position in the market and push for further growth.



Awards to Recognise Businesswomen's Success

Women who feel that their achievements in business deserve wide recognition are invited to apply for the 2008 Women in Business Awards.

The awards include three categories:

- **Business Woman of the Year;**
- **the Shona Sibbald Award for New Business (under female management); and**
- **Female Employee of the Year.**

To be considered for the Shona Sibbald Award for New Business, businesses must be under female ownership, have

been formed between 1 January 2004 and 1 January 2007 and be based in West Lothian. To be eligible for all categories, women must be working for or running a business in West Lothian.

The Award ceremony will take place in Livingston at the Deer Park Golf and Country Club on Thursday 29 May.

For an application form contact Alice Sinnet at the Enterprise Centre on Tel 01506-777924 or e-mail alice.sinnet@westlothian.gov.uk. Closing date for entries is 18 April 2008.

So how has Carole found time to play a role in WLWIB? "It was a personal decision to join," she says, "as I saw great value in the seminar topics. When you go into business, you have to keep on top of things because you have to wear different hats for accounts, HR, marketing and so on. Having been in business for a long time, I also like to think I could give good advice to members where I can."

When pressed on the idea that a separate business support organisation for women may be seen as unnecessary in 2008, Carole won't be drawn into such debates. However, the recently launched new report, "State of Women's Enterprise in the UK" makes policy recommendations on how national and local government can further support women's enterprise.

Key recommendations include the need for a continuum of appropriate business support for female entrepreneurs, particularly to encourage high-growth enterprise, and the need for a national mentoring network for women

in business.

Dr Rebecca Harding of Delta Economics, author of the report, said: "Research continues to show that the attitudes and motivations that drive women's enterprise are fundamentally different to those that drive men. Such differences need to be taken into account in the delivery of business support to women."

Certainly, 10 years of new business and workplace legislation hasn't dampened the ambitions of West Lothian Women in Business to strive for yet more women to take the plunge and make a lasting impression on their career or their business.

And the stats would back them up. The 30 per cent starting their own business may now have reached 40 per cent, but a recent Scottish Enterprise inquiry still concludes that women are under-represented among new businesses.

So here's to 10 more years of making a stand for women in business.



win the SPACE RACE

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THE FUNDS TO SUCCEED

Having a growth strategy is a crucial element in any business wanting to go places. A range of financial and advisory support from West Lothian Council's Growth team is designed to help ambitious companies that want to take the next step in their journey.

Nobody ever said that running a company would be easy. But the punches that businesspeople are increasingly made to roll with as they grow can, at least on occasions, be softened by the help and advice from business support organisations such as Business Gateway.

Take Alpha Plus Group for example – a West Lothian firm selling and leasing ground maintenance, cleansing and waste management vehicles for over 17 years. The company has seen its fortunes move continually upwards during this time, growing from a staff of two to in excess of 50. But even Steve Matthews, founder and managing director who displays a sound business acumen and passion for his business, can recognise

the range of business support out there for firms on a route to growth.

"I realised two years ago that the business was outgrowing my ability to control it solely," says Steve. "Turnover was at a healthy level and the workforce was reaching 40, and the feeling was that we could do with some support to take things forward.

"In 2006, I took the advice of Business Gateway West Lothian to speak to staff in Scottish Enterprise. My first thoughts were that we probably wouldn't qualify for support, not being a biotech or hi-tech sector firm. But through a bit of networking, we were put in touch with a very experienced independent consultant."

That consultant was brought on board by Steve to act as mentor, and proved particularly useful when facilitating the management team away-day. On the back of this, Steve enlisted the help of an HR consultant to get proper procedures and processes in place.

While managing to steady the foundations for further growth, the need to back it up with a concerted marketing plan proved to be another challenge. "Our marketing strategy was poor," says Steve. "There was no consistency, brand identity or underlying message."

A Business Gateway contact was on hand to introduce the company to the Graduates for Business recruitment scheme, and this inspired Alpha Plus to appoint two marketing staff, leaving Steve "delighted" with both the process and the calibre of his new employees.

The support for Alpha Plus' growth didn't stop there, however. One of the

Help for growing businesses

West Lothian business advisers have a range of financial instruments at their fingertips to support indigenous, growing businesses that can demonstrate plans which lead to improved sales and profit margins or new jobs. Companies in priority sectors are the most likely beneficiaries but valued local employers in other sectors – such as Alpha Plus – may be considered.

