

## Walsall Works Expo set to offer digital CVs and 100s of jobs

Preparations are underway for the biggest ever jobs and skills event to be held in Walsall.

More than 80 local employers and training providers will come together at the Walsall Works Expo event next month to offer jobs, training and apprenticeship opportunities to more than 1,100 people.

The event, on March 15, has been organised by Walsall Council's Employment and Skills team, in partnership with the DWP and The VIEW programme and will be held at The Hub, Walsall College between 12.30pm and 5pm.

Utility giant Homeserve will be joined by the Express & Star, Walsall Foot-

ball Club, Walsall College, National Express, whg, and organisations across various industries and sectors.

Councillor Lee Jeavons, deputy leader of Walsall Council and portfolio holder for regeneration said: "This is the third year we have held the Walsall Works Expo and this year's event promises to be bigger and better like nothing before."

"We're working really hard to encourage as many as people to attend. We have tried to design the event so that it meets a multitude of needs, starting in the morning with a career showcase for young school aged pupils, followed by a lunch-time session for employers. "The finale of the event is



Preparations are underway for Walsall's jobs and skills event the main Expo in the afternoon which expects to see over 1,100 local jobseekers in attendance."

Black Country Impact, which provides free courses to young adults will give

visitors the chance to stand out by helping them to create a video CV.

To register your attendance call Walsall Works on 01922 654353 or email WalsallWorks@walsall.gov.uk

# Manufacturers create 125 jobs

**A unique industrial collective is casting aside the shadows of Brexit by recording its best ever year, with a £10m increase in sales paving the way for 125 new jobs.**

The Manufacturing Assembly Network (MAN), which comprises eight sub-contract manufacturers from across the Black Country and the wider West Midlands, as well as an engineering design agency.

It has taken advantage of the positive exchange rate for sterling and a desire to tap into British innovation to win contracts across the automotive, aerospace, electronics, renewables and medical sectors.

All nine firms have experienced growth over the last 12 months and have benefitted from sharing best practice, purchasing power and working together to target new clusters.

The expansion now means that MAN employs a 1,000-strong combined workforce across 15 factories and boasts an order book that is fast approaching £90m, with 40% of that turnover sent overseas.

"I am a firm believer in the power of collaboration and that is exactly what has helped us to grow the collective and our individual businesses over the last year," explained Rowan Crozier, CEO of Brandauer and the new chairman of the Manufacturing Assembly Network.

The Network is made up of Alu-cast, Barkley Plastics, Brandauer, Grove Design, KimberMills Inter-



All nine firms in the Manufacturing Assembly Network have experienced growth

national, Mec Com, Muller Holdings, PP Control & Automation and SMT Developments. Together they offer a wide range of engineering disciplines including automation and control systems, casting, design, forging, plastic injection moulding, PCB development and precision stamped parts.

It is also currently working with Warwick Manufacturing Group (WMG) to improve processes and commercialise new technologies.

Rowan continued: "This is a very exciting time to be taking the reins at MAN and there's some immediate opportunities I want to focus on, pri-

marily widening the network's reach to win more business and strengthening our existing relationships with academia."

For the first time the group will have a deputy chairman with Adam Cunningham of Muller Holdings - based at Cleobury Mortimer near Kidderminster and with another site at Wednesbury - unanimously voted in.

"Last year, £5m was invested across nine companies and encompassed factory extensions, new CNC machines, robotic welding cells and the recruitment of apprentices. I can see this figure being even higher in 2018."

## Small appetite for finance as venture funds lag behind US

The latest British Business Bank 'Small Business Finance Markets' report shows appetite for new loans among small firms dropping to its lowest level since 2011.

The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) national chairman Mike Cherry, from Staffordshire, said: "The BBB has done some exceptional work in increasing access to finance across the UK in recent years, particularly in areas outside of London and the South East where investment is harder to secure."

"But the fact that less than 2% of UK small firms sought new loans over

the last couple of years is a real concern.

"We're lagging behind the US when it comes to venture capital investment in businesses to the tune of millions. That has to change."

"Lots of small firms simply aren't up to speed on all of their options."

"Increasing numbers are applying for asset-based loans and exploring the P2P route which is encouraging."

