

BUSINESS TIMES



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Special guest at grand opening



OVER the past six years, Kurt Hobbs Coachworks has grown from a start-up business into a thriving enterprise. Recently, as part of its ongoing expansion, the company held the grand opening of its new reception area, offices, boardroom and studio. Kurt Hobbs, who founded the company in 2009, invited his friend and closest business adviser Derek Jones, formerly of Derek Jones Commercials and Derek Jones Bodywork, to perform the opening ceremony. Derek (left) is pictured above with Kurt outside the purpose-built centre. Read more on Pages 28 and 29, part of this month's Starting and Staying in Business feature.

Doubling of export values

THE value of goods shipped abroad by local businesses, which has been made possible with the assistance of Northamptonshire Chamber of Commerce, nearly doubled to £300million in 2014/15 compared to the previous year. Latest export statistics from the Chamber show that: During 2013/14 Northamptonshire Chamber's International Trade team processed 14,794 export documents for local businesses - equating to a 15 per cent increase on the previous year. This enabled £162million worth of products and services to be sent to worldwide destination. During 2014/15, the International Trade Team processed 15,275 export documents for local businesses enabling around £300million

worth of goods to be sent to worldwide destinations. Last year, Northamptonshire Chamber helped over 700 local businesses to provide the necessary paperwork to export goods out of the county. As an accredited issuer of export documentation, Northamptonshire Chamber is the only organisation in the county that is authorised to issue documents required to send goods overseas. Paul Griffiths, Chief Executive of Northamptonshire Chamber, said: "We're seeing a significant rise in the value of goods and services being exported out of the county and this is fantastic news. "Exports is an area where firms in Northamptonshire perform strongly and that has been supported by high levels of business confidence, both of which have been reflected

in our Quarterly Economic Surveys. "However we need to encourage more businesses to think about becoming a global brand and the new Government needs to take more steps to remove any barriers to trading overseas. "As a Chamber, we enable businesses to secure the necessary paperwork to enable their goods to leave the county and be delivered overseas. "The launch of our new Chamber Foreign Exchange Service will help our members save money on international transactions." For more advice about exporting, contact Northamptonshire Chamber on 01604 490490 or visit the international trade section of www.northants-chamber.co.uk

Clearing the way for new hub

AN application has been submitted to demolish the Amalgamated Tyres building in Fetter Street in Northampton to make way for an exciting new development that will create jobs and attract investment, according to Northampton Borough Council.

In January plans were approved for a Cultural Hub. The Northampton Alive project would bring a number of buildings back into use in Guildhall Road, Fetter Street and Angel Street. Based in the town's Cultural Quarter the £10m

project will become a hub for creative industries, with managed workspaces for up to 100 business, creating and sustaining 400 jobs over 10 years. The council has been working closely with Amalgamated Tyres to help them relocate to a new Northampton location.

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Seal of approval

SINCE the business was set up in 2009, Kurt Hobbs Coachworks has been making changes and working as a team to meet the requirements of the WVTA governing body.

WVTA (Whole Vehicle Type Approval) came into force at the end of October 2014 and has had a major impact on the commercial vehicle and bodybuilding industry.

It requires all manufacturers of commercial vehicles and bodywork to be approved by the relevant UK and European authorities. Without an approval the completed vehicle cannot be taxed and registered for use on the roads.

Greg Hook, Type Approval Manager at Kurt Hobbs Coachworks (pictured) has invested a great deal of time and effort over the past five years, working towards WVTA. Greg's knowledge of WVTA actually spans more than eight years - evidence of how much work is involved.

"The professionalism of the company has been dependent on Greg's hard work and commitment," said Kurt Hobbs. "The success of the business would not have been so great without WVTA adherence and approval. Greg has taken on the role of a dedicated Type Approval Manager and attended regular meetings and now has a wealth of knowledge. He is a fantastic utilities man and I knew he was always



the right person for the job."

While it has involved significant costs and changes in working procedures to obtain the approvals, it has greatly benefited the whole company by introducing a complete quality system and conformity of production. Ensuring the right components are fitted and the bodywork is built to match the customer's exact requirements.

Kurt added: "As with any compliance changes within an industry, we've had a few minor hiccups along the way, but these learning curves have only strengthened our knowledge and understanding and I'm pleased to say that we are now competent in all aspects of WVTA.

"Huge thanks and congratulations to Greg Hook for making this happen and increasing the business's professional profile and taking KHC to the next level."

Becoming the hub of the business

AS Kurt Hobbs Coachworks has expanded, Kurt is always looking for areas that can be improved and is constantly striving for perfection.

One of the newest departments to be created within the business has been the stores department. Keeping stock on site is essential to enable jobs to be completed with minimal down time.

"I have to admit that stores is a

department that has been overlooked in the past, especially when the business was not the size it is now," said Kurt.

"I've had people overseeing it before but I didn't appreciate what a key part of the business it is. Having recognised this I have invested time and money developing new ways to improve the service."

Michelle Fox (left) joined KHC in April 2015 as Stores Manager and is continuing to develop the department.

"The stores department is growing and has fast become the hub of the business," added Kurt.

