



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



## New start for a new year

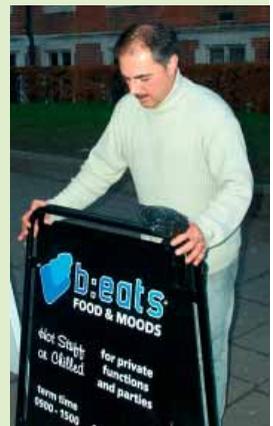
Bob Tabiei, originally from Iran, is starting out the new year with a new job - helped by Azure. Bob came to the region as an asylum seeker in early 2005 together with his eldest son. He had worked in Iran for the previous 24 years, as an auto electrician before leaving for the UK.



Bob has now settled in Gateshead. His wife and second son have since joined him in order to reunite the family. Bob regularly visited his local Jobcentre to look for work and had applied for many vacancies before realising after several months that his recent heart operation was making employers wary of taking him on.

In March 2005 Bob met with Stuart Bentham, Disability Employment Adviser based at Gateshead Jobcentre, to discuss his situation and he was referred to Azure Employment Services under the Workstep programme. Azure's Tony Kelly, Workstep Adviser, worked with him to find a job that suited his needs. Whilst Bob was actively seeking work he attended an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) course at Gateshead College.

In late December Tony learned of a job vacancy for a porter within Newcastle University's Union Society, an employer with whom Azure already had strong links. Bob applied and was successful. He has settled in very quickly and said, 'I am at a different time in my life, this is a new environment for me - but it is like working with friends and family.'



## Skills for life

Following on from proposals set out within Azure's 2006 strategic review work has commenced in relation to the 'skills for life' agenda.

Azure has been granted assistance from the LSC (Learning & Skills Council) in the form of a facilitator who is helping to implement and monitor the initiative. The Azure Senior Manager leading the project is John Gemmell - also closely involved are Carol Robson (Training and Development Manager) assisted by Toni Fowles (IT Training).

The exercise is concerned with standardising and coordinating training opportunities for staff and clients and to develop a suitable system to record and monitor training activity. Individuals have been identified as the 'local coordinators' in each main area of the charity's activities. The system will cover training needs from induction and then throughout employment. Making important distinctions between mandatory company training, job specific training and essential skills training, matrices will be created to record and progress training at both the individual and departmental levels.



Where existing systems and practice are already good they will be incorporated. There is to be close linking with the company recruitment process to ensure matters are set up correctly for new employees - right at the outset of their employment.

## IIP (Investor In People)

Many staff will remember our collective achievement in being recognised as an Investor in People in March 2003. It doesn't seem like three years ago (but it is!) - therefore we are due to be assessed again. In fact a three month extension has been granted so our assessment will take place in June 2006.



The standard has been revised since 2003 and an information sheet will be sent to all staff very soon advising of relevant changes. Meanwhile we are looking at our paperwork systems to ensure we have all key documents in place. Importantly the new standard is designed to get the staff's personal views when Azure is assessed.

## Summary strategic review 2006



All staff should have received their personal copy of the 2006 strategic review - if not please contact Sandra Allaway who will issue one to you immediately. If there is any matter about which you require clarification do not hesitate to ask your departmental manager in the first instance. As always the full strategic review document is available to all staff upon request and you are encouraged to take advantage of this.

## The dog gets it!

Azure was granted a pair of tickets to see our local Premiership Rugby League team, Newcastle Falcons, play Northampton Saints on 26th March, this as a result of some advertising spend. Denise McClintock organised a fundraising raffle amongst staff and requested Brenda Dalton to draw the winning ticket. The draw took place in the Employment Services area, in front of an audience of 'scrutineers'



- and the winner was...Brenda Dalton's dog (Harvey)!

Brenda had bought the tickets on behalf of her young nephew and put them in the dog's name. Suitably embarrassed for having drawn her own (or her own dog's) ticket she offered to put the winning ticket back in and redraw. However everyone insisted she kept the prize as it had been won fairly and squarely.

We're not sure whether the nephew is going with the dog or with some other companion. Doubtless Brenda will let us know!



The result - Newcastle Falcons 13 Northampton Saints 32

## Garden Centre makeover

Horticultural General Manager John Taylor has motivated major change within the Garden Centre's operational areas. The most noticeable changes have been made to the outside sales areas, although the product display and quality of merchandise has been improved in all departments. Hard work has been relentless to ensure the Garden Centre is ready ahead of Easter and what we all hope will be a super summer of sales. The themed garden arrangements are the outcome of a working relationship struck with partner landscaping firms Chameleon and E2. Congratulations to all - particularly John and all his team – it's looking good!



Selected views after the makeover - come and see for yourself.



What we need now is some really good weather.

## Radio Newcastle - Garden Mania - Sunday 9th April

Radio Newcastle's regular lunchtime show 'Garden Mania', with Azure's John Taylor as a panelist was transmitted live from the Garden Centre.

Pictures and further details in the next newsletter.



