

Charity highlights Azerbaijan prospects

BUSINESS opportunities in a former Soviet state were highlighted by a North-East training charity that has worked there for about six years.

Keith Hunter, managing director of Middlesbrough-based TTE Technical Training Group was a key speaker at a conference in London focusing on business opportunities in Azerbaijan.

In 2004, TTE formed a joint venture partnership with Petrofac to provide world-class technical training in Azerbaijan.

TTE-Petrofac trains hundreds of Azeri technicians each year for BP and its production-sharing partners at Sangachal near Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan, which has substantial oil reserves, has a population of 8.8 million and was recently classified as one of the fastest-growing countries in the world, but has remained unknown to many businesses.

Mr Hunter said: "With its strategic location as an import and export gateway for trade and oil in and out of the Caspian, it holds huge untapped market potential for UK companies both within the outside of the oil and gas sector.

"TTE has pioneered strong business relationships in Azerbaijan within its joint venture with Petrofac.

"It is gratifying to know that TTE's work in this part of the world has been recognised as so ground-breaking that we were invited to present our experiences to such a prestigious conference."

The Middle East Association's conference, called Britain in Azerbaijan – A Trade Investment Forum, held in association with International Bank of Azerbaijan, took place at the Mansion House, in London.

Providing help with affordable homes targets

A HOUSEBUILDER has launched a scheme to partner North-East housing providers to help them meet their Government affordable housing targets.

McInerney Homes is partnering housing associations (HA) across the North-East and Yorkshire to help get schemes under way, and already five developments in the region are at an advanced stage.

The scheme, called McInerney Partnerships, oversees aspects from sourcing land opportunities, securing planning permission and construction of the scheme, when the completed homes are then presented to the HA.

Projects in Haswell, County Durham, Fencehouses, near Chester-le-Street, Catterick in North Yorkshire, Norham in Northumberland and Knottingley in Yorkshire are being developed at a rapid pace.

Business owners ready to splash out for charity

FIVE North-East business owners are participating in the world's biggest swim after meeting through social networking site Twitter.

The team, which consists of Heather Baxter, of GENI, Derek Curtis, of Bond Solutions, Mark Easby, of Better Brand Agency, Lisa Forster, of Angelfysh, and Marianne Whitfield, of Cobweb, will be swimming 5,000m on Friday to raise money for Marie Curie Cancer Care.

The group met on Twitter and decided to take part in the Swimathon at Sunderland Aquatic Centre. The swim will take about three hours and the team, named the Twimmers, is hoping to raise more than £1,000 for the charity.

Mr Curtis, of Sunderland-based Bond, said: "We all use Twitter for business purposes and we had been talking for a while previous to agreeing to do the Swimathon. We were all discussing getting fit and when the idea of participating in the event was mentioned we all jumped at the chance."

Mrs Baxter, from GENI, based at Evolve in Rainton Bridge, Houghton-le-Spring, said: "Although the Swimathon will be a challenge, I am excited to take part and hope we will exceed our fundraising target."



MEET THE TWIMMERS: From left, Heather Baxter, of GENI, Derek Curtis, of Bond Solutions, Lisa Forster, of Angelfysh; Mark Easby, of Better Brand Agency, and Marianne Whitfield, of Cobweb

Former football physio to open fourth practice

A PHYSIOTHERAPIST who set up his own business after leaving a North-East football club has opened his fourth base in the region.

Paul Gough set up Paul Gough Physio Rooms less than three years ago, and in that time, has expanded to open practices in Darlington, Durham and Hartlepool. Last month he added a fourth in Guisborough, east Cleveland.

From being a one-man operation in 2007, when Mr Gough left Darlington Football Club after four years as head physiotherapist, the business now employs eight physiotherapists and four secretaries who help to treat more than 400 patients a week.

Among the clients are major employers such as Bupa insurer AIG, and local businesses including Winn Solicitors.

Mr Gough, 28, has further expansion plans, hoping he can open at least one more practice in the near future.

"Opening a new practice is quite a sizeable investment and brings with it a great deal of opportunity and excitement for us," he said.

"As well as Hartlepool, we also have a practices in Darlington and Durham, so to add this fourth premises so soon after starting the business is quite an achievement for us, but is a credit to my colleagues and the service which they give to our patients.

"I'm hopeful that with our com-



GROWING BUSINESS: Paul Gough

By Deborah Johnson
Deputy Business Editor

deborah.johnson@nne.co.uk

bined and continued hard work there maybe at least one more addition to our chain of practices in the near future."

Mr Gough, who work with everyone – from private individuals to major multi-nationals – said the business has grown at a rapid rate.

"Across our four practices we now care for more than 400 patients a week, and we are working with companies both nationally and internationally such as Bupa and the American insurer AIG, and more locally companies such as Housing Hartlepool and Winn Solicitors, to ensure their staffs and patients return to fitness as quickly as possible," he said.

"When I first left Darlington FC to start the business I was responsible for every task you could think of, from answering the phone, preparing invoices, replying to emails and in between all this I had to look after my patients.

"We are now a team of four secretaries and eight physios and I have no doubt that through their friendliness and professionalism they are largely responsible for our success.

Mr Gough, from Hartlepool, said he remains indebted to Darlington FC for the opportunities he had while working there.

"I had an amazing four years with Darlington, including some interesting visits with them to Hartlepool's Victoria Ground to play against Pools," he said.

"It was a great phase of my life and the experiences I gained there have definitely helped the development of this business, so to George Reynolds and Dave Hodgson, my then chairman and manager, I will always be grateful for the opportunity they gave to me."

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