



HRH The Duke of York, patron of Ladder for the Black Country, meeting apprentices during a recent visit

Promoting apprenticeships

Supported by patron HRH the Duke of York, the Ladder for the Black Country is a multi-organisation partnership promoting apprenticeships across the region.

The Ladder for the Black Country has brought together some of the key players in business, training, education and the media to offer a 'game changer' for the region's youth unemployment levels,

which are among the worst in the country.

The Express & Star is leading the drive for apprenticeships and apprentices both in the newspaper and on line, spreading the word across the Black Country and beyond.

The Vine Trust with its record for taking on apprentices is a key partner alongside Performance Through People which is the main training provider and has set up partnerships with local colleges and training companies.

But also on board is the Black Coun-

try Chamber of Commerce, Walsall Council and retail giant Ikea.

Around 250 young people have expressed an interest in becoming Ladder apprentices. Find out how your business can give them the opportunities to learn as they work.

To find out more go to the website: <http://www.ladderfortheblackcountry.co.uk/> Or telephone 03332 409 699.

You can follow the Ladder on Twitter @ladder4bc or like the Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/LadderfortheBlackCountry>

Award-winning event team will be behind the scenes

Once again Yarrington will be the team behind the scenes at the Express & Star Business Awards making the event come alive with an exciting blend of audio, lighting and visual effects.

Their involvement promises to make these awards a very special night to remember for all the guests.

Based in Shrewsbury, Yarrington is an award-winning, marketing, design, video and event management company providing a full range of services to clients locally around the West Midlands and national clients in areas such

as London, Birmingham and Manchester.

They have been awarded an amazing total of seven M&IT awards (the meetings industry Oscars) for Best Production Company and have a reputation for providing the very best technical and creative solutions for awards, conferences and launch events nationwide.

Solutions

The past decade has seen consistent growth as their integrated offer is becoming vital to any successful mar-

keting campaign. As more projects need to work across media, including print and digital solutions linked to live events and launches, Yarrington offer bespoke solutions whatever the size and complexity.

Individually the creative teams are specialists in their own areas but are able to integrate their services into custom-made packages to best suit the client and project.

For more information check out their website at www.yarrington.co.uk or call Mark Allsop, Managing Director on 01743 234910.



Yarrington's multi-skilled creative teams work together to ensure every event is a night to remember



www.ladderfortheblackcountry.co.uk



HELPING BUSINESSES AND YOUNG PEOPLE PROSPER THROUGH APPRENTICESHIPS

What is Ladder for the Black Country?

It is a multi-organisation partnership aimed at promoting apprenticeships, made up primarily of the Vine Trust, Black Country Chamber of Commerce, the Express & Star and Performance Through People.

What are we asking employers?

We want companies to offer one or more apprenticeships, which are paid jobs that include on- and off-the-job training and lead to nationally-recognised qualifications.

Why are we doing this?

Youth unemployment in the Black Country is among the worst in the country. We want to close the skills gap between school leavers and employers by creating more direct entry routes into work-based training schemes.

For employers, what are the benefits of having apprenticeship?

For every apprentice you take, you may be eligible for a Government grant of £1,500. Research shows that 72 per cent of businesses report improved productivity as a result of employing an apprentice.



Step up to Ladder for the Black Country. Call 03332 409 699

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EVEN BETTER
THAN EVER
BEFORE**

**THE EXPRESS & STAR
BUSINESS AWARDS 2015
ARE ALREADY SET TO BE
AN EVENT TO REMEMBER**

There has been a growing awareness in recent years of just how important local businesses are to the health of our economy, not just in terms of jobs but also the vital investment they bring that is helping put this country back on the road to recovery.

The recent visit by Her Majesty The Queen to officially open new factories built by Jaguar Land Rover and stamp-printing company ISP on Wolverhampton's i54 site is a testament to the role of business in regenerating this area.

So it gives me huge pleasure to be able to launch the Express & Star's Business Awards for 2015 – an event that provides an opportunity to celebrate all that is great about companies in the West Midlands: their inventiveness, their strength, their commitment to the area and the talent of their people.

It is also a matter of great pride that these will be the biggest business awards ever organised by the Express & Star.

