

Shropshire WiRE Woman of the Year Award - finalists announced



Pictured from left to right: Back: Lisa Manders, It's a Girl Thing, runner up; Sian Lovegrove, Mail Boxes etc, Third place and Helen Mitchell, Ascendancy Internet Marketing, runner up; Front: Paul Nash, Switch on Shropshire Project Manager; Dame Stella Rimington MCB; Sharon Nichols, www.ourlocalfood.co.uk, winner and Sarah Franklin, WiRE

Most promising start-up business award Sponsored by Switch on Shropshire

The Women in Business Lunch, organised by Shropshire Chamber and Business Link was held today at the Albright Hussey Hotel, Shrewsbury and featured awards for Shropshire's most promising start-up business run by a woman.

The WiRE (Women in Rural Enterprise) awards to celebrate Shropshire's most promising female start up are sponsored by Switch on Shropshire and will be presented by the former head of MI5 Dame Stella Rimington MCB.

WiRE is a national business club that helps rural women start or grow their own enterprise, the awards entrants had to be current WiRE members, live within Shropshire and have been trading for less than 18 months. The judging panel included representatives from Business Link and Switch on Shropshire have selected four finalists based on the entries providing evidence of the business vision, approach to planning and developing their idea into a viable business idea.

17 entries of a very high standard were received and the judges selected four finalists who were all visited.

Sarah Franklin from WiRE said "we are delighted with the quality of entries demonstrating the enterprising spirit of the business women in Shropshire and we are grateful for the support of Switch on Shropshire has enabled us to celebrate start up successes."



Paul Nash, Project Manager of Switch on Shropshire said "our aim is to develop broadband access to enable local businesses to compete in the modern economy and the WiRE award entries demonstrate that new Shropshire businesses are seizing opportunities."

The winner and finalists are listed below:



Sharon Nichols, Winner of the WiRE Woman of the Year Award for Most Promising Start-up Business, for her business www.ourlocalfood.co.uk

Winner: www.ourlocalfood.co.uk , proprietor Sharon Nichols

Sharon received a cash prize of £250 and a bespoke trophy

Sharon identified frustration over the time-consuming business of sourcing, ordering and delivering high quality local produce. This was widespread amongst suppliers and buyers.

Through its website the business has created an accessible, easy to use link between suppliers (farmers, growers and processors) of local, organic high quality specialist foods and the buyers (restaurants, hotels, caterers). Trading is online through Sharon as an intermediary and she organises the collection and delivery of the goods.

The emphasis is on local provision, high quality food and user friendly personal service, supporting the local economy. Plans are in hand to expand the concept to other areas of the country, concentrating again on the "local" provision for the local area, but linking each area through the website to enable wider distribution of quality products if there is a wider demand. Discussions with a local primary school over the possibility of sourcing all local produce for school meals are also in hand.





Runner-up: Ascendancy Internet Marketing, proprietor Helen Mitchell

Ascendancy supports businesses to generating response from their website; services include search engine and email marketing, analysis and reporting on performance of website, training and consultancy.

The business works closely with clients to fulfil their business objectives and with web designers to optimise the design and usability.

Helen has planned the growth of the business carefully to fit in with her young family and has a clear short term and long term goal for its continued development.

Runner-up: It's a Girl Thing – Children's Pamper Parties, proprietor - Lisa Manders

A business idea inspired by a night out with friends and reminisces about childhood parties. The result is a range of Pamper parties for young girls and teenagers:

- "Little Princesses" (4 – 8 year olds)
- "Little Divas" (9-14 year olds)
- "Pamper Pyjama Parties" (8 –14 year olds)
- Tailor made packages for older teenagers wanting make-overs and pamper nights before going out with friends or for adults, a girly night in over a glass of wine

Expanding quickly since conception in May 2004 with an average of 3 parties a week and plans to look into a Franchise package to extend business across the region.

Third Place: Mail Boxes Etc, proprietor Sian Lovegrove

The business involves 3 core elements: mail box rental, packing and shipping and copying and printing which are all part of the MBE Franchise for the property in Shrewsbury. Sian has added an Internet Café (The only one in town!) and has just launched Business Angels a local version of the BBC 2 Series *Dragon's Den* where entrepreneurs are put in touch with people with new business ideas to consider investment.

Sian's ambition is "to be in control of my own destiny and not be answerable to a big fat man behind a desk, and I want to make a difference to the world around me. But most of all I want a Jaguar XK8 convertible."

