

Issue 18
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IIP – success (and a half day extra holiday granted)

Azure has recently undergone a rigorous examination against the Investor In People standard and it is pleasing to report that we have succeeded in gaining re-accreditation. Since gaining our overarching IIP approval in early 2003 there have been changes to both the standard and to many aspects of Azure's operations. There have been relocations, changes in personnel, reorganisations as well as the major step of changing our name.

Despite these continual changes, and the significant and never ending operational challenges, staff clearly remain positive about the organisation, its mission and overall commitment to its staff.

The independent assessor, Lesley Curtis from Assessment North East, interviewed 43 staff over three separate days and we are grateful to everyone for their participation. The choice of staff for interview was made by the assessor from full staff details provided by Azure, ensuring that there was a truly representative sample. All interviews were held in strict confidence. Whilst Azure receives; the overall outcome, some detailed comments from the assessor and, when relevant, direct quotes from interviewees, no feedback is attributed to any individual, this remaining totally private.

Azure management are not complacent and, following valued guidance from Anne Wheat of Business Link, management are aware of areas where further progress is possible. With the revised IIP standard as a point of reference, we will undertake further work to strengthen our IIP related policies and processes.

IIP is very important to Azure. To mark the achievement, which reflects well on all employees, the Board have approved that all staff employed at or prior to the date of assessment be granted an additional half day of leave in the current holiday year. **Enjoy!**



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

2006 AGM

On 14th June Azure held its 24th Annual General Meeting in the Robinson Suite in the headquarters building.



Founder member Jean McCallum MBE with member Ken John.

Chairman Neil Robinson MBE addressed almost forty members and guests, including founding member Jean McCallum MBE (who had travelled specially from Edinburgh). He delivered a PowerPoint presentation - setting out progress in all areas of the Charity's activities. Whilst the financial results were disappointing, the Charity's success is not solely measured in monetary terms and there were many positive developments reported.

The evening also marked two retirements. Firstly Sir Terence Harrison retired from Azure's Board of Trustees after seven years. Secondly the very recent retirement of Ian Watson, Azure's auditor from Tait Walker, was acknowledged. On Azure's behalf the Chairman offered thanks to both and a modest gift to recognise their significant contribution. In his response Sir Terence paid tribute to the valuable objectives and many achievements of the Charity and he offered his good wishes for the future.

The formal business was followed, as is customary, by a social gathering with an excellent buffet provided by Lesley Smith and her team. The glorious weather was an added bonus, with an enjoyable time had by all.



Chairman Neil Robinson MBE with retiring trustee Sir Terence Harrison



Chairman Neil Robinson MBE with Ian Watson (recently retired from Tait Walker)

2007 AGM – an early date for the diary

At its recent Board meeting the Trustees fixed the date of the 2007 AGM as being Wednesday 20th June.

Northumberland College Extended Education Awards 2006



Claire Farrar, Michael Nesbitt, Bridgit Collins, Peter Elliott, Sharon Storey & Kevin Usher

Tracey Lingham receiving her award from Peter Elliott



On the evening of Wednesday 21st June Azure Chief Executive and Northumberland College Chairman, Peter Elliott OBE, officiated at the Extended Education Awards Ceremony in Ashington. Of all the awards ceremonies held each year this is the one Peter enjoys most – not least as there are always students receiving their awards who are from Azure.

The Azure students were supported on the night by staff member Ann Bell who kindly took the photographs.

Above and Beyond the Call of Duty

Wendy and Susan, both Restaurant Associates at BHS in Newcastle have been recognised for their commitment and dedication to their work.

Susan has recently been awarded with a gold 'A' badge for cleaning while Wendy was recognised for her customer services skills and has also been awarded with a gold 'A' badge. The 'A' stands for **A**bove and is the first of four stages in the BHS employee recognition scheme known as: **A**bove and **B**eyond the **C**all of **D**uty. Wendy and Susan are pictured with colleague Bill and Restaurant Manager Ann Westberg. Wendy, Susan and Bill access support through Azure's Workstep programme and have over 27 years service between them.



Bill, Ann, Susan and Wendy at BHS

Health and safety

Peter Ellis continues to address health and safety matters around the organisation. Whilst everyone has a general responsibility for these matters Peter is specifically assisted in his role by the Company's Health and Safety Representatives as well as by Azure's management.

Board member Billie Turnbull recently agreed to be the trustee with a particular interest in health and safety and she met with Peter in July ahead of the Board meeting at which he reported upon progress and issues.

Shaun Routledge



Before gaining employment with Azure Landscapes this April, Shaun successfully completed his NVQ level 1 in Horticulture while taking part in Azure's Horticultural Training Programme.

Shaun, from Seghill, was one of six new Landscape Assistants taken on by the Charity to form a new Landscapes Squad, needed to meet the demand from an ever increasing client base.

Shaun, with appropriate protective equipment, undertaking strimming duties at Azure's HQ site.

Garden Centre e-mail marketing progress

Simon Leonard and Denise McClintock are working closely with Horticultural General Manager John Taylor to ensure the momentum of e-mail marketing of the Garden Centre is maintained. We now have a modest but growing e-mail list and on a monthly basis are sending out details of tips, offers and occasional prize draws. The e-mail shots are linked to the web-site.

Northumberlandia

It is disappointing for Azure that the Shotton Open Cast development was refused planning consent by Northumberland County Council on 4th July 2006. Had this progressed Azure were hopeful of having a major long term involvement in the associated landform project, Northumberlandia.

