

Town Centre Management Update

October 2000 from Mike Webb - Town Centre Manager

MY APPOINTMENT as Dover's Town Centre Manager, a year ago, coincided with the immediate "New Beginning" relaunch of Town Centre Management (TCM), planned to build on the initial work undertaken by my predecessors, under the guidance of TCM's influential Board of directors, which comprises local business people, plus colleagues from a wide-range of organisations, including Terry Sutton, MBE, who represents "The Dover Society".

Throughout this year, the local press has given regular support and coverage to a number of our activities and, due to the increase in our various actions, it is gratifying that "Neptune", (96.4, 106.8 FM), our local radio station, affords us a regular, half-hour Tuesday slot, (11.00-11.30am), dedicated to Town Centre Management affairs.

Publicity for our activities is vital. This enables town stake holders to become fully aware of what we are trying to do. This, in turn, enables everyone, with a positive interest in Dover Town Centre's well-being and future, to become conversant with our performance and to make informed comments and suggestions, which are always welcomed.

The first task was to put Town Centre Management, as a voluntary organisation, paid for by grants and by its membership, on to a firm financial footing. This has been achieved by radical cost-cutting and by extensive membership recruitment. Our organisation now has some 120 members, and, as such, represents a powerful lobby in the town.

Secondly, the strategy was to divide

the town into sub-groups, each with its own business representative, so that local interests could be best served. At the same time we set up a town-wide retail group, and further various sub-groups. Many of our members are now extremely active on behalf of their part of the community and the town.

Much of our work involves attending meetings, committees and liaising with important organisations in the town,



Mike Webb with Phil Hayley at TCM's fundraising dance

such as Dover District Council, the Town Council and many pressure groups and charities. Whilst this work is vital, much of it goes on behind the scenes, and does not, necessarily, make riveting reading! Where the towns-people can notice our activities, is on the Town's social front. Here, we feel considerable success has been achieved, and would list our attempts at innovation.

Firstly, the perennial problem of Xmas Lights. Whilst we remain seriously underfunded, Xmas Lights and the Switch-On day last year, showed a marked improvement from previous years. For the first time we held an all-day event, with kiddies' rides and activities and, for the first time, "The Neptune Radio" Road Show, which was a great success. We secured the services of Toyah Wilcox, to perform the Switch-On, in front of record crowds, estimated, by the police at over 4,500. We hoped that this year would be even better as we continued our five-year plan to give Dover the lights that the Town deserves. Switch-On day was November 25th, with 'The Neptune Radio' Road Show and with Theresa di Marco, from "EastEnders", and other surprise guests.

The underlying problems of Xmas Lights are two-fold. Firstly, unlike many towns, Dover lacks a clearly defined centre, meaning that the resultant ribbon-development represents a massive area for lights to cover. Secondly, the general public is probably unaware of the invisible costs of the lights. Such costs involve storage, insurance, transport, erection, dismantling and maintenance. In addition, junction boxes, timers etc cost hundreds of pounds for each string of

lights. These costs swallow several thousand pounds each year, before a single bulb is purchased.

Accordingly, the theme for this year's TCM fund raising has been "Dover's Xmas Lights". To this end, we



The Mayor, who is also chairman of TCM, receiving a cheque from Gala Bingo to go towards Christmas lights

introduced regular Quiz Nights. These are great fun, presenting an opportunity to make new friends (and new enemies!). The final two quizzes of the year were held at the Post Office Social Club in Maison Dieu Road, on October 18th and November 29th. Further, two dances were held on 30th September and 20th October. In addition to the above, we also upgraded our annual Easter/St George's festivities, in the town. This year "The Maroondogs" played in the town centre, to great acclaim and appreciation from the record crowds. At the same time, free treasure hunts and competitions were held, throughout the town, for the children.

The biggest new event of the year was the introduction of our Midsummer-Xmas extravaganza. This involved a major cavalcade through the town, with Father Christmas, Miss

18 Dover, our Town "Yeller", and all junior entrants to our major Talent Show (sponsored by "The Mercury"). Father and Mrs Christmas travelled in a unique 26 foot-long, 1959, pink Cadillac Eldorado, giving out Easter eggs on route!

The Talent Showcase, held at the Park Inn, was seen by over 1,500 people, as over 60 contestants, aged from 6 to 88, performed! Gala Bingo's sporting General Manager had wet sponges thrown at him whilst in the stocks. How do we top this, next year?

Other fund-raising activities have involved our sale of the excellent Dover Castle print, which is being bought by visitors from all over the world. The same is true of our Queen Mother Commemorative Brochure (sponsored by the "Dover Express").

Another major event, in association with Media Models, was "The Model of the Year Competition" at the Town Hall in September.

On perhaps a more serious note, our activities have involved the highly-successful relaunch and revamp of Dover's Shop Watch 2-way radio-security system. This system benefits every law-abiding citizen, since the radio-link is closely tied to the town's CCTV security. Wide publicity in the press, on local radio and through leaflet drops, was undertaken advertising the relaunch that was held at Gala Bingo's excellent facility, in the town centre. The provision of free breakfast plus a game of bingo helped make it an important social event too. Over 60 people attended, including our MP, our Mayor, representatives of Dover District Council and the Police. Superintendent Eyre expressed his great satisfaction and support for the event, which, subsequently was widely publicised in the Media. Since the relaunch, membership has rocketed by over 50%

at the last count (from 29 to about 50), strategically placed around the town.

In addition, the suppliers of our radio system, local company Smye Rumsby, has agreed to help TCM administer the system. Further, to improve reception, the base station has now been moved to a strategic, town-centre location.

Further good news is that, following the initiative, the police asked TCM (as licence holders) for our agreement to allow town centre police radios to be "chipped" with the Shop Watch radio frequency. The outcome means that PCs now have to carry only one radio, not two. Such is the success of this concept that the Police now wish to extend the facility to squad cars, and are considering introducing the idea into other areas.

TCM has also played a major role, on behalf of DDC, in consultations with the public, concerning the Council's wide-ranging initiative for Dover's Town Centre Strategy, which is currently with the consultants.

Other activities have included our support for "Surfers", our new Cyber Cafe' in the Indoor Market. This has resulted in many crew members from the Cruise ships finding their way to our office for advice, and into the town centre to use the cafe.

Similar promotional activities have been taken in conjunction with Etam's Tammy Department, for their "Steps Look-a-Like Competition", and with Hargreaves Sports Open Evening, as well as the opening of "Avenues" cafe/restaurant, in Cherry Tree Avenue.

So, it can be seen that a lot is happening at Town Centre Management. I look forward to the opportunity of speaking to "The Dover Society" in person, in the not too distant future so that together we can make things happen more quickly.