



Embargoed until 1st October 2012

Five star Belfast take the honours at Chamber Awards 2012

A mobile shredding business, a vocational training specialist, a fledgling invoice discounting firm, a thriving burrito bar and an international home textiles manufacturer were amongst the main winners at the Chamber Awards 2012's Northern Ireland heats.

Shredbank, People 1st, Keys Commercial Finance, boojum and Ulster Weavers beat off competition from across the country to secure the Excellence in Customer Service, Commitment to People Development (sponsored by Acua Limited), Most Promising New Business (sponsored by BT Business), Marketing Campaign of the Year (Sponsored by the RBS Group) and Achievement in International Business (sponsored by DHL Express) titles respectively.

They will all go forward to represent Northern Ireland in the National Finals and are now in with a chance of winning the top £25,000 cash prize.

President of the British Chambers of Commerce Martyn Pellew said: "There has never been a more important time for businesses to showcase the amazing work they are doing on a day-to-day basis.

"The Chamber Awards is a perfect platform for them to do just that and receive the recognition and profile they deserve for helping move the economy forward and create employment, often in local areas."

Belfast winners

Set-up by John and Karen Bilsard, **boojum** (Marketing Campaign of the Year) is a casual burrito bar, serving homemade Mexican food at excellent prices.

It currently operates two restaurants in Belfast and one in Dublin, with ambitious growth plans resulting in a projected turnover of £2.2m for 2012.

At the heart of its success has been its ability to build an attractive brand and identify the right ways of talking to its customer base, which is predominantly students and young professionals.

The latest marketing campaign was billed as the battle for a 'Free Burrito' Day with fans encouraged to get the most 'likes' on Facebook for their favourite boojum

location.

It lasted 2 months and saw thousands of interactions on the Belfast and Dublin fan pages and resulted in a major increase in customers to all three restaurants.

Keys Commercial Finance (Most Promising New Business) was set up by two ex-bankers in June 2011 to provide working capital against invoices for clients in Northern Ireland.

It is the only locally managed funder in the industry, with all decisions made in Belfast and taken with the view of encouraging business growth and job creation.

The company, which employs 5 people at its Belfast base, has gone from a standing start to generating gross income of £40,000 per month and currently has 23 live clients – 55% ahead of plan.

Keys Commercial Finance's initial growth has been down to its efficiency, professionalism and a growing reputation for transparency and attention to detail.

People 1st (Commitment to People Development) provide vocational and corporate training for a diverse range of customers, including 800+ private, public and third sector organisations.

With six offices across Belfast, Banbridge, Lisburn and Newry, the company delivers ApprenticeshipsNI, Training for Success, Step to Work and LEMIS to over 2500 learners.

It places a strong focus on up-skilling its own staff to help manage demands from its customers and a learning and development plan covers induction, continued professional development and individual training routes.

A flexible training budget facilitates delivery and allows for additional opportunities as and when they are identified.

All of this has been instrumental in People 1st achieving 'Very Good' status for its graded provision in a recent inspection by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI).

Shredbank (Excellence in Customer Service) uses state-of-the-art mobile trucks to shred confidential documents at the customer's premises.

Positioning itself as a security business as opposed to a waste management organisation, the company offers one-off unscheduled bulk shreds, regular shredding schedules and project management to include decanting files and lifting bags from various client locations.

It prides itself on its exceptionally high customer service and has reinforced this commitment by securing ISO9001:20008 and appointing a Quality Manager to oversee sales and operations.

The firm, which employs 10 people, has seen 45% growth in 2011 and is expected to turnover approximately £550,000 this year.

Backed by 125 years of industry knowledge, **Ulster Weavers** (Achievement in International Business) is one of the fastest growing home textiles companies, employing 42 people and reporting sales of over £10m by the end of the year.

The Holywood-based firm's products range from cotton and PVC aprons, to cotton and linen tea towels, tea cosies, bags, doorstops and mugs. In addition, it was also appointed licensee by the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games to produce official kitchen textiles.

Ulster Weavers' sales outside Northern Ireland have now grown to over 95% and include high-end customers in France, Germany, Italy and the Pacific nations.

This growth is a direct result of investment in export marketing and the business now boasts five members of staff based in China and two in both the US and Great Britain.

National Final

The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) Chamber Awards 2012 is committed to finding the best businesses through a series of regional heats followed by a National Final, due to be held at London's Guildhall on November 29th.

Now in its 9th year, the competition is one of the showcase events that highlight the role of business as a positive force for the UK recovery and the success of local communities and individuals.

boojum, Keys Commercial Finance, People 1st, Shredbank and Ulster Weavers are joined by four other winners from Northern Ireland who will go forward and compete for the national titles in their respective categories. All will have a chance to win 'Outstanding Business Achievement' and a £25,000 cash prize, courtesy of the RBS Group.

All winners are members of the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce. Other successful companies include:

- Alana Interiors' Carol Little (Entrepreneur of the Year)
- Autoline Insurance Group (Excellence in Innovation)
- Employers for Childcare Charitable Group (Business of the Year)
- Williams Industrial Services (Sustainability Award)

Martyn concluded: "A record number of firms have taken part this year, all determined to prove that 'Business is Good for the recovery'.

The Chamber Awards 2012 is supported by the RBS Group, BT Business, Dell, DHL Express, Westfield Health and ACUA Limited.

For further information or to book your place at the National Awards Final, visit **www.chamberawards.co.uk**

ENDS

For further information, please contact Russ Cockburn on 07812 600271 or email russ@dc-pr.co.uk

Notes to Editors

The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) is the national voice of local business.

The BCC sits at the heart of a powerful nationwide network of Accredited Chambers of Commerce, serving over **100,000 businesses** across the UK, which **employ over five million people**.

For more information visit: **www.britishchambers.org.uk**