(refer http://planning.northumberland.gov.uk/publicaccess/tdc/tdc_home.aspx)



On Sunday the 9th April Radio Newcastle's Garden Mania show transmitted live from the Garden Centre. The show was presented by the extremely popular and experienced TV and radio

professional, Marian Forster. Marian met with Peter Elliott and John Taylor a week or two ahead of transmission day to agree format and select the best location. On the day the BBC team arrived, set-up and transmitted – all without a hitch. It was extremely interesting to see how a live location show like this is woven seamlessly into the studio links – experts at work!

The show's format is to deal with unscripted questions from a live audience as well as phone in callers on any gardening related subject. The panel comprises Marian and the show's regular gardening specialists 'Stan and Eddie' plus our own John Taylor (who has appeared on the show in the past). Prior to the main gardening related questions Marian interviewed Peter about how the Garden Centre fits into the Charity's mission.

Horticulturists of the future?

Always keen to foster good relations with our local community the Nurseries were pleased to receive a recent visit by 26 year three pupils, their science teacher Mrs Tyas and other adult assistants from St Paul's RC First School in Cramlington. The children kept John Taylor on his toes with a stream of relevant questions including 'how do plants help us breathe' and 'do you grow any English plants'.



Enthusiastic pupils anxious to ask John the next question

Just what we needed - long may it shine!

In the last newsletter we stated that, following the many improvements to the outside and other areas of the garden centre, what we needed was 'some really good weather'. Well, at the time of writing (end of July), we've had that for a while now and the upturn in the sales has been marked. Another area to gain from the hot dry weather has been Landscapes. They have had no 'rained off days' yet and the grass is barely growing – these factors assisting Landscapes to be right on top of all contractual obligations and giving capacity for extra jobs. Rolawn has suffered somewhat due to the conditions being too hot for most people to lay lawns .



Whilst a few showers wouldn't go amiss it is hoped that this good weather will continue through August (and that it keeps going beyond that).

Everyone benefits – trainee activity on Keele Drive



Trainees, including Mark, Martin, Kevin, Anna and Chris, currently taking part in Azure's Horticultural Training courses, spent two days helping Jimmy Whisson to spruce up the communal garden in front of Keele Drive. The garden was weeded thoroughly and the established plants were cut back to ensure easy access to the garden. New plants were added to really brighten up the space and finish the garden off.

Jimmy Whisson – Horticultural Training Assistant and trainee Mark Leyland (foreground)

Personnel systems

We are almost at the end of a major phase in reviewing our personnel documentation and ensuring it is up to date (and where necessary changed from SHAW format to Azure). Everyone should now have a current Azure style job description – should this not be the case for any member of staff, please contact your manager or Sandra Allaway who will arrange.

Staff will progressively receive updates to every section of the staff handbook and should update their own 'black book'. Any problems should be referred to management who will assist.

Congratulations



- to **Claire Gardner** (nee Routledge) who married Iain Gardner on Saturday 3rd June at Longhirst Hall. Claire and Iain then enjoyed a two week honeymoon in the Maldives. Claire is a Workstep Adviser (Employment Services).

- to **Christine Baker** (Employment Services) who emigrated to Cyprus.

- to **Brenda Dalton** (Landscapes) who has just celebrated her 60th birthday.

- to **Peter Tait** (Rolawn), **Ann Hutchinson** (Tynedale) and **Rose Ryall** (Washington) all recently retired. We wish them all well in their retirements which we hope will be long, healthy and happy.

- to **Elaine Laidler** (Central Services) on becoming a grandmother for the second time. The new addition, grandson Owen, on the 10th April.



- to **Lynn Waggott** (Keele Drive resident) who recently celebrated her 51st birthday - seen here with friend Claire.

- to **Malcolm Birnie** (Nurseries) who has decided after almost 13 years to leave the North East and team up with ex Azure Nurseries manager Phil Tremayne in Surrey. Malcolm's Workstep support will continue in his new position.

Malcolm (on the right) is seen here at his leaving function with friend and colleague Tom Turnbull.



Bereavement - Jackie O'Connor

Sadly Jackie O'Connor, Community Access client, died on Friday 7th July 2006. Her husband, Jimmy, is receiving additional support from Azure at the present.

Jen Seaton, Senior Manager Support Services

Jen was born in Leeds, a twin and one of five children. She came to the North East in 1981 to study and remained in the area. Whilst studying she worked for Newcastle Social Services within the fields of mental health and learning disability. On completing her degree she became a full time support worker within mental health. Jen worked for Newcastle Social Services for seven years. Her role as a manager saw her set up two respite services for adults with complex needs.



A three year stint with Northumbria Police gave her the opportunity to diversify her skills. Jen joined Azure in September 1994 initially as the senior manager for the Tynedale service. She has subsequently taken on the management of all Azure's Support Services.

Jen's main interest is animal welfare. All her animals have been rescued from difficult situations. She is also interested in walking in the Scottish mountains, cycling, photography and some DIY interests.

Karen Green, Nurseries Assistant



Karen started work for the Charity in February 1987 and has been with Azure Nurseries for over 19 years. When she began working in the greenhouses there were two other women working in the team. However, Karen is now the only female employee within the Nurseries and while it doesn't bother her too much, she can miss being in mixed company.

Karen's role within the Nurseries is varied. Her duties range from re-potting plants, lining them out on the benches, attaching them to the irrigation system, ensuring that they are well maintained, weeded and that all the dead leaves are removed.

Karen lives in Cramlington and walks to work. She really enjoys attending a computer course twice a week at Blyth Star Enterprises. Karen spends the rest of her free time with Fiancé, Joe Curry, who also lives in Cramlington.