

Local approach warms things up at THE MASONS ARMS

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There was a cold wind blowing through the Masons Arms in Stanley, County Durham, when Michelle Gill took it over in August 2006. The community feel of the pub, a leased premises owned by Punch Taverns, had been lost as locals took their custom elsewhere.

Michelle, who was brought up in the area and still has immediate family close by, knew that to be successful the pub had to become the centre of the community once more. She set about turning things around with the help of her family and Milestone, the licensed trade's leading accountancy services provider.

Mark Leighton is the Milestone regional accounts manager for County Durham and he has been in regular contact to ensure Michelle is able to focus on building up sales and extending the customer base. He commented: “The Masons required some serious ‘TLC’ and Michelle’s warm and friendly approach, together

with a lot of hard work, is beginning to make a difference.”

Winning back lost customers

Confident that Milestone would look after the financial management side of the business, Michelle has thrown herself into the task of winning back lost customers and attracting new ones. With her family helping wherever possible to keep staff costs down, she has invested in refurbishing parts of the premises as well as a number of other initiatives.

On one Saturday each month, Michelle is funding a live entertainment night and she hopes that by developing strong links with a local pop group she might have a resident band. Michelle has also introduced a karaoke evening, a domino handicap competition and darts, dominoes and pool teams – and during certain events she provides free bar food.

Throughout this very busy period, Milestone has been providing Michelle with financial management reports, processing payroll and VAT and helping her to complete her first self assessment tax return! She said: “The Milestone service has been really good. Mark visits regularly and when I have a query, I just pick up the phone and he talks me through it there and then. As well as Mark’s assistance, I have been able to call on support from Milestone’s head office to sort out a number of tax issues left behind by the previous licensee. They have always been approachable and supportive in resolving historical issues, which were often more complex because they related to someone we had no contact with.”

Punch Taverns’ business relationship manager for the area, Jim McDougall, commented: “Milestone has been instrumental in the success achieved at the Masons Arms. Michelle had very limited experience of running a business or of the associated financial responsibilities, so it’s fantastic that she has been able to rely on Milestone whilst she concentrated on breathing new life into the business.”

The local community is responding positively to the hard work and pragmatic approach displayed by Michelle and her family. Many of the customers lost by the previous landlord have returned and they have been joined by new ones. Turnover is well over budget and costs are being tightly controlled to provide capital for further development.



Milestone’s Mark Leighton with Masons Arms licensee Michelle Gill.

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