- Business Growth Grants – These funds can support project costs of up to 30% (to a maximum of £3,000) where firms can demonstrate that the project will help them grow sales, margins and jobs.

- Training Grants – can support training associated with company growth activity, providing 30% of total costs, to a maximum of £1,000.

- Small Business Loan Fund – provides interest-free loans to a maximum of 30% of the total funding requirement (up to £5,000). Targeted to support early-stage businesses (in their first three years of trading), and designed to lever other private-sector funding and assist job creation.

- A new West Lothian Loan Fund offering gap funding of up to £30,000 is to be launched later this year.



firm's prime sellers is a street-cleaning machine called Littermaster, and continuing its good sales record relies on developing the product in line with changing legislation on noise, vibration and emission levels.

Enter TAP – the Technical Assistance Project that provided investment and growth funds to companies that qualified for backing. As Steve explains: "We already had a machine which we had sold many of – but we wanted to make it better. The TAP grant was towards that

development. It helped a local company produce something that can be sold on a national scale and has led to work outside Scotland."

So where does a growing Alpha Plus Group go from here? "An important foundation stone for the company now is proper training for our colleagues," adds Steve. "This will help give them some ownership of the business. Within the next year, we hope to make some structural changes to the business, giving some people more responsibility.

There are good local people working here who want that opportunity."

Being able to call upon a whole range of business support has meant the future now paints a much clearer picture for Alpha Plus Group. While further growth for this successful company is not a foregone conclusion, Steve Matthews' own calculations point to a doubling of the workforce within five years. And given his own natural passion for success, that is a target worth betting on.

"It helped a local company produce something that can be sold on a national scale"



CONTACT

Firms looking to engage with West Lothian Council's Business Growth advisers on the range of support available should contact 01506 777400.

ROUTES FROM THE CENTRE

West Lothian's location at the hub of the Scottish transport network could be boosted following the unveiling of the national planning framework.

The Draft National Planning Framework published by the Scottish Government in January has pinpointed four schemes of national importance close to and with implications for West Lothian, namely: the Replacement Forth Crossing; Edinburgh Airport enhancement; Grangemouth Freight Hub; and Rosyth International Container Terminal.

It's clear that the projects for enhancements to Edinburgh Airport and the Rosyth International Container Terminal will have significant positive impacts on West Lothian's international connectivity.

Improving the area's connections within Scotland, the new Forth Replacement Crossing will be built west of the existing bridge and will increase capacity across the

Forth, assuring the long-term future of the crossing in light of corrosion issues with the existing bridge.

Its direct connection with the M9 near Winchburgh in West Lothian will build on the success of the £35m M9 spur near Kirkliston that opened in September last year, bypassing the notorious delay hotspot of the A8000 and speeding up journeys from West Lothian to Fife, Dundee and Aberdeen.

The second project of national importance is the improvement to the Grangemouth Freight Hub, which also includes improved transport links through upgrading the A801 Avon Gorge route. This key link in the central Scotland road chain, currently connects West Lothian and Falkirk via a narrow and twisting route across the river Avon. A new road would provide a fast, level alternative to the current steep crossing that is often subject to delays as accidents can lead to closure of the whole road.

Westfield-based fish-food manufacturer EWOS uses the route for both importing raw materials from Grangemouth port and sending its finished



“As well as boosting links to the north it will also improve connections to England and Europe”

product north to Scotland's fish farms, with over 10 lorry movements a day. James Deverill, purchasing and planning manager commented: “Our lorries are often delayed by accidents at the Avon Gorge; the new road will help our supply chain to become more reliable as well as saving us money and fuel from reduced journey times.”

As well as boosting links to the north, the upgrade will also improve connections to England and Europe via the WH Malcolm rail terminal at Grangemouth. One local beneficiary will be Tesco who brings containers from England via the terminal to its massive West Lothian distribution hub in north Livingston. Design work is now complete and if funding can be secured, construction could start in 2008/09.

And with improved air, sea and road connections covered, completing the picture are

the enhanced rail connections between Airdrie and Bathgate. Work on the new railway is well underway, moving a step closer to linking Edinburgh and Glasgow to communities in central Scotland.

