

BUSINESS BRIEFS

Local and national business news and views

Entrepreneurial spirit pays off for hardworking pair

TWO young Newry entrepreneurs have helped set up an innovative travel service aimed at taking the headache out of holiday planning.

Marie-Claire McAteer and Mary Murphy are developing a one-stop shop holiday and travel website called ComeRoam alongside a team of university colleagues.

The final year students at Queen's University Belfast came

up with the idea as part of their Business Information Technology studies.

"Research shows that 20 per cent of people don't have a destination in mind when they set out to plan holidays. This is why we have decided to develop ComeRoam," Marie-Claire said.

"To find your perfect trip all we need to know is your budget, your

age, your departure location, when you want to go, what type of break you want and we'll do the rest.

"Once you have decided on your destination based on ComeRoams' suggestions, you'll be able to pick where to stay and find information."

They also plan to expand the service into travel agents with easy to use interactive kiosks allowing

holidaymakers to book with the travel agent there and then.

ComeRoam is currently in the development stages but the girls hope to have the fully functioning website up and running by early next year. To help them do this they are asking Democrat readers to take a few minutes to visit the site at www.comeroam.co.uk and complete a short questionnaire.



TAX TIPS

by Janette Burns, Tax Partner, FPM Chartered Accountants

Q. I would like to make a charitable donation at Christmas. If I make a donation of £1,000 under Gift Aid, is it correct that this will reduce my personal tax liability this year by £250? Will the charity also benefit if I make a donation under this scheme?

A. The government want to encourage more giving to charities and so offer a range of tax incentives to individuals and businesses that make charitable donations.

If you are thinking of making a gift of cash you can get tax relief if you give under Gift Aid.

If you pay tax, Gift Aid is a scheme by which you can give a sum of money to charity and the charity can normally reclaim basic rate tax on your gift from HMRC.

That increases the value of the gift you make to the charity.

For 2009/10 the basic rate of tax is 20 per cent, however, the Finance Act 2008 provides that charities will still be able to recover 22 per cent tax on all gift aid donations made before April 5, 2011.

So for example, for every £100 donation using Gift Aid, in the current tax year that gift is still worth £128.20 to the charity. If you are a higher rate taxpayer you will be entitled to a reduction in your tax by £25.

You can give any amount, large or small, regular or one-off and benefit from the Gift Aid scheme, if you are a taxpayer. If you do not pay tax, you should not use Gift Aid.

There are three main conditions to qualify for gift aid tax relief.

You must make a declaration to the charity that you want your gift to be treated as a Gift Aid donation, pay at least as much tax as the charities will reclaim on your gifts in the tax year in which you make them (tax credits on dividend income will count towards the tax paid) and not receive excessive benefits in return for your gift.

The advice in this column is specific to the facts surrounding the question posed. Neither the Democrat nor the contributors accept any liability for any direct or indirect loss arising from any reliance placed on replies.

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Positive outlook works

A NEWRY firm's forthright approach to tackling the recession has helped it land a new £2.5m contract.

Project contractor MJM Group, based at Cambane Business Park, secured the tender to kit out deluxe cabins of a Saga cruise ship, a new client for the firm that's actively pursuing fresh markets around the world.

A crew has already started working on the Florida job to refit 29 deluxe cabins with a boost in temporary posts to fulfil the contract.

MD Jonathan Guest credits good salesmanship and networking for pitching MJM Group to a wider audience.

The firm operates an aggressive growth strategy to conquer the recession.

Under the plan, the firm left its long-term base in Rathfriland last year to move closer to key transport links in Newry.

"We invested £10m in the Cambane building with support from Ulster Bank," explained Mr Guest.



BRIAN McConville, MJM owner, Kenton Hilman, Ulster Bank, Jonathan Guest, MJM managing director, and Leona Loughran Ulster Bank.

"During all the doom and gloom, we bucked the trend to invest in our property.

"For the business, it's all about securing our workforce while growing and expanding. Through marketing and positioning ourselves into a place where we can

offer customers, both existing and new, different ways to fulfil their needs.

"It's all about being responsive to our customers' needs and providing the best possible service.

"We have been working with existing clients and trying to get

others on board. We see the current economic recession as an opportunity instead of a threat."

Mr Guest believes the group is better placed to deal with the crisis due to its proactive approach to gaining business contacts.

"It's my personal view that the industry in regard to construction has been quite fat in recent years and a lot of companies haven't had to try very hard," he said.

"Now things have changed and firms have to be leaner and look outside Ireland for business."

MJM Group has seen a notable shift in its markets. Once it resourced 50 per cent of contracts in Ireland. Now that's down to 20 per cent with the rest made up from global trade.

The company took the decision to open an office in London in June and it has already started to pay dividends with a £2m contract to fit out a plush restaurant opposite Harrods in Knightsbridge.

There are currently 87 skilled workers at MJM Group and management hopes this will increase next year.

Shareholders in tax boost

SHAREHOLDERS of companies in the Republic could be eligible for an income tax repayment.

HM Revenue and Customs has announced a change to the law regarding taxpayers in Northern Ireland.

Some income tax will be repaid for 2003 to 2008 if they have received Irish dividends - subject to certain conditions.

Describing it as "Santa arriving early for many shareholders", Janette Burns, tax partner at FPM Chartered Accountants in Newry, explained what it will entail.

"HMRC has stated they wish to ensure that the tax treatment of Irish dividend receipt in these years is aligned with the taxation of UK dividends," Ms Burns said.

"To achieve this, HMRC has announced that repayment claims can be made in relation to Irish dividends received by UK taxpayers in tax years from 2003/2004 to April 2008."

It all came about because of a change in tax legislation in April 2008.

It was updated to allow a notional 10 per cent tax credit on dividends received from the Republic if the shareholding was less than 10 per cent.

This tax credit was already available to taxpayers who received dividends from UK firms and under EU law, taxpayers believed it should have been available sooner.

"Many taxpayers challenged HMRC treatment of their dividend income prior to April 2008 and argued the UK system was unlawful as dividends received from UK companies were taxed at more favourable tax rates than those received from Ireland," Ms Burns said.

These arguments were not accepted by HMRC but it has conceded that those who paid the higher rates of tax should receive a refund.

Claims for 2003/2004 and 2005/2006 must be made before May 31 next year for self-assessment taxpayers.

For those taxed under PAYE rules, a reclaim should be made by January 31, 2011.



THE Enterprising Women's Network (Armagh and Down) has hosted a seminar for women in business called Managing the Credit Crunch in Banbridge Enterprise Centre. Pictured are EWN co-ordinator Margaret Andrews with Liam Quinn, Newry and Mourne Enterprise Agency and EWN board member, and Jennifer Malone, of Newry and Mourne Enterprise Agency. The next event on January 21 will be a sales training seminar on how to generate leads and win new business. For more information, contact Margaret Andrews on 028 3083 7575 or email info@enterprising-women.net