

A PERSONAL SERVICE



Micky Caine, a kind and popular estate manager, at her retirement party in May after 23 years with the company, pictured with Charles Clayton, managing director, and Sharon Taylor, deputy managing director. Micky started at Ramsbury, before moving to Alton and then onto The Orchard, Fairford in 1998.

Our residents tell us that the X-factor that makes our private estates attractive and happy places is the estate manager. They set the tone, welcoming and assisting owners to settle into new homes and are on hand for advice or emergencies. Their services are given in a professional manner, without intruding, helping residents to enjoy an independent lifestyle.

There are variations in the way the service is delivered. On some estates Cognatum employs resident husband and wife teams, one primarily responsible for the office side and the other for gardening and general maintenance. On other estates there may be a single resident or non-resident estate manager available in the office during the morning and on call at other times, with the gardening undertaken by an outside contractor. Deputies are employed to cover time off and in all cases our services to residents operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

News in brief...

Board changes – 2011 saw a number of changes to the Cognatum board. In June Malcolm Vine became Finance Director. He has worked in both the private and public sectors and joined Cognatum in 2009 around the time of the merger. Christopher Mackenzie-Beevor, who joined the ECA in 2007, left the board in September, but continues as a regional manager. Jim Harris was appointed as the second resident director on the board. Mr Harris had a long and distinguished career with British Airways, culminating in his appointment as director of marketing. Since then he has been a director of a number of companies and charitable organizations and now lives at Stuart Court, Minchinhampton.

Residents Advisory Panel – The panel met twice in 2011. David Abbott and Mervyn Colenso-Jones have retired so there are two vacancies to fill before the next meeting in March. Charles Clayton and Sharon Taylor will both participate in future meetings.

New development at Seymour Place, Odiham – Work started in May on the building of nine contemporary energy efficient houses at Seymour Place. This extension to the original 18 houses built in 1995, in this delightful Hampshire town, should be ready for occupation next summer, with a show house opening in March.

The Cinnamon Trust award – In October Penstones Court in Oxfordshire won the 2011 award for the top pet friendly retirement development. This unique charity, founded in 1985, helps elderly people and their pets as well as looking after animals that can no longer be taken care of by their owner.



The swimming pavilion in the gardens at The Orchard.

Managers are responsible for the day-to-day running and maintenance of grounds and buildings. They arrange for window cleaning and rubbish collection. Depending on the estate, there may be other things to look after such as a mini bus, guest suite, laundry or swimming pool.

Although owners are responsible for the internal maintenance of their home, they can take advantage of contacts with local suppliers and trades people, built up by the estate manager. If a little more assistance or care support is needed, managers can help find the appropriate agency. In an emergency they are there to provide immediate short-term comfort and assistance.

It is a very important and demanding job, and each of our estate managers brings their own style to the task.

HEAD FOR HEIGHTS

Sue Pickering always wanted to abseil but only got started in 1997 when she was 68. She has now abseiled about 20 times from buildings such as Portland Bill and Southwold lighthouses, the Manchester Velodrome, a cliff in Cumbria and the Marquess of Anglesey's column in Anglesey.

With fantastic support from her neighbours at Berehurst, Alton, and other friends and family, Sue has raised about £20,000 from abseiling, as well as one skydive from 13,000 feet. In the summer of 2010 she did six descents, raising funds for Macmillan Nurses, Myasthenia Gravis, an ICU neurological unit and a heart unit.

Her last abseil, in August 2011, was down the Spinnaker Tower in Portsmouth. Now, coming up for 82, she says that is the last one – unless she gets a chance to tackle Big Ben.

