

on the GRAPEVINE

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prime numbers ...

■ **SPENDING POWER:** Supermarkets enjoyed a 0.6% year-on-year sales boost during 2009. The latest CSO stats have motor trades down 4.5%, even though SIMI's figures touted a 5% increase for January on the back of the new scrappage scheme. Elsewhere, no grey areas, just unrelenting black — pharma, meds and cosmetics, -2.0%; clothing and footwear, -4.2%; bars, -9.9%; and other retail sales, -11.7%. Overall, sales were -17.3% for January and -4.8% in the year in volume terms.

any other business...

Meet and greet



Global sales executive with IBM, Denis Collins, greeting Taoiseach Brian Cowen at a Cork chamber event sponsored by IBM Ireland.

Orders flood in for JFC's Aquacube water tanks

PLASTICS manufacturer JFC has been enjoying a flood of new orders for its 'Aquacube' emergency water tanks ever since the crippling water shortages in December and January.

The surge has mostly come from private and municipal clients in Ireland and England where the flooding, paradoxically, caused huge shortages in clean drinkable water. Developing new markets is now the priority for JFC, whose head office is in Tuam, Co Galway, with operations in Britain, Holland, Poland and South Africa.

The company has secured an order of 600 emergency tanks for Severn Trent Water, which serves over eight million customers in Britain, stretching from the Bristol channel to the Humber, and from central Wales to the East Midlands.

Severn Trent Water is one of the largest water companies in Britain. The tanks will be sited on street corners and used to supply emergency drinking water to houses in the event of mains water supply failure.

JFC director Colm Concannon notes: "Given the recent unprecedented



JFC's Aquacube emergency water tanks.

weather conditions here in Ireland and Britain over the last number of months with extensive flooding and frost, curtailment on public water supply and shortages due to frozen pipes have never been as common. With temperatures reaching -16° in parts of the country during December and January, the integrity of existing water pipe work has been seriously compromised with severe ground frost causing leaks and leading to interrupted water supply."

Suitable for potable and non-potable water use, the JFC Aquacubes are approved under the Council of European Union Drinking Water regulations for use in public water supplies. JFC has won a series of industry awards for the product.



CIMA vice-president (Cork-Kerry) Jacinta Nolan (purple dress, centre), president (Cork-Kerry) Sheila Lewis (far right), with guest speaker and CEO of CPL, Anne Heraty, and lady members of CIMA's Cork-Kerry branch Committee at their annual dinner, Maryborough House Hotel, Douglas, Cork City. Picture: Clare Keogh/Provision

E-skilling teachers key to future, says Microsoft executive

E-SKILLING Ireland's teaching population is the key to a more sustainable economic future, according to one leading IT industry figure.

Microsoft Ireland HR director Fiona Mullan said: "We need to start providing people with the tools they require at school and ensure that over the course of a career those vital e-skills are continually developed. "We need to begin with our teachers. With continuous professional development they can ignite that spark and thirst for knowledge that we hope will encourage students to develop their e-skills. In ten years time, we'll be using technology in ways we

haven't thought of yet." Fiona Mullan is also chair of Fast Track to IT (FIT), a government-backed initiative to upgrade the e-skills of Ireland's rapidly ageing population. The fear is that Ireland will fall out of touch without extensive upskilling in this area.

E-skills were in the spotlight last week during EU e-Skills Week. FAS and the ESRI predicts that up to 250,000 jobs will be created in the next five years, while the IDA expects to create 105,000 jobs between now and 2014. The majority of these jobs will be technology-driven.

■ For more, visit: www.fit.ie or <http://eskills-week.europa.eu>

Tradesmen's organisation warns about cash-only cowboy jobs

BLACK market home improvements have soared since the downturn, and Irish home owners could pay the price when it comes to making future insurance claims against burst pipes or gas-led fire damage, says a tradesmen's representative organisation.

Home owners are taking serious risks in hiring under-qualified tradespeople, says Onlinetradesmen.ie, and the tax evasion involved is coming under increasing governmental scrutiny. A survey by Onlinetradesmen.ie, an online source of accredited trade professionals, has put under-the-table mixers clearly in the spotlight.

Onlinetradesmen.ie MD Ted Laverty notes: "There has been a flood of people who had been working on sites, with minimal experience. People who had been building houses under the direction of four senior men, working to a formula. A lot of them have been let go. They are drawing the dole, and doing tax-free mixers at knock down prices on the side, pretending to be carpenters and plumbers."

"The evidence is anecdotal, but we have heard of specific cases where the shoddy work could have serious long term consequences. Everybody is looking for a bargain at the moment, but when it comes to home improvement that can come back and bite you in the rear.

"Non-compliance with regulations can also create problems when it comes to trying to sell your house. Anybody can call themselves a plumber or an electrician. You could be bringing a monkey into your home and you'll know no different unless you ask for certification. We work with FAS, HETAC and the other training bodies to ensure people are properly qualified.

"Property owners should always hire a professional. Check their qualifications, their trade associa-



Onlinetradesmen.ie MD Ted Laverty warns home owners that they are exposing themselves to serious risks by using unqualified tradesmen.

tion membership and get a cert for the work. For any sizeable job, you should get a contract in place. That way, everyone is protected."

Members of Onlinetradesmen.ie highlighted the rise in cash-only home improvement jobs during a recent survey. The survey also revealed a perhaps surprising degree of optimism among tradesmen, 28% of whom predict a definite increase in business from 2009 levels. A further 53% of respondents identified the potential for increased business in 2010. Some 65% plan to undertake training in 2010, while 13% see potential for hiring new staff this year.

The survey was conducted in February 2010 with more than

2,400 qualified trade professionals participating.

