



Embargoed until 1st October 2012

North Staffordshire retailer claims West Midlands 'Business of the Year' prize at the Chamber Awards 2012

A North Staffordshire specialist retailer has secured a prestigious achievement for the county after it was announced as the Chamber Awards 2012's Business of the Year (sponsored by Westfield Health) for the West Midlands.

Smith and Morris Retail, which runs the hugely successful www.barbourbymail.co.uk, made it a memorable double when it also won the Excellence in Customer Service title, beating off competition from firms throughout the region.

Judges were impressed with the company's massive growth that has seen it potentially add over £12m of annual sales to the business in the last five years, achieving a 98% customer satisfaction rating in the process.

There were seven other winners from the West Midlands, including one of the world's most successful car manufacturers, a childcare provider and a specialist manufacturer from the Black Country.

The full list of Award winners includes:

- Alumat Systems (Sustainability)
- Busy Bees Benefits (Marketing Campaign of the Year)
- Concept Steels (Achievement in International Business)
- Contact Group (Excellence in Innovation)
- Soul Tree Wines (Most Promising New Business)
- Jaguar Land Rover (Commitment to People Development)
- Viezu's Paul Busby (Entrepreneur of the Year)

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."

The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) Chamber Awards 2012 is committed to finding the best businesses in Britain 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 for the 'Business is Good for Britain' campaign that highlights the role of business as a positive force for the UK recovery and the success of local communities and individuals.

Smith and Morris Retail, which is a member of North Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce, runs dedicated Barbour website www.barbourbymail.co.uk and www.outdoorandcountry.co.uk, a specialist retail website selling brands including Barbour, Jules and Hunter.

It has fully exploited the increasing popularity of outdoor clothing among the rich and famous, investing £200,000 into the functionality of its online presence and a firm commitment to excellence in customer service.

This has seen sales grow dramatically and the management team expect turnover to hit nearly £14m by the end of 2012. Impressively, the website accounts for 77% of income and, thanks to the new virtual fitting room, attracts more than 4.3 million visitors every year.

The company, along with the seven other winners, will now represent the West Midlands in their respective categories in the Grand Final, with the chance to win the title of "Outstanding Business Achievement" and a £25,000 cash prize courtesy of the RBS Group.

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

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**

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

Notes to Editors

Breakdown on the other winners:

Alumet Group (Sustainability) – Embracing the ‘green’ agenda has paid dividends for the Southam-based business, who has made a commitment to protecting the environment, reducing its costs and encouraging sales.

The UK’s leading façade contractor has launched a new service called Alumet Regenerate, which specialises in energy assessment and is committed to ensuring the sustainability of buildings.

Concept Steels (Achievement in International Business) – The Black Country manufacturer has diversified significantly over the last three years and invested heavily in a major export push.

International sales have risen more than 52%, with Scandinavia, the Eurozone and the Middle East all driving this growth.

Busy Bees Benefits (Marketing Campaign of the Year) – A sustained PR and marketing campaign called “Mind the Gap – Raise the Cap’ has helped increase awareness amongst parents of how much they can sacrifice from their salary in exchange for childcare vouchers.

The company has already secured 9,000 signatures to its e-petition, which asks the Government to raise the current cap from £55 to £75 per week.

Contact Group (Excellence in innovation) – Providing solutions through automatic notifications has helped the Birmingham firm deliver two-way communications between schools, parents and local authorities.

Due to the bad weather seen this year, more than 8.5 million messages were sent using the company’s Call Parents system.

Jaguar Land Rover (Commitment to People Development) – Over 1000 new operators have been trained to a nationally recognised qualification as part of the car manufacturer’s ‘Solihull Vision’ to drive employee skills.

The approach involves greater communication, completion of a detailed skills needs analysis, and involvement of training providers – all geared towards ensuring the Solihull plant can cope with multiple new vehicle launches in 2012/13.

Paul Busby (Entrepreneur of the Year) – The Bromsgrove businessman has overseen the launch and evolution of Viezu into the world leader in vehicle tuning and calibration.

Its products have been fitted on 42,000 vehicles across the globe, delivering a saving in carbon production of approximately 60,000 tonnes.

Soul Tree Wines (Most Promising New Business) – Just 16 months after its launch, the Solihull business has established a growing reputation for putting Indian wines firmly on the map.

It has contracts with 250 restaurants across the South of England and the Midlands and is now selling its wines in France, Germany and Ireland.

Background on BCC

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