

## New animation studio signs up for charity deal

A new animation studio based at Stockton Business Centre has secured a prestigious deal to help deaf children.



Back2Front Animation is providing a new interactive character for a special website for charity Talking Hands, which helps those with hearing problems.

The lion character and website were unveiled at an opening ceremony in the company's new Stockton Business Centre offices.

Back2Front Animation was set up by Talib Kadhim and Sarah Tyson, who combined their skills to offer both computer generated images and model making.

Creative director Talib said: "Animation studios usually concentrate on one or the other, but we think by offering both we can give businesses something different.

"For example, we can provide models of the Talking Hands lion character, which is unusual for a CGI studio to offer. It means items can be made for merchandising or for promotions."

Art director Sarah is the talent behind the model making, with Talib the CGI expert. While Sarah has been freelance, Talib has worked at some of the country's top studios.

Rose-Ann O'Malley, from Talking Hands, said: "We were really excited by what Back2Front Animation could offer and it really makes our website interesting.

"The lion is fantastic and I can't wait to see the finished model."

For Stockton Business Centre Tel: **527933** email: [enquiries@stocktonbusinesscentre.org](mailto:enquiries@stocktonbusinesscentre.org)

## Further success for Woodcraft Training

A bursary from the GoalZ Project through A4e has enabled six Ian Ramsey School students to enrol on a joinery course with local training provider Woodcraft Training Services.

During the course, the students will work towards a Preparation for Work qualification and learn how to use hand tools and power tools under the supervision of Ian Coning, himself a former Ian Ramsey pupil.

Woodcraft Training are based at the Stockton Business Centre and Lee Beresford, GoalZ Project co-ordinator, has worked with them on a number of projects enabling students to try this exciting vocational area of work. He believes the short courses encourage schools to consider funding future courses to give students a real opportunity to gain apprenticeships when they leave school.

Ian was delighted to have Ian Ramsey School attending the course as the first Stockton school to use the service. He said: "We are currently

working with schools from Hartlepool, Middlesbrough and Darlington to deliver a range of courses including the City & Guilds Level 1 Basic Skills in Construction, which has previously helped students to gain further training and apprenticeships in the construction industry."

The GoalZ project has helped schools across the Tees Valley find work placements and extended training for young people to improve their lives and future career prospects.



For more information on GoalZ, contact Lee Beresford at [lberesford@4e.co.uk](mailto:lberesford@4e.co.uk) or for course information call Ian Coning on **07788 585824**.

## Business off to the "write" start

**An Eaglescliffe woman with a way with words has set up her own business using her writing skills.**

Emma Finn, 39, has launched Finn Copywriting offering to write press releases, adverts, newsletters, websites and brochures for businesses.

Emma, received a Vital Spark grant as well as completing a course with the Institute of Copywriting to obtain her Diploma before launching her new business.

She said: "Copywriters are the creative people who write the words for advertising campaigns, leaflets, sales letters and websites among other things.

"It's something that we all take for granted. Yet every day thousands of businesses fall into the trap of poorly written and ineffective pressadverts, press releases, newsletters, websites and brochures. It's a shame they don't stop to think about what this says to the outside world about their business."

For more information about financial assistance contact the Business Development Team. Tel: **528384** email: [business.enquiries@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:business.enquiries@stockton.gov.uk)

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## Businesses aim to be greener

**Organisations working to promote business efficiency and environmental awareness in the Tees Valley are developing a Green Business Forum.**



The newly co-ordinated approach is intended to provide a focal point for businesses, particularly SMEs, making it easier for them to access information on how to improve their

environmental performance, and what further support is available.

Mike McNulty, of the Environment Agency, a member of the forum, said: "There are many savings that businesses can make that will also benefit the environment.

"For example, using energy more efficiently will reduce carbon dioxide emissions and bills, or cutting back on waste will reduce your disposal costs as well the pressure on landfill sites.

