



Golfing bliss: Jeweller Jack Murphy

Why Newry is



by Michelle Fleming

STROLLING across the historic golfing greens of Co. Down's spectacular Ardglass Golf Club, grandfather-of-two Jack Murphy smiles: 'I'm practising all right - after 51 years working, I'll need all the practice I can get for retirement.'

With the sun in his face, breathing the mist rolling in from the sea, the dark cloud of the credit crunch looming large over the rest of the country doesn't as much as cast a shadow over this soon-to-retire businessman.

While the rest of us tighten our belts and brace ourselves for the challenging times ahead, a fresh-faced Jack Murphy has no worries bar where to take wife Pat on a retirement holiday, whether to play his next round of golf at his home club of Ardglass or somewhere more exotic, and how

to amuse his two grandsons, Owen and Tom. Although business is booming for Jack Murphy Jewellers and promises to boom more still over the coming months, Jack has decided it's time to sell up and enjoy the very sweet fruits of his hard-earned success. So just what is Jack's secret? How has he managed to prosper at this most challenging of times?

Well, Jack is just one of many business-owners based in the dual-currency haven of Newry - Ireland's newest boomtown, thanks to the economic climate. With a euro at a consistent high - currently €1.27 against sterling - and both Irish and British retailers in the South failing to pass on the savings to already hard-pressed consumers, it's no wonder that more and more are choosing with their feet. And those feet are taking them north.

Jack, for one, isn't complaining. 'We've earned some very good money over the past few years and the business from the South has paid a massive part in myself and my wife Pat saying: "Yes, we can retire right now",' admits Jack warmly, bejewelled Cartier watches and engagement diamonds glistening about him in his showroom on Newry's main shopping street, Hill Street.

In the corner of his greeting room, where Jack first opened for business back in 1973, Thank You cards fight for space on a table.

If it wasn't for the business we have built up, a large proportion of which has come from the Republic, we would not have been in this position. Business from southerners has paid a huge, huge part in where we are today.'

It's come full circle for Jack and his fellow business folk in Newry, who endured tough times during the Troubles. As a border town, Newry inevitably suffered the fallout from the atrocities, which persisted from the Seventies until the mid-Nineties.

As the violence intensified, tourism all but disappeared. Even the southerners who once travelled north to the border towns for their shopping stopped travelling.

'Every accent you hear in Sainsbury's is a Dublin one'

Declan McChesney of Cahill Brothers, trading since 1894 and the oldest shoe store in the North, recalls times that weren't so promising: 'It was an appalling time. The dark days in the Seventies and Eighties when people stopped traversing the border.'

He added: 'We may sound cynical but we had a saying up here that for every one person killed we would have at least one day of bad business.'

But the peace has brought with it prosperity and now Newry is emerging as one of the North's most robust retail centres.

As word spreads of major savings to be made by driving just an hour up the M1 from Dublin Airport - shoppers from Balbriggan, for example, find they can get to Newry faster than they would Grattan Street, without the hassle of traffic and parking.

It's not just Dublin however. Jack welcomes customers from as far south as Clonakilty, in Cork.

'This year, takings have been up every month,' reveals the father-of-two. 'Last month we were up 11 per cent, the previous month up five per cent, the month before, eight.'

'With the better euro people see they are getting a lot better value. They really see the difference and can save enormous amounts. About 25 to 30 per cent of our customers are from the south, but in money terms, what they represent is a lot higher.'

Jack regularly takes calls from Dubliners price-checking. 'An hour ago I had a guy from Dublin asking

It's the peace dividend writ large as the border town, which suffered bitterly during the Troubles, becomes the new favourite destination for Southern shoppers sick of the Rip-off Republic's soaring prices

about John Rocha. He had shopped around and found by coming here he'd make a saving of about 15 per cent.'

Newry has become something of a 'one-stop-shop' for southern shoppers fed up with hugely-inflated prices in the South and the rip off prices being charged by British retailers, as sensationally revealed by the Irish Daily Mail.

Customers park for free while shopping in the likes of Sainsbury's, Marks & Spencer, Dunnes, Debenhams, Argos, Boots, Penneys and a wear in The Quays and Butterrune shopping centres. There is also an eclectic assortment of independent retailers in the compact town centre, including Jack Murphy Jewellers.

The 1,300-space Quays car park is heaving with southern registration plates and express coaches ferrying shoppers from down south regularly pull in.

Shoppers don't have the hassle of exchanging currencies as most retailers accept euro, with many offering exceptional rates in a bid to entice shoppers into their stores.

Signs in shop windows scream 'Best exchange rate in town' and '85p to every euro here,' as stores compete for

YOURS TO CUT OUT (AND RECYCLE).



Last week, National Newspapers of Ireland (NNI) won this European Paper Recycling Award.

We'd like to dedicate it to you, our readers.

Thanks to your efforts, the rate of Irish newsprint recycling has increased by more than 35% in the past five years.

This has saved around 75,000 tonnes of newsprint from going to landfill. It has also halved the amount of CO2 being produced.

