

Solicitors expand with new city office

A HUSBAND and wife who have run a Sunderland law firm for more than a decade have just opened their first office in Newcastle.

Jacqueline Emmerson and her husband and business partner Michael Robinson have built up a broad client base for the multi-disciplinary practice Emmersons Solicitors since it opened in 1998.

It is now looking to the Newcastle market, increasing client reach as far as South East Northumberland, with a new office in Gosforth High Street.

Mrs Emmerson, who also lives in Gosforth, said: "Our aim for the Gosforth office is to make it the 'law firm of choice' for people in Gosforth and beyond."

The firm was set up by Mrs Emmerson and has since grown into a multi-disciplinary practice covering family law, residential and commercial conveyancing, commercial litigation, wills and probate, criminal law and motoring offences.

The couple also hope that the office will bring more jobs to the area, expanding its current workforce of 11 members of staff across both offices.

She said: "We pride ourselves in having expertise in all fields of law, so if a client needs representation on a house they are buying, we could also



BRANCHING OUT Michael Robinson and Jacqueline Emmerson have opened an office in Newcastle.

direct them to one of our lawyers who can arrange all their family matters, make their wills and essentially plan for their entire future.

"We are obviously very well known and respected in Sunderland and as we have seen an increase in work volume and demand from clients that live

outside of Wearside, we decided to take the plunge into the Newcastle marketplace.

"Our future goal for the Sunderland office was always to expand it and have a second office. Newcastle is the obvious appropriate move for us as having a Newcastle base allows us to

capture a far larger client base and work with people in the outskirts of the city centre and more rural areas.

"I am particularly interested in increasing the family law side of the business and working with people in Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland areas.

Metnor looks homewards to achieve growth targets

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BUILDING and property company Metnor, which recently delisted from the stock market, has unveiled ambitious plans for growth focusing on its building services division Norstead.

Newcastle-based Metnor bought Norstead in 1992 and last year it brought in half of the group's £80m turnover. Around £15m of Norstead's current revenues come in from Metnor's base in Maidenhall in Kent and Metnor boss Stephen Rankin says he now wants to develop Norstead's North East profile.

To help achieve his target of matching the southern office's performance in the North East Rankin has just appointed a new managing director of Norstead and is already seeing signs of improvement.

He said: "Last year's turnover from the Norstead in the region was £3m but the level of current orders coupled with recent order successes

sees us forecasting a turnover out of the Newcastle office of £10m in the current year.

"Most of our focus in recent years has been on the London market but we are now turning attention closer to home.

"The new managing director Billy Thorburn's vast experience in the sector has rejuvenated the Newcastle office and the company as a whole. We are excited to be on a growth track in the region and over the next few years we are aiming to match revenues from our South East office at over £40m."

Metnor expects to increase the number of regional Norstead employees from 59 to 70 this year, with further staff being employed in subsequent years.

Rankin's ambitious plans following a bruising few months which culminated in his decision to quit the stock market, saying Metnor had been seriously undervalued by the City.

This coincided with a radical shake-up at the company which has seen £1.5m taken out of the company's cost base and staff numbers reduced by 80 to 350.



AMBITIOUS Stephen Rankin.

Metnor is comprised of three divisions - Metnor Construction, Norstead and Metnor Property - and with much of the group's work coming from public sector and healthcare contracts it is surviving the recession better than many competitors.

So far this year Norstead has secured

work on hotel, care home developments and student accommodation developments.

Metnor Construction had a record 2008 with sales topping £40m after securing major contracts with healthcare companies to build new care homes.

While 2009 is proving more of a challenge Alan Greenwell, the managing director of this division, says it has contracts in place for the next two years, including the construction of a 395-bed student accommodation block for Northumbria University on Stoddart Street, Newcastle.

Rankin says he is optimistic that given a strong finish the group may come close to last year's sales figures.

He added: "The changes in the group this year have created a much leaner structure providing us with the ability to be a serious competitive force. The business is in good shape. We have a strong order book going forward and we are very excited about the future."

Metnor left the stock market in March this year after 10 years as public company. During that time sales rose from £10 to £80m.

BUSINESS TODAY

RETAIL

Celebrity jeweller loses its sparkle

EXCLUSIVE Jewellery firm Theo Fennell has lost £1.3m as the downturn and a string of ventures took their toll.

The jeweller, which has counted Elton John and Victoria Beckham among its customers, blamed "a number of unwise management decisions" for its woes.

It was forced to write off £1.3m after a failed move into fragrances, while new concessions in Dublin and Westfield London were closed within months.

It will now focus on its jewellery business, under its new management.

ENGINEERING

Balfour cements huge contracts

ENGINEERING group Balfour Beatty has won places on six construction projects worth more than £250m through its contractor Mansell.

The deals include Devon County Council's Construction Framework South West, which is involved in a range of new-build and refurbishment projects.

RETAIL

Moonpig sees its profits soar

ONLINE greetings card retailer Moonpig said pre-tax profits more than doubled from £2.5m to £5.7m in the 12 months to April.

The group, which was founded in 1999, said sales also soared to £30.9m from £7.9m the previous year.

It sells more than six million cards a year.

GAMING

Gaming firm to hit mainstream TV

INTERACTIVE gaming firm NectPlay TV has secured a five-year deal with Channel Five to broadcast its SuperCasino.com live TV show in late-night tofeshopping windows.

The casino programme will initially air from 12 midnight until 4am three nights a week, extending to six nights a week by October and seven nights from early 2010.

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