Transport minister Stewart Stevenson welcomed the start of advanced works on the £300m rail link that will re-open a 23 kilometre section between Drumgelloch station and Bathgate to provide fast public transport access between Glasgow, North Lanarkshire, West Lothian and west Edinburgh.

The minister attended a sod cutting ceremony marking the start of advanced work at Livingston North Station.

Mr Stevenson said: “I am delighted this work is underway. The project will open an important door of opportunity for the communities and economy in the Central Scotland corridor.

“The Airdrie–Bathgate link will open up employment and education opportunities for people living west of Edinburgh and east of Glasgow and, importantly, will provide a public transport alternative to the congested M8/A8 route.”



KEY ECONOMIC INDICATORS

	2001	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2010 (proj)	2024 (proj)	Source:
Population									
Population	159,000	161,000	162,800	163,800	165,700		173,000	196,400	GRO(S)
% of population aged 0 to 29	38.81%	37.70%	37.47%	37.42%	37.36%		36.99%	34.27%	GRO(S)
% of population aged 30 to 49	32.33%	32.61%	32.43%	32.17%	31.93%		30.59%	26.68%	GRO(S)
% of population aged 50+	28.99%	29.75%	30.01%	30.46%	30.78%		32.42%	39.05%	GRO(S)
Labour Market									
Resident Workforce (working age)	104,000	106,000	106,900	107,200	105,900				National Statistics
Total number of jobs	67,600	71,200	72,000	73,600	75,200				Annual Business Inquiry
% of jobs in service sector	68.30%	76.30%	73.50%	75.27%	75.80%				National Statistics
Economic activity rate	88.50%	86.90%	88.50%	88.50%	84.30%	87.10%			Labour Force Survey/ Annual Population Survey
- males (working age) (1)									Labour Force Survey/ Annual Population Survey
Economic activity rate - females (working age) (1)	79.40%	77.70%	78.20%	78.80%	80.50%	80.30%			Labour Force Survey/ Annual Population Survey
Claimant unemployment (2)	3,015	2,878	2,389	2,347	2,490	2,324			National Statistics
Claimant unemployment rate	3.00%	2.80%	2.30%	2.30%	2.40%	2.30%			National Statistics
Long term as % of all unemployment (3)	10.20%	8.90%	10.20%	9.00%	8.20%	9.60%			National Statistics
Education									
% population degree educated (working age)	23.40%	25.70%	25.40%	28.50%	26.40%				Labour Force Survey
% population with no qualifications (working age)	16.00%	14.00%	16.00%	13.00%	12.00%				Labour Force Survey
Output and Business Activity									
Average gross weekly earnings (4)	£356	£366	£388	£389	£388				Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings
Gross Domestic Product (£ million) (5)	£1,658	£1,676	£1,713	£1,743	£1,780				Mackay Consultants
Number of businesses	4,410	4,272	4,296	4,485					Annual Business Inquiry
VAT-registered businesses	2,965	3,025	3,135	3,225					National Statistics
New business start-ups (6)		657	622	629	709				Scottish Clearing Banks
Travel									
Inward commuting	22,491								Census 2001
- as % of workforce	31%								Census 2001
Outward commuting	26,109								Census 2001
- as % of workforce	35%								Census 2001
Edinburgh Airport passenger arrivals and departures (millions)	6.04	7.48	7.99	8.45	8.61		11.5		Scottish Transport Stats
Housing									
Households	65,062	67,085	68,259	69,309	71,770		74,870	91,310	GRO(S)
Owner-occupation (% of household)	62%	69%	69%	68%					Census 2001/SHS
Housing completions	1,366	1,397	1,199	875	1,158	1,288	1,175	714	West Lothian Council
Average house price	£69,055	£88,913	£103,737	£114,390	£130,921				Scottish Government

- (1) Change in methodology between the two surveys between 2004 – 2005. Four-quarter average data for Apr – June.
 (2) Claimant unemployment and claimant unemployment rates as at July each year.
 (3) Long-term unemployed are those who have been unemployed continuously for 12 months or more.
 (4) Workplace earnings.
 (5) Estimates (constant 2006 values).
 (6) New businesses based in West Lothian that have opened accounts with any of the four Scottish Clearing Banks.



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