And that is thanks to the support we receive from the business community itself.

Of the 11 external sponsors who are joining us for the latest awards, nine have proved fiercely loyal and supported this campaign previously –

several of them for many years.

Our warmest thanks go to Aspray24, Carvers Building Supplies, Lloyds Bank, Higgs & Sons, BDO, Jaguar Land Rover, Wolverhampton City Council, UTC Aerospace Systems and the University of Wolverhampton for continuing to make this the premier business event in our region.

And we also offer a hearty welcome to the EBC Group and to Ladder for the Black Country, our two new sponsors.

My thanks also go to the Wolverhampton Grand Theatre who are once again sponsoring the drinks reception.

Without the support of these sponsors these awards would, quite simply, not be possible.

I will be looking forward to joining judges from our sponsors when we carry out the visits to the awards finalists. These site visits form a vital part of the selection process in our bid to find the best of local business.

And it is those companies and business people who put themselves forward for these awards who are, of course, what this event is all about.

The Express & Star Business Awards provide an unrivalled opportunity for local companies to fly the flag and highlight the vital role they play in all our lives. I urge every business to seize this opportunity and enter the competition. We look forward to hearing from you.



KEITH HARRISON,
EXPRESS & STAR EDITOR



Express & Star BUSINESS AWARDS



BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

SPONSORED BY

Express & Star

The judges will be looking for a special business with that special something, which deserves the blue riband award. They will display outstanding performance across the company and best practice in their industry will be second nature to the winner. Inevitably the shortlist will be made up of companies that demonstrate the powerful combination of inspirational and focused leadership with a dedicated workforce. The judges will be expecting to see outstanding commitment to customers, innovative use of new technology, investment in staff and a sense of corporate social responsibility. This award will go to the very best of Midland business.



BEST PLACE TO WORK

SPONSORED BY



Have you created an environment in which employees thrive and are committed to the company's aims and ambitions because it is a better place to work? Does that mindset translate into positive benefits and achievements for the business? The judges want to hear how you have brought this about, the impact this has had on your staff and organisation, and how it sets you apart from your competitors. This may include elements such as an outstanding commitment to professional and personal development, evidence of corporate social awareness and addressing environmental issues. The judges will want to know about the investment needed and how the positivity that has been created has had an impact on the company performance.



**FAMILY BUSINESS
OF THE YEAR**

SPONSORED BY



The judges are looking for impressive businesses that are actively owned or managed by more than one member of the same family and have achieved growth during the last three years. Successful entrants will demonstrate how they achieve a balance between family and business, how they have overcome challenges and ensure innovation is central to their growth strategies. The winner will have established a business that recognises the importance of both family heritage and boardroom agility, with a leadership team that pursues market opportunities and strives for longevity and sustainability.



**SMALL TO MEDIUM SIZED
BUSINESS OF THE YEAR**

SPONSORED BY



If your business employs between 20 and 200 people and is outstanding in a number of ways, this could be the category for you. Innovative marketing, first class customer service and a committed workforce are the type of strengths being sought. The judges are looking for a coherent business plan that offers a competitive advantage, delivers positive results and includes a strategy for future expansion and growing market share. The ultimate winner is likely to be an innovative company that is looking forward to the challenges ahead.



COMMUNITY CHAMPION

SPONSORED BY



The judges are looking for a business that displays a commitment to corporate social responsibility on a regular basis and can show how this has had a positive impact on the surrounding area. Activities may include getting involved with the local school or encouraging staff to work voluntarily on other community projects. Evidence should be given not only of the impact on the neighbourhood but how this has helped employees in terms of personal development.



APPRENTICE OF THE YEAR

SPONSORED BY



The judges will be looking for an outstanding apprentice, with a minimum of three months' service, who has made an outstanding contribution to their employer's business, possibly by assisting the delivery of a key project or supporting growth and/or sustainability. They will be looking to honour an apprentice whose attitude and performance makes them a shining example to others. The judges will expect evidence of where the candidates have clearly added value to the business and gone above and beyond the performance expected. The award is open to apprentices from companies and organisations of all sizes.

