

jonesandclark

INDUSTRIAL SUPPLIES, HAND AND POWER TOOLS

of Burton on Trent 80 Years of Retail Success

It is clear that Jones and Clark is rooted in its surrounding community in Burton on Trent. Now running into the third generation of family ownership and due to celebrate eighty years of trading in October, the business is an example of how evolving ideas and embracing change enable businesses to survive and thrive. The business was started in 1932 by William Clark and Thomas Jones and its main focus was saw doctoring. Although based in a largely residential area, the company continued to expand and, in time, had to move to Waterloo Street in Burton. Expansion continued there too, with a series of houses knocked through to accommodate the need for larger and larger premises.

But this year, with parking issues and customer growth being difficult to manage on a residential street, it was decided to move to an industrial estate "down the road" and not too far away. At a stroke this has provided a few neat solutions for the business with a more open and user-friendly Trade Counter area, better office accommodation, more parking and easier access and a well-organized system for storing stock with a bay for speedy dispatch too. And, crucially, there is room to expand and evolve the business in the future.

Currently, the business is being run by Simon and Monica Douglas-Clark and they very much continue the family run business ethic built on solid foundations and with an eye on future developments.



Monica and Simon Douglas-Clark

When asked about the employee team Simon had the following to add: "The team consists of 11 employees ranging from 3 experienced members of staff with over 30 years in the business each, through to our newest apprentice who started just under a year ago. We like to recruit locally and build on our employees' existing skills. We are dedicated to developing the skills and experience of our team, for example, two of our managers are currently finishing their NVQ level 3 in Management and we hope to gain "Investors In People" status during 2013."


Many of the staff have some background in various trades within the tool-using industries, so are able to offer sound advice to customers. However, in order to keep up with new developments in products and practices, both new and established staff take advantage of a number of training outlets. For example, suppliers' representatives can be invited to train colleagues on new ranges of tools, and the THS-provided training on sales and sales management has been well received. Staff "experts" act as mentors to newer staff to increase product knowledge, but it is not unheard of for a particular staff member, new or old, to be told to brush up on a range of products and present the fruits of their labours to all other relevant staff. In this way, all staff are treated as valued members of the team.

Stocking decisions can be fraught for small businesses because it is always great to have all the relevant products ready for demanding customers. But the reality is that storage space and cash flow are powerful arguments against. Simon readily admits to enjoying making stocking decisions, and as a small independent company, Jones and Clark are able to quickly change and update stock lines. Simon particularly enjoys looking for innovative and interesting products to meet the changing demands of customers, so is a regular visitor to trade shows. Operations Manager Steve Dyche and Frank Chambers, the Purchasing Coordinator are also



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Reply No. 237

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INDUSTRIAL SUPPLIES, HAND AND POWER TOOLS

—Continued from previous page

Currently working on a new mezzanine floor for the trade counter to house a wide range of PPE, workwear and safety footwear which they hope to have ready for their trade day. The new PPE section will include a changing room and lot's of new exciting ranges.

In discussion with the staff it is clear that Jones and Clark want to be part of the local community. The company belongs to the Chamber of Commerce and has had a long tradition of raising money for key charities including the MS Society and the local St Giles Hospice.



Jones and Clark has also sponsored local junior football tournaments and the match programmes at Burton Albion. It maintains connections with local colleges by liaising with teachers and students to put together flexible toolkits at very competitive prices for their courses.

Perhaps the most pressing event for Jones and Clark at the moment is the Open Day to celebrate 80 years of being in business. This event takes place on the 19th October and already the neighbouring businesses have joined in the spirit of the occasion and allowed their forecourts to be used for supplier display areas, demos and best of all, a buttie van. Jones and Clark know what their customers want!



Perhaps I ought to leave the last word to Simon:- "People are beginning to see the value of the independent dealer - we are flexible, responsive and personable. We value our customers big or small. If we build on these strengths and are prepared to evolve, we see a bright future for our business and the THS group as a whole."



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Reply No. 216

Reply No. 213



closely involved in stocking decisions, perhaps with a more 'nuts and bolts' attitude to everyday stocking decisions!!

Most small businesses rely on some sort of IT to maintain controls over stocking, ordering and purchasing. Some companies develop their own in-house systems, but Jones and Clark have been able to make the bought-in Merlin System work very well for their needs. In their experience, it has not only been able to grow with the needs of the business, but also to survive (and help) with the recent change of premises. Also, when new needs for IT have been identified, the system has been able to supply newly written software solutions.

Jones and Clark has a number of ways in which they test the temperature of the customer experience. For example, this year, there is a feedback questionnaire to provide a more formal set of answers as to how the business could develop.

On a more informal level, customers are sometimes asked for their views in a short discussion on the shopfloor by counter staff or managers. Indeed, it is not unknown for the odd pint or Indian meal to be partaken of in pursuit of customers' views.

Some of the things that emerge from these discussions are quite interesting windows on customers' decisions to use a certain supplier – for example did you know that the presence of a coffee machine can be a dealmaker?

More recently, customer views on the way in which returns were handled led to the development of a more integrated system made possible by developing the IT system mentioned above.

Another way that Jones and Clark has developed its business by listening to customers' views is in the purchase of a new sales and demonstration van for one of our Sales Representatives (rather than a car). This means that our Sales

Representative can make visits but also deliver to the customer base as necessary. This vehicle can be stocked with products to show and sell to a wide customer base.

Simon is emphatic that membership of THS has helped the business survive and develop, especially in recent years when trading conditions have been tough for everybody. Here he is quoted again in full:-

"Our membership of THS is vital to give us the buying power in today's competitive industrial supplies market. We draw on the strength of the membership and thrive on the learning and support that we find from the group and the membership as a whole. We are consistent attendees of the THS Exhibition and AGM. The exhibition is important for liaising and networking with suppliers and members. This year has particular significance as we will be having our 80th anniversary Open Day and Trade Show on October 19th just before. We are excited to have the opportunity to invite customers and suppliers to our new premises." Although Jones and Clark has its own system of "crossed tools" stickers to indicate special prices on items that are surplus to requirements, it also takes advantage of the various promotions that THS offers. Once again the online system of selecting the promotions on the THS website is praised because it is so efficient and each retailer can choose the products most suited to its customer base.

The new range of basic tools from THS has also been well received by the customers of Jones and Clark, and has proved good for the company too.

Having coped with the challenge of moving to a new premises, a process that took four days and a lot of forward planning, Jones and Clark is optimistically looking forward to the future.

-Continued next page



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Reply No. 205