EDITORIAL

It has been another difficult year for Britain and Europe and any optimism of a year ago that the worst was behind us seems to have vanished. Economists expect growing unemployment, inflation and national debt, with no recovery until 2013 so let us hope that 2012 proves better than their predictions. Cognatum has done its best to respond to the tough economic environment. Managing director Charles Clayton emphasised in his annual report the need to "continue to keep costs under tight control without compromising service standards". Across our 60 private estates increases in service charges in 2012 will be kept below inflation in 80% of cases. On the other estates there are exceptional reasons for above inflation rises, such as agreement to extra gardening or additional reserve fund contributions.

The 2011 project to put computers into every estate office has improved data handling and communication, despite initial reservations that it would take away personal contact.

The annual meetings in October were well attended and, although primarily concerned with budgets, many local issues were discussed, underlining the uniqueness of each and every private estate. The Residents Advisory Panel discussed the role of estate managers at their meeting in September, and at their suggestion we have included an article about managers in the newsletter.

Cognatum Property continued to improve its performance in an unpredictable market with a 30% increase in sales in 2011, with the average property price slightly higher than the previous year.



A jazzy way to settle in

A garden party and a jazz band celebrated the completion of the nine new apartments and houses next to Lyefield Court at Emmer Green. The site is a golfer's delight with Reading Golf Club next door. Beechcroft Developments organised the party on a sunny day in August, with a little help from Audrey and Dave Brown, the courtyard managers. All the new properties have been sold: with the larger ones each going for around £500,000.



Sue Pickering comes down Guy's Hospital tower.

Sales through Cognatum Property have been steady throughout 2011. A weak local market has affected some areas more than others, but overall the average price of properties sold in 2011 has remained close to 2010 levels, increasing by 1.4%. Encouragingly, 30% more sales have been successfully contracted compared to 2010. Once again, experience shows that properties offered for sale in a clean, uncluttered state and in good decorative order, sell more quickly.

In this specialist market the high reputation of Cognatum is a boon to sellers, along with the superb architecture and high standards of landscaping on all estates.

Most buyers say their main reason for buying a Cognatum property was to be closer to family and to enjoy the flexibility that living on a managed development offers, including peace of mind whilst away. In these straitened times buying into a lifestyle where costs can be calculated in advance, and where residents are protected from sudden and urgent maintenance demands, is another attraction.

Despite all the doom and gloom, there are reasons to be confident of a buoyant 2012 with events such as the Olympics and the Royal Jubilee to lift the spirits – and maybe some confidence returning to the economy.



7 Remenham Row, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire

On the banks of the Thames with a lovely riverside garden, a very attractive three-bedroom cottage.

£675,000



5 Old Town Farm, Great Missenden, Bucks

A large well proportioned three-bedroom cottage in an old farm setting, with a swimming pool in a fine listed barn.

£575,000



11 Northfield Court, Aldeburgh, Suffolk

A stunning two-bedroom ground floor apartment overlooking the gardens and just a short walk to the sea front.

£330,000



15 Home Farm, Iwerne Minster, Dorset

A beautifully light and contemporary two-bedroom ground-floor apartment, part of a converted barn in an award-winning village.

£325,000



8 Churchfield Court, Girton, Cambridgeshire

A spacious two-bedroom cottage in excellent decorative order, looking out over the gardens - only three miles from Cambridge.

£360,000



17a Bramley Grange, Bramley, Surrey

An unusual two-bedroom penthouse apartment with lovely views across the mature gardens, close to the village centre.

£295,000



13 North Mill Place, Halstead, Essex

In a corner position, this two-bedroom cottage overlooks a beautiful well-landscaped courtyard garden.

£210,000



18 The Orchard, Fairford, Gloucestershire

A charming Cotswold stone three-bedroom cottage with a conservatory, around a tree lined garden with a swimming pavilion.

£300,000



33 Mytchett Heath, Mytchett, Surrey

A detached open plan two-bedroom Wing house with integral garage, in extensive grounds of lawns and woodland.

£425,000



8 Carysfort Close, Elton, Cambridgeshire

A stone built two-bedroom first floor apartment with a covered balcony and wonderful unspoilt views over parkland.

£250,000