"Being able to prove your environmental credentials can also open up avenues in terms of your business reputation and the increasing degree to which procurement procedures demand this.

"Therefore introducing green business practices doesn't mean you will incur more costs, in fact you will save money. This is something no small business can afford to ignore,

and is the sort of message we want to convey through the forum."

As part of its activities the forum will be running a Resource Efficiency Club (REC) in the Tees Valley, based on similar successful clubs in other areas of the country.

The club will be made up of 15-20 businesses which can demonstrate they have the potential to make cost-savings, are committed to putting into practice efficiency methods, and are willing to collate and share data that will measure the progress of their actions.

If you are interested in joining the Green Business Forum or the Tees Valley Resource Efficiency Club, or would like more information please contact James Glancey, Business Development Officer on (01642) 526023 or email

[james.glancey@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:james.glancey@stockton.gov.uk)

## BID is a Tees Valley first

**Companies on a Billingham industrial estate have voted to create the North East's first Business Improvement District - or BID - from April this year.**

The move puts the Cowpen Lane Industrial Estate in line for a range of improvements, particularly security and safety measures along with the visual image of the estate.

BIDs are a partnership between councils and local companies in identified commercial areas.

The businesses agree to pay a levy over and above the non-domestic rate. Every penny raised this way is then spent on improving the estate to increase business activity there.

Stockton Council balloted businesses there after an earlier consultation in conjunction with the Cowpen Industrial Association, which has drawn up a business plan to improve the estate. As members of the association, tenants there will be able to decide how the money raised is spent.

For further information email: [mike.devereux@kdevereux.co.uk](mailto:mike.devereux@kdevereux.co.uk)





# Businesses can get the Midas touch

Businesses can find help with issues of energy, waste and water costs with Midas.

Midas, based in Newcastle, is a company set up to help others boost their business performance through resource efficiency.

Midas has a five-step approach for business. Step One is a free Initial Diagnosis to help highlight a company's resource issues, focusing on energy, waste and water costs.

Step Two is a tailored report detailing what the company can do to save money and appropriate service providers to implement these actions.

Step Three is for companies to decide which actions they would like to take forward for more in-depth analysis. A Midas Broker will work alongside companies and 60 per

cent funding is available on five to ten days consultancy support.

Step Four revolves around funding. There are no forms to fill in, companies just let Midas know what work they want to take forward and once the work is completed companies will be promptly reimbursed for 60 per cent of the costs.

Step Five is aftercare, when Midas helps companies interpret report findings and offers assistance to implement any changes.

Midas is currently working in fields such as energy efficiency, waste minimisation, waste related innovation, industrial symbiosis and much more.

You can contact Midas on **0191 233 9319** or email



[Fiona.dowson@tnei.co.uk](mailto:Fiona.dowson@tnei.co.uk)  
[www.midas-ne.co.uk](http://www.midas-ne.co.uk)

Other useful links include:  
[www.carbontrust.co.uk](http://www.carbontrust.co.uk)  
[www.wrap.org.uk/business](http://www.wrap.org.uk/business)

## STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP

Find out how to access funding for IT and e-business projects for small and medium businesses at free seminars organised by the new Catalyst 2 funding initiative.

The seminars will provide businesses with the opportunity to apply for funding, offering 50 per cent towards the costs up to a £2,000 maximum.

The project is supported by

OneNE and is expected to operate until March 2008.

The free seminar in this region is on March 7 at Wynyard Rooms, Billingham. To confirm a place email: [info@n-e-life.co.uk](mailto:info@n-e-life.co.uk) or phone **(0191) 487 2002**.

The Catalyst Team is also searching for IT companies which can become regional suppliers for the project.

## Finance in business

Early Introduction to Finance courses are to be held for small and medium businesses in the North-East.

Run by Nstar Business and Finance, there will be a course at Hall Garth Manor, Darlington, on March 13 and another on April 17 with the venue to be confirmed.