"When it comes to equity finance, however, lots of small businesses are hesitant about selling a stake in their firm, even though it could be the right move for them."

## Midlands Engine briefing on fund

A briefing about the Midlands Engine Investment Fund is being held in Dudley.

The aim is to transform the finance landscape for smaller businesses.

It will provide more than £250 million of investment to boost small and medium business growth through finance of between £25,000 and £2m.

The briefing is at the Black Country Living Museum in Tipton Road on March 6 from 8am to 10am.

To register visit <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/midlands-engine-investment-fund-regional-briefing-event-dudley-tickets-4289779413>

# Restaurant serves up three major listings



Mohammed Khan, left, and his father Sitab Khan at Wolverhampton's city centre Bilash restaurant

**A leading Wolverhampton restaurant has served up a trio of listings and awards to round off its 35th birthday celebrations.**

Bilash, which offers a combination of traditional and contemporary Bangladeshi cuisine, has been listed in the Michelin and AA Food Guides for the 15th consecutive year, whilst it has also been named by Harden's as one of the UK's Top Restaurants.

It comes hot on the heels of a £100,000 investment in renovating the Cheapside venue and creating a whole host of new dishes for local diners and those that have travelled from as far afield as Bournemouth, London and York.

"There's no better accolade than to

be listed in one of these publications, let alone all three of them," explained Mohammed Khan, who runs the business with his father Sitab.

### Delighted

"We never know when they come and there's no advertising or free meals as part of the deal...it's a completely unbiased review of the food, the service and the atmosphere. I'm delighted we scored so highly in every possible area."

He continued: "They really help to attract new custom and we know people that have travelled all the way to Wolverhampton to try our cuisine for themselves."

Bilash, which employs 16 people, seats 50 diners downstairs and a further 30 upstairs, which can be used for private dining or corporate functions.

The latter is a growing market for the family-owned restaurant with local

businesses keen to impress customers and suppliers with a visit, whilst the Grand Theatre regularly take group bookings for show performers.

"Turnover was up 10 per cent in 2017 and we had to take on more staff to cope with demand from diners," added Mohammed.

"This year is going to be equally exciting, with lots of events planned including a Mother's Day weekend special menu and our biggest ever seafood week celebration."

"We are also putting on a week of complimentary dining as a thank you to all our loyal customers, who have supported the Bilash for the last 36 years."

"The menu will consist of a gourmet three-course dinner and will be charged at a flat fee of £20 per head with all the proceeds going to an Orphan Village in Bangladesh to provide water and education."

## Architects pledge career support for Stourbridge College students

Stourbridge College has launched its new built environment facility by establishing a partnership with national architectural practice Corstorphine + Wright.

Over the last two years, Corstorphine + Wright has provided the college's 60 construction students with industry related lectures and work placements and in fact three of the college's students have been recruited by the company after completing work experience at its Hagley Road offices in Stourbridge. This is while continuing their studies and training.

### Partnership

"Teaming up with Corstorphine + Wright puts the college in a stronger position to show our learners the professional working environment they will be joining," said Gill Coldicott, Head of Stourbridge College.

"The industry hasn't stopped calling out for skilled workers, so it is exciting for us to have another avenue through which to inspire others and help meet this demand."

"The partnership will also help us to continue to develop the construction courses, apprenticeships and training programmes we offer."

This is a first-time collaboration for Corstorphine + Wright which has risen 16 places to 56 in the AJ100, a list of the country's top architectural firms.

Mike Turner, the company's tech-



Gill Coldicott of Stourbridge College & Mike Turner of Corstorphine & Wright

nical director, said: "We already have training and recruitment initiatives in place for graduates and undergraduates and now we are going a step further. We hope to inform students about the design and technician roles available on residential, commercial and industrial projects being developed across the UK as well as the region."

"We can also share the career journeys of people working in our teams

so that students can see the different pathways they may follow."

Stourbridge College's construction and built environment facilities include bricklaying, carpentry and electrical installation workshops. Plumbing courses are also delivered in partnership with the Worcester Bosch Group, with training provided for their apprentices alongside the courses offered to full time college students.