

## **Profile on Sarah Dunning, Chief Executive of Westmorland Ltd**

Only 24% of family businesses make it to second generation

Westmorland has had a very successful three years under its new Chief Executive. Sarah is passionate about the brand values of the Company and how this is manifested in everything the Company does from décor to recipes. Every member of staff has a copy of our ethos square, which simply explains what makes us different as a Company and everyone realises that they have a very important part to play in making the business unique.

Sarah has vision, enthusiasm and determination and inspires all who work for her. Sarah has been very clear about her vision throughout and the direction in which she wants to take the Company, which interestingly is in the opposite direction to all the other Motorway Services Station operators. Welcome Break, Roadchef and Moto are running less of the outlets within their Service Areas themselves, and bringing in well known franchise instead such as M & S, WH Smiths, KFC and Burger King.

Sarah, for whom it is vital to retain the ownership and management of all elements of the business, because without this you can't strengthen your brand, has taken a contrasting line. Sarah has a holistic approach where the Company ethos is felt in every part of the business – pride in our homemade food, promotion of local talent, support of the artisan and celebration of the locality. The last three years have seen significant reinvestment in the Company – all of which have strengthened the ethos. They include the creation of a new forecourt shop on Tebay Services Southbound where more space has been allocated to selling local produce, a major refurbishment at the Westmorland Hotel where new contemporary design utilises natural materials throughout and at Rheged the opening of the new Discovering Cumbria Exhibition and Cumbria Information Centre, a new children's pottery workshop, outdoor play area and the new Rheged Café. Also contributing to the success has been a new management structure and the implementation of operational efficiencies.

For Sarah, a progressive and dynamic people culture is essential. Part of this is about creativity and environment in which talent can rise and contribute to the business. It is also about having a business which is connected with its community. To that end, Westmorland has adopted Eden Valley Hospice, which opened the first children's hospice in Cumbria in 2007, as the Company's charity partner. The Westmorland staff have pledged to raise £50,000 over 5 years – so far we have raised £10,000 by a number of initiatives including the Windermere Lake Swim, entering a team in It's a Knockout at the annual Cumberland Show, running the London Marathon at Rheged on a treadmill, electronic Season's Greetings and collection boxes at each till point. The

Charity Partnership has had great benefits in building team spirit and our Chief Executive Sarah Dunning has been hands on with all our fund raising exploits.

Sarah recognizes that the success of Westmorland depends entirely on our people, and there are many staff who go above and beyond what is expected of them during the course of their work. So Sarah introduced the Shine Awards to reward shining stars. Everyone is encouraged to nominate the colleagues they feel show an outstanding commitment to their work and 300 nominations were received in 2007.

**Ends**