## Azure Garden Centre - web site development

Guided by the Garden Centre's John Taylor as to its content and ultimate form, Simon Leonard is devoting as much time as his other duties allow to the development of the Garden Centre's own web site. This site is separate from the Charity's main site but is directly linked to and from it. The initial objective is to show clearly, department by department, the range of goods and services. As well as this there will be current special offers. In the long run it is hoped to move to having all products available to view - with photos and prices. Mail order purchasing would be the final stage.

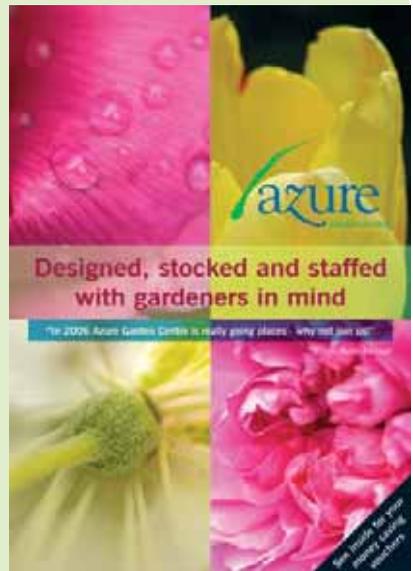
For those with a technical interest Simon uses two specialised web design packages 'Dreamweaver' and 'Fireworks'. Azures sites are hosted by Onyx Internet.



Simon working on [www.azure-gardencentre.co.uk](http://www.azure-gardencentre.co.uk)

## Print meets a critical deadline

To promote the launch of the Garden Centre following its makeover and new name a promotional flyer was created. This was a team effort between the Garden Centre and Printing. A number of attractive offers and seasonal vouchers together with information on major Garden Centre partners were assembled. The creative talents of Printing's Darren Turner then translated all this into an attractive document greatly assisted by Darren's excellent macro photography which was used to create a very striking front cover. The rest of the print team then ensured that the major run of 160,000 was completed to a high standard - against an extremely tight deadline. Distribution was then effected to pre-selected post-code areas by Amaro distribution. Reaction to date is very favourable.



## Italian visitor



On 4<sup>th</sup> April Azure were pleased to host a visitor from Italy - Marina Da Forno of Italia Lavoro (the Italian Ministry of Welfare's Agency for Employment, Social Inclusion and Labour Market Policies). Ms Da Forno, based in Rome, is currently evaluating support philosophies and methods in other countries and has a particular interest in the UK's approach.

This visit was arranged by the regional Jobcentre Plus team, which was also represented. Jobcentre Plus provided details of their own systems and how they work closely with partner organisations such as Azure. John Gemmell and Elaine Dobson from the Employment Services department showed our guest around the Cramlington site and provided an insight into how support and training is delivered and specifically how these are tailored to the work needs and personal development of supported individuals.



Chris Whalen (Jobcentre Plus), Ms Da Forno, John Gemmell and Elaine Dobson

Ms Da Forno, a fluent English speaker and formidable intellectual force, was suitably impressed by the depth and breadth of our activities.

## High praise

It is nice to receive unsolicited genuine praise. The following are direct quotes from a letter recently received from a very important Landscapes customer. "... a short note to express my appreciation and gratitude for all the hard work over the past year. The friendly, helpful and hardworking nature of the men is a credit to your firm.... at all times the men face any problems with a cheerful, can do attitude and professionalism which any company would be proud of".

Well done Landscapes – keep up the good work!

## Additional training room

In recent weeks a new training room has been created adjacent to the Cramlington IT suite. This extra resource is proving of great benefit and is easing demand on the other bookable rooms.

## Garden Construction Services

It is pleasing to confirm that Garden Construction Services 'the shed greenhouse and garden buildings specialists' have come to an agreement with the Garden Centre to continue their valued presence.

A determining factor in their decision was confidence in the Garden Centre's future and the way in which it is presently being developed.



## Promoting Azure

The charity seeks to publicise its existence and promote its businesses and services in a wide variety of ways. We use straightforward commercial advertising, as appropriate, for the business enterprises and we regularly seek free publicity through press releases and public relations exercises.

It was pleasing that Azure were the subject of an accurate and complimentary full page article in the Journal on New Year's Eve - with excellent photos of supported employees Kristen Dearing and Maureen Simons and also trainee Kate Archibald.



Azure's marketing coordinator, Denise McClintock, is regularly involved in promoting the particular activities of Employment Services and clearly whilst doing so promotes the charity more generally.

We are always pleased to play host to visitors from far and wide and to cooperate with key partners such as Jobcentre Plus at every opportunity (refer article on page 7).

Talks are regularly given to small groups, often in the evening, the most recent of these being to Stakeford Methodist Ladies Club. In April Azure's Chief Executive Peter Elliott OBE is to be the guest speaker at the meeting of the North Tyneside Disability Forum. A much larger stage was offered recently to Azure's Chief Executive when he was one of the guest speakers at the very well attended Annual Disability Symbol Awards ceremony held at Durham County Cricket Club (hosted by Jobcentre Plus).

At the time of writing Azure's name is being widely promoted by Radio Newcastle in the build up to the 'gardener's question time' show.