We got the award. The credit is all yours.



Keep up the good work.
Keep recycling your old newspapers.



Irish Independent - Irish Examiner - The Irish Times - Irish Daily Star - Irish Daily Mirror - The Irish Sun - Irish Daily Mail
Evening Herald - Sunday Independent - Sunday World - The Sunday Business Post - The Sunday Tribune - Irish Mail on Sunday
Irish Daily Star Sunday - Irish News of the World - Irish Sunday Mirror - The Sunday Times - Irish Farmers Journal

the NY of the North



JUST WHAT'S ON OFFER IN THE BARGAIN TOWN?



A bit of Northern sole: Model Kelly Anne McKendry makes the most of the bargains in Newry, trying on a pair of floral heels by label Bourne, £115, from the Place of Dress boutique at popular shopping centre, The Quays



Border bling: Kelly tries on a 18ct white diamond watch 'Tank Americaine' by Cartier £16,700, Necklace £2,800 by Hearts on Fire, 18ct white gold 1.10 carat

their slice of the pie. (With the conversion at 79p, shoppers save €7 for every €100 they spend, on top of existing savings to be made.)

One woman pushing a full trolley is mother and grandmother Lily Dale, 57, a housewife from Walkinstown, in Dublin. She keeps her eye out for weekend deals at local hotels to turn her monthly shopping session into a bit of a relaxing girly weekend for herself and her daughter.

She says: 'With mortgage interest rates the way they are, they say staying in is the new going out now. A lot of young people come up here to stock up on their beer and wine for barbecues, buying in bulk. Every accent you hear in Sainsbury's is a Dublin one at the weekends.'

'It's a lot cheaper than Superquinn or Dunnes and there's a lot better variety in the fresh stuff.'

She added that some stores are really going that extra mile to entice customers: Five weeks ago Debenhams' were offering pound per euro if you spent over £20.

Ashling McCann, 17, and pal Tonia Callaghan, 21, from Ballyfermot in Dublin, arrived up with €1,000 in their pockets and three suitcases. They open them up to reveal hordes of shoes, belts, dresses and tops crammed inside.

Ashling vows: 'We're definitely coming back here again for the shoes - if we ever need to buy another pair again! We bought

loads of shoes, as we've sisters too. 'We spent most of the €1,000 but that would have been about €3,000 if it was in Dublin. It's well worth coming up.'

According to Cathal Austin, who runs The Quays: 'It's been fantastic here since Christmas and that's down to the southern shoppers. Our profits are up in double figures per cent wise, so that's terrific.'

'In terms of footfall in the UK retailers and in the south, we're certainly bucking the trend. A lot of British retailers getting a bad press in the south has also helped. Even with the euro at 65p there was a 15-20 per cent saving by coming across the border but the strong Euro recently hasn't so much increased numbers as increased the number of visits. People have fewer euros in

'Now really is a thrilling time to be in business'

their pockets so they're coming here to spend them wisely.

'We reckon over 60 per cent of our shoppers here at the weekend are southerners and our euro takings have doubled against the same time frame last year - and that's not taking into account credit card sales.'

Cathal says the days are long gone when you could identify a southern shopper by their trolleys full of booze - they're just as likely to have aftershave, soaps, deodorant, washing powder, tins of beans, fruit and veg and a leg of lamb.

Indeed, it seems shoppers now head north for everything from dentist check-ups to purchasing new 4x4s to booking holidays. 'We get a lot of our customers in out of curiosity. After pricing something down south they say it's a lot cheaper here, especially now,'

remarks travel agent Conor O'Neil, of Thomas Cook in the Quays.

'I'd say 60 per cent of our customers are from Dublin - without them everyone here at the Quays would be scraping the barrel.'

Blushing brides-to-be are also a common sight about town.

Bernie Traynor, who owns the Bridal Loft on Hill Street, has many a Cork and Dublin girl on her books.

'A lot of brides are coming north of the border now, especially in recent months for their dresses and bridesmaids.'

'I had a girl in to me from Thurles in Tipperary in last weekend, the week before a girl came up from Clonakilty in West Cork.'

'For the wedding dress alone,' she continues, 'one girl from Dublin saved between €600-700 by buying her Benjamin Roberts taffeta dress here, and that was in the medium end of the market. Price matters and every bride has a budget, especially these days.'

Up the road, Declan McChesney of Cahill Bros, says it's a 'thrilling time' to be in Newry.

'We've noticed a tremendous increase in our southern business. It rumbled about six weeks ago and it's building more and more with every week.'

'My customers are aghast at some of the prices they see in Dundalk compared with me here. We remember the days when there was nobody shopping in Newry so to be here now really is a thrilling time to be in business.'

And for the rest of us. Delighted, I priced a camera lens on sale here that was a quarter of the price back in Dublin.

With a looming holiday on the cards, and not exactly rolling in dosh, sod Grafton Street or Dundrum, I'll be joining the caravan of southerners heading up the M1 next month. See ye up there.

Shop 'til you drop: Such great savings will excuse a just a little indulgence