For more information visit [www.nstarbusinessandfinance.com](http://www.nstarbusinessandfinance.com) or call **(0191) 211 2300**.

## How to do Business with the Council

If your company is interested in procuring works, supplies or services from Stockton Council, firstly check out the web site for information - <http://www.stockton.gov.uk/business/howbusi/> and download the Guide to Suppliers & Contractors - <http://www.stockton.gov.uk/resources/business/businessinfoguides/howtodobussbc.pdf>

For current contract opportunities - <http://www.stockton.gov.uk/business/howbusi/curcontopp/>  
Details of Stockton Council Contract Registers - <http://www.stockton.gov.uk/business/howbusi/curcontopp/>

So, check out the timetables, if there is something coming up that is appropriate to your business activities, mark your calendar this may be the opportunity you have been waiting for!

For opportunities with other North East Councils you can access the NEPO portal <https://www.qtegov.com/systems/qtsupplier.nsf/>

# Streets Ahead with



**Sue Burgess**  
Stockton Town Centre Manager

In this regular feature Sue Burgess, Stockton Town Centre Manager, provides a snapshot of progress on issues important to the business community in the Borough.

### Plans for the town centre

Following on from the reported launch of the Retail Forum in the last edition of Vital Spark, the Forum discussed the following important issues at another successful meeting in January:

- New on-street parking measures, the result of consultation with businesses last April - we think you will be pleased with these;
- Launch of the Safer Shopping in Stockton retail crime prevention initiative - benefits and how you can join;
- Presentation of the proposed Town Centre Action Plan for the short, medium and long term development of Stockton town centre - you have an opportunity to comment and make suggestions for improvement before its final approval by the Council.

If you would like further information on any of these, please email your town centre manager [sue.burgess@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:sue.burgess@stockton.gov.uk)

### Markets update

Good progress is being made with the redevelopment of Stockton Markets. Working closely with stallholders, we have agreed to provide new, high quality covers, and we are working on the new layout which will make it



more shopper-friendly, more accessible and easier to manage. The launch is anticipated for April 07.



### Fairtrade

Businesses are invited to take part in a Fairtrade event planned for February 28, highlighting Stockton's commitment to fair trade and to increase the impact of this initiative. If you would like to find out more about how to be involved, either with the event or in Fairtrade itself, please contact Kawun Williams at SBC on **(01642) 526596** - she'll be delighted to help.

### Stockton Sparkles! Christmas festival

As you know, this was the first time we had ever delivered such an ambitious programme of Christmas festivity in Stockton. Early reports indicate success of the Festival in its objective - to increase the attractiveness of Stockton to shoppers in the face of competition from nearby centres.

The two shopping centres reported footfall and turnover well above the national average for December - but how did your business do? Your comments and suggestions for next year are welcomed - please email the town centre manager [sue.burgess@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:sue.burgess@stockton.gov.uk)



Also of note is that the Council's investment in the Festival was matched almost pound for pound by sponsorship and private sector revenue, so a big thank you to all who supported it.

## Business Forum

Stockton on Tees Business Forum meets quarterly at The Swallow Hotel at 4.30pm.

The dates scheduled for 2007 are as follows:

- Tuesday 13th March
- Tuesday 12th June
- Tuesday 11th September
- Tuesday 27th November

New members are always welcome.

For further information, please contact Carol Hodgson on [carol.hodgson@cemuk.co.uk](mailto:carol.hodgson@cemuk.co.uk)

## LEGI bid

Stockton Council in partnership with Middlesbrough Council submitted a £17m bid for funding in the second round of the Local Enterprise Growth Initiative (LEGI).

Despite excellent feedback from the regional panel and short listing for interview by the national panel, the bid was unsuccessful. We are awaiting formal feedback and are looking at what areas of the bid we can continue to develop and improve. A third round of LEGI funding is subject to the Comprehensive Spending Review in 2007/8.