## Cash and Carry

The Nurseries cash and carry team, who also have responsibility for sales from the Rolawn franchise, have made a good start to the year. A number of previously lost customers have been won back, this due to a combination of factors – excellent range and quality of products, well laid out and maintained selling areas and a positive sales attitude. The department, led by Caron Stephenson, has benefited from the considerable efforts of Team Leader Emma Richards, who joined Azure in December, and colleagues.



To further assist customers and to move closer to a 'one stop shop' the sales range has been extended by the addition of decorative stones and pebbles – this being consistent with current landscaping and gardening trends.



## Nurseries

The original core business of the Nurseries, the growing of crops under glass and outside, is adjusting to the revised strategy of providing for our own businesses – the Garden Centre and the Cash and Carry. Additionally it is hope to further develop sales to local customers. Jonathan Peers and colleagues are working hard to ensure the right products will be available in top condition at the right time. Like the Garden Centre and other horticultural businesses the right weather at the right time is critical to success.



## Christmas lunch 2005

Lesley Smith ensured that the first Christmas lunch as Azure maintained the same high standard as always. As well as a traditional Christmas meal with all the trimmings those present were treated to musical entertainment from Keith Henry (refer following item) and Bobby Alexander. Everyone present joined in the Christmas Carols led by Keith and Bobby. As can be seen from the photographs, a good time was had by all.



## Keith Henry - entertainer

Keith Henry, Keele Drive resident, is extremely interested in music and loves to be able to perform to an audience. One activity, attended by Keith on Mondays with support from

C o m m u n i t y  
A c c e s s ,  
is called 'Streetbeaters' – the collective name for three samba drumming groups (named Beatniks, Bang On! and Worldbeaters'. Keith is seen in the photograph playing the drums.



Keith also gave his usual sterling performance at the Azure Christmas lunch – sharing the limelight with Bobby Alexander who was also enthusiastically received (see previous item).

## Congratulations



Julie with baby Callum

- to **Julie Gibson and Dave Lucas** on the birth of son Callum Lee Lucas on the 6th April at Wansbeck Hospital - a bouncing 9lb 2½ oz
- to **Christine Baker (Employment Services)** on her recent 50<sup>th</sup> birthday (February)
- to **Brenda Dalton (Landscapes)** who passes 20 years of service in early April. Brenda is very proud of that achievement and has arranged an evening function to celebrate with friends and colleagues
- to **Peter Ellis (IT)** who, in his role as Azure Health and Safety Adviser, has just passed his exam following a formal H&S training course
- to **Brian Jones (Cramlington Housing)**, employee since January 2000, who is retiring at age 60.
- to **Claire Routledge and Tony Kelly (Employment Services' Advisers)** who have gained 'Management of Work Experience' qualifications.
- to **Tim Morgan (Charity Member)** and wife Faustina for becoming parents for the first time. Daughter Francesca was born on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2006 (birth weight 7lb 5oz)

## George Straker – 60<sup>th</sup> birthday party invitation

George Straker, Support Worker with Azure Supported Living is celebrating his 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday this April. George, who has been with the charity for 2 years, has kindly extended an open invitation to his Birthday celebrations. The party is taking place on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> April at George's local pub, Pacers Bar, in Linton just outside of Ashington. Celebrations start at 7pm - there will be buffet and all are welcome. The party was supposed to be a surprise, but George had to be informed when it was discovered he was planning a weekend away! George and his wife Margaret are now making plans for a break away to the West of Scotland later this year.



## Saving some trees – and helping charity as well

By common agreement most staff in the headquarters building agreed not to exchange Christmas cards in 2005 as they would usually have done but rather to make a donation to charity. The selected charity was St Oswald's which benefited to the tune of £173. It is almost certain to be repeated.

### New Board Member, Eric Morgan

Eric Morgan recently joined the board of Azure. He is shortly to retire from his role as consultant to Sanderson Weatherall, Chartered Surveyors. Eric had previously assisted the Board with advice on the purchase of the freehold interest in the main office, nurseries and garden centre sites at Cramlington. Eric is also a director of William Leech Investments, the company set up by the late William Leech and now owned by various charities.

Eric has worked in the north east for over 35 years and has made a particular study of the urban built environment of the region and how it has evolved. Other interests include sport generally but tennis and golf in particular.



### Kath Turnbull, Volunteer



Kath began as an Azure volunteer nearly 7 years ago - in July 1999. For 15 years prior to that she worked at Proctor and Gamble in Seaton Delaval, before leaving due to ill health. Understandably, Kath found it difficult having to give up work. Eventually she went to see a Jobcentre Disability Employment Adviser who told her about the Charity.

Kath began working in the outdoors plant area, but over the years she has undertaken various roles and 2 years ago moved to the Coffee Shop. Her role involves serving customers, working on the till, clearing tables and helping out with whatever needs to be done. She

works mainly at weekends and bank holidays when the Coffee Shop and Garden Centre are at their busiest. She works full days but enjoys the flexibility associated with being a volunteer.

Kath enjoys gardening, walking her dog and reading, but what she most looks forward to is going on holiday. Kath is only just back from a week in Gran Canaria and is already looking forward to her next holiday, hopefully to Canada later this year.