The internet-based network also recently issued a Home Improvement Index which found that the average spend on a home improvement project has decreased from €15,000 in 2006/07 to €5,000 last year. People are spending less, but people are also becoming increasingly aware of green-focused grants with the likes of Sustainable Energy Ireland (SEI), which can help reduce their domestic energy consumption. Naturally, this is also good for tradesmen.

As Ted Laverty notes: "The survey results reveal a better outlook for the home improvement sector in 2010 coming off the back of a

very difficult 12 months for trade professionals. This optimism is borne out by an increase in home improvement projects submitted by property owners through the Onlinetradesmen.ie service so far in 2010. While home improvement projects are undoubtedly reduced in terms of size and value from previous years, there is still strong activity nationwide.

"The SEI deserves credit for fuelling activity in the renewable and insulation sectors through their property owner grant schemes. Overall projects are now more affordable for property owners, with trade professionals having already reduced their fees significantly in 2009. Unfortunately, this has also

resulted in an increase in unqualified operators doing 'mixers' in the sector — which often result in long term quality issues for the property owner."

Some 8% of tradesmen surveyed plan to cease trading during 2010 due to black market competition. On the upside, 29% are planning to train and upskill this year, and a further 37% are reviewing their training options. Numerous respondents called for price cuts in FAS training courses.

Onlinetradesmen.ie has partnerships with RECI, the Royal Institute of Architects (RIAI), RGII (Register of Gas Installers of Ireland), and the National Guild of Master Craftsmen Ireland.

Banks are 'starting to release funds', says ACCA president

RECEIVERSHIPS will continue to grow, but banks are starting to release funds to small business, according to ACCA president Brian McEnery.

Speaking at the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants President's Dinner in Thomond Park, Limerick, Mr McEnery brought mixed views for Ireland's many struggling businesses.

"I think 2010 is going to see a lot of movement in the whole area of receiverships and examinerships so we need to be on the top of our game. The banks and the courts are really starting to address the cash flow issues companies are facing so business owners need to be able to present strong business plans or restructuring schemes," said Mr McEnery.

Mr McEnery is also a partner with Limerick accountants and business advisors Horwath Bastow Charleton, a non-exec director of



Speaker and associate professor of finance, TCD School of Business, Brian Lucey, and president ACCA Ireland, Brian McEnery at the ACCA breakfast.

the National Asset Management Agency, and he has recently launched a National Insolvency Unit in Dublin.

Those who attended the ACCA event included ex-Taoiseach John Bruton, Mayor of Limerick Kevin Kiely, Crowe Horwath's EMEA

director Bernard Delomenie, Horwath UK principal Erlend Heiberg, ACCA global president Brendan Murtagh, Irish Taxation Institute president Olivia Lynch, TDS Michael Noonan and Kieran O'Donnell, and Liam Irwin from the Revenue Commissioners.

Technology entrepreneur Ray Nolan guest speaker

INTERNET entrepreneur Ray Nolan is guest speaker at innovation centre NovaUCD's open morning on Tuesday, March 23.

The founder of Web Reservations International and Worky.com, Mr Nolan will reveal the secrets of his entrepreneurial success at the Entrepreneurs Live! seminar. Last November, after 10 years at the helm, he sold Web Reservations International for more than \$340m to San Francisco private equity investor Hellman & Friedman.

Ray Nolan said: "I strongly encourage everyone, especially students, to seriously think about getting involved in entrepreneurship. New and existing entrepreneurs, especially high-tech entrepreneurs, have a significant role to play in the development of a smart economy."

Mr Nolan's talk is part of the Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown 2010



Ray Nolan: guest speaker at NovaUCD's open morning.

Enterprise Week. Other speakers during the week will include: David Seavers, co-founder Aonta Technologies, Owen O'Connor, founder, Cernam and Dr Emmeline Hill, co-founder, Equinome.

■ For more, see: www.ucd.ie/nova/events



■ **PADDY MAGUINNESS** has been appointed MD of poverty relief agency Traidlinks. He previously worked in senior roles with Concern for 30 years. He has been CEO of the Niall Mellon Township Trust. He is a board member on the Equality Authority, an advisor to EEPA (European External Policy Advisors). He is a former president of joint advocacy body Alliance 2015.



■ **LORRAINE CLEMENTS** has joined food and facilities management firm Aramark as director of cleaning services. She spent the last 25 years with OCS Ireland in senior roles, including MD of the cleaning and security division for seven years. Aramark has clients in pharma, financial services, IT, manufacturing, education and healthcare. It employs 4,000 people throughout the island of Ireland.



■ **SIMON GRANT** has been appointed technical architect at IT Focus. He was previously a technical architect and senior systems engineer with Datapac for five years. He also spent six years with Aviation Systems, designing and implementing networking systems for aviation leasing and aircraft spare parts brokering clients. He holds several IT industry qualifications, including Microsoft, HP and VMware.



■ **EVA ROSS** has joined Yara Fertilisers as area manager for the Republic of Ireland. A native of Mullingar in Co Westmeath, she is an Agricultural Science graduate from McNeese State University in Louisiana, USA. This is the first time that Yara has appointed a person with specific sales responsibility for its range of branded complex, compound fertilisers in the Irish market.



■ **EMER FINNAN** has been named finance director with EBS Building Society. An executive director since 2007 responsible for strategy, legal and secretarial services, she brings 20 years financial services experience to the new role. She was previously a director with NCB Corporate Finance, responsible for financial services and advising on transactions. She has worked with ABN AMRO, Citibank and KPMG.



■ **JOHN TAYLOR** has joined 4FM as programme director. He has extensive experience as a radio manager and programmer in Ireland and in his native New Zealand over the last three decades. He was previously a programme director of 98FM in Dublin, and operations manager for the Radio Network in Auckland, New Zealand. He will work closely with Jim Miley, newly appointed CEO of 4FM.