WOLVERHAMPTON RACECOURSE IS THE CHOSEN VENUE FOR THE BLACK-TIE EXPRESS & STAR BUSINESS AWARDS CEREMONY.



YOUNG BUSINESS OF THE YEAR
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The judges are looking for a young business, five years old or less at January 31, 2015, that can demonstrate qualities such as dynamic leadership, innovative product/service development and a robust marketing strategy, along with commitment to the region. The people at the top will need to provide evidence of ambition and business acumen, having achieved a tangible level of success, and demonstrate how the commitment of their staff is supporting the drive of the business towards further growth. The winning organisation is likely to be a strong all-rounder, already a leader in its own chosen area of expertise, with a clear and deliverable vision for the future.



CUSTOMER SERVICE AWARD
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Organisations entering this category need to illustrate both their commitment to, and achievement of, outstanding customer service at all levels. Everything an organisation does to win, satisfy and retain customers will be considered. Staff training is a critical part of this and an ongoing development plan must be shown. The customer service policy must be clearly stated and defined. Companies must be able to show how this strategy has had a positive impact on the business as a whole, including the achievement of nationally approved standards.



BEST USE OF TECHNOLOGY
SPONSORED BY



Has your company created, introduced or developed new technology that has had a positive impact on your business? The use of technology can cover anything: it may be the advancement of a back-office system, a process that has made the business more efficient or a customer facing investment, such as a new website or digital innovation. The judges will be looking for evidence of how the technology has improved processes, reduced costs, increased revenue and enhanced customer satisfaction. This award is open to established and new businesses alike.



Wolverhampton's biggest and brightest venue is the choice again this year to host the Express & Star Business Awards.

Set in 22 acres of parkland, just a mile and a half from Wolverhampton city centre, Wolverhampton Racecourse is a fantastic multi-purpose venue, most commonly associated with all-year-round horse racing fixtures on their unique all-weather track, staged both in the afternoons and under the floodlights in the evenings.

Renowned for entertainment combined with a race meeting, featured events include live music evenings on Saturday's throughout the year, Christmas party nights through the festive season, Family Fun Days and a feature live music event with a star act in the summer months. All accompanied by excellent dining options inclusive of superb raceday packages.



Much more than just a racecourse, the venue hosts many private events throughout the year, including awards ceremonies, conferences, exhibitions, fairs, weddings and more. A popular destination for private celebrations, the racecourse can accommodate small intimate gatherings in one of their many function rooms, up to much grander events of up to 600 people in the Ringside Suite, and large scale outdoor events using the vast site space. With an onsite Holiday Inn Hotel and ample free parking, Wolverhampton Racecourse exudes convenience for events of all kinds.

In the last few months the venue has been the location of the Promise Dreams Walk for Dreams, as well as the largest business networking show in the UK. The racecourse is proud to be the venue for the Express & Star Business Awards and the racecourse team are very much looking forward to the 2015 event.



EXPORT AWARD
SPONSORED BY



This award is set up to recognise the achievement of companies, regardless of size, which have coped with the challenges of dealing in international trade and built a sustainable business. The judges will be looking for evidence of a considered strategy that has led to expansion into new overseas markets, or growth in a current one, for clear signs of leadership at the top level and how innovative thinking has brought something fresh to the organisation. They will be looking for confirmation that growth in trade has been achieved internationally and the organisation has improved its market position.



INNOVATION AWARD
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This award is looking to celebrate those businesses which have developed a new product or idea, a process or way of working that is fresh, different and effective. Evidence will be sought by the judges of how the market for the product or idea was established in advance, how it has enhanced the performance of the business in terms of daily operation and the impact it has had on commercial performance. It is anticipated the winning organisation will embrace innovation and new technologies as part of their long term strategy and also illustrate their potential for high growth.



MANUFACTURING CHAMPION
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Is your business innovative, organised and producing goods to meet a demand that has been clearly identified? Is it investing in people and developing their skills? Is it embracing new technology? Is there a policy of continuous improvement and lean manufacturing at the heart of the business? The judges will be looking for evidence of commitment in all these areas, plus a comprehensive marketing plan, information about effective processes and a positive customer service policy in operation. They will also be looking for examples of environmental responsibility and evidence that measures are in place to ensure sustainability.