"Michelle is doing a brilliant job and even though it's early days, we can all see the improvements that she is making. When parts are delivered to site they are stored in the correct areas and then delivered to the relevant workshops so that the bodybuilders have all the equipment they need to hand. With Michelle's expertise and knowledge within the industry, I look forward to her driving this department forward, cutting lead times and eventually selling and supplying parts online in the future."



Part of the team since day one

SHAUN Warren has been with Kurt since day one of Kurt Hobbs Coachworks.

Shaun is not only a skilled Commercial Vehicle Bodybuilder, he is a hands-on

Operations Director within the business.

His knowledge and level of responsibility has developed year on year as the company has expanded and he has had a huge part to play in the success of the business.



Special guest in official grand

THE past six years have been the most challenging, exciting and rewarding years of my business career. Since starting the business in June 2009 we have grown steadily year after year. I believe that employing a loyal and hardworking team and providing a consistently great service to our customers have achieved our success as a business.

The business did not achieve its current status overnight, it has been a well-managed steady growth year on year to achieve what we have today. Having over 30 years' experience within the commercial vehicle industry, combined with a great work ethic and a passion for business has been a winning combination.

Business is all about people, building and maintaining great relationships. Many of my employees and customers have become my long-term friends.

Last month saw the grand opening of our new purpose-built reception area, spacious offices, private boardroom and designated signs and graphics studio. In conjunction with this a fourth workshop has been built with the facility to house an additional six vehicles in progress.

To officially open the new building, we decided to invite special guest Derek Jones to do the honours. Derek once owned Derek Jones Commercials, the Scania dealership in Wellingborough, and Derek Jones Bodywork in Islip, Northamptonshire.

I worked closely with Derek for many years and he is one of the most influential business people I have ever met. Without Derek's guidance and support I would not be where I am today. Derek offered me so many great opportunities to better my career and I am truly thankful for his support over the years.

Kurt Hobbs, Managing Director



Kurt Hobbs (right) invited Derek Jones to perform the official opening of the new building.

Welcoming in a new

KURT'S eldest daughter Chloe Hobbs has recently joined the business as the receptionist in the new purpose-built reception area.

Chloe (20) already has two years' office and administration experience, she joins the business to assist with all aspects of office duties and meet and greet visitors to the busy reception area.

Chloe is keen to be involved with marketing the business and has already taken control of the Facebook accounts and has created a business Twitter account.

You can follow Kurt Hobbs Coachworks on @khcoachworks.

Kurt said: "I already have my 18-year-old son, Kingsley Hobbs, working as a trainee commercial vehicle bodybuilder and he's doing a great job. I was looking for a receptionist and it made sense to offer the position to Chloe because I'm keen to make it a family business going forward.

"I'd really like them to have the opportunity to learn every aspect of the business and hopefully this will stand them in good stead for the future."



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Invited to opening



ones, who has provided guidance and support to him over the years, to new building.



Kurt Hobbs and Derek Jones, at the official opening, with members of the management team.

Winning team inspires continued success

The overall mechanics of the business are managed effectively by each person taking responsibility for their part. When the business first started it was easy for Kurt to oversee everything, but as it has grown Kurt has put his trust in his staff and feels confident he has a winning team. Kurt said: "Thankfully all of the employees have been

flexible and supportive and embraced all the changes that have happened as KHC has expanded. I am really fortunate to have such loyal and hardworking staff. I have a great production team with a vast range of skills and knowledge who are supported by our management team - Shaun Warren, Greg Hook, Helen Burbidge, Nick Wesby, Michelle Fox, Ian Whitmore, Gary Newman, Pete Wallinger and Matt Farren."

...y generation



...has brought his daughter, Chloe, and son, Kingsley, into the family

Building excellent customer relationships

Burbidge (left) started working at KHC in 2011. She had worked alongside Kurt in the past and has a wealth of experience within the commercial industry. She manages the day-to-day administration for the

whole company. "Helen's years of experience in the industry, her professionalism and friendly positive attitude make her an important part of the company and she has a great business relationship with customers and suppliers alike," said Kurt.

Alternative view shows the heights firm has reached



The Kurt Hobbs Coachworks site in Great Addington, as seen from the air during Kurt's recent helicopter flight over the area.

WHEN starting up six years ago, Kurt Hobbs Coachworks initially occupied just one workshop at their site near Great Addington.

However, it soon became clear that as the business developed it would mean that Kurt and the team would need more space. In a short period of time they were able to utilise the second workshop on the site, but Kurt didn't stop there.

Since that time Kurt Hobbs Coachworks has more than tripled in size and now has a total of four large workshops, a spray-painting bay, graphics bay and a dedicated stores department. Most recently it has incorporated new large purpose-built open plan offices, reception area, boardroom and signs and graphics studio.

A purpose-built car park is available on site for the 40-strong workforce.

KHC has the facility to house up to 70 commercial vehicles on site and work on 20 vehicles at any one time. The whole site is fully alarmed and monitored by 24/7 CCTV security cameras from a local central station. The business really is a hive of activity with vehicles coming and going constantly throughout the day.

Kurt recently celebrated his 50th birthday and flew a helicopter over the KHC site. He said: "I couldn't believe the size of the place from the air. Looking at the site from above really put it into perspective what I have achieved. It was a proud moment."

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