

Business **barometer**

Our new column looking at what's hot and buzzing on the local business scene



Chef cooks up a tasty donation to Grove House hospice funds

The new owner of a top St Albans restaurant has raised a huge £3,800 for Grove House by cooking for bidders in their own homes.

Phil Thompson, who took over Darcy's, now THOMPSON@Darcy's in Hatfield Road last November, cooked for two bidders and their guests as a prize offered for an event held by the St Albans Chamber of Commerce.

The lucky winners were Bob Stephen from Harpenden and John McGowan of Radlett.

Bob said: "Phil cooked for eight of us last month and it was a wonderful menu. We had Tortellini of native lobster, vine tomato consommé and basil, roast English quail, sautéed sweetcorn, spring onion and peanuts; pan roasted fillet of Cornish Brill, wilted lettuce, scallop and tarragon butter, as well as slow roast sirloin of Dedham vale Beef, creamed potatoes, braised cheek croquet, girolles and thyme jus - followed at last by wild strawberry mousse, compressed English strawberries, shortbread crumble and white chocolate."



■ Phil Thompson, legendary football referee Graham Poll and Marianne Gearing at the St Albans Chamber of Commerce St George's Day lunch

He added: "Everything about the evening was absolutely first class. Phil arrived with Dan, his colleague and they were very professional in what they did. The food was served when we asked for it and it was all superb - we couldn't fault it."

"All my guests were most impressed and I will definitely book him to cook for me again and will be

in to visit him at the restaurant soon."

John said: "Phil produced a five-course tasting menu which was out of this world. After each course we had a different wine to suit each one. A wonderful night was had by all. I would definitely do this again and also suggested a cooking school, which I said I would sign up to. A big

thank you to Phil and his staff for a wonderful night and I would recommend anyone to visit his restaurant."

Colin Ivey, corporate funding manager for Grove House said the amount raised through Phil's prize was a tremendous achievement and the total pledged at the Chamber of Commerce St George's Day event - of which Marianne Gearing, Phil's fiancée, is a very active member - came to £14,500 as a result.

"Our massive thanks to all prize givers and bidders, as well as special thanks to Phil and Marianne from the restaurant for also being sponsors and to Chamber executive director Lisa Bates.

"We are also delighted that Phil and Marianne have agreed the same prize for the sports dinner on February 5, 2015 so it should prove popular."

The St George's Day Lunch is the Chamber's biggest event of the year, with around 300 people attending. Anyone can attend and the auction is held to raise money for a chosen charity.

Betting firm celebrates rise in profits

St Albans-based spread betting and fixed odds operator Spreadex is celebrating a rise on profits by nearly 30 per cent in a year.

The firm, which offers sports betting and financial trading from one account, posted profits before tax of £18.5m from a turnover of £35.4m for the year ending May 31 2014.

Spreadex, based in the Ziggurat, Grosvenor Road, was originally formed in 1999 but has seen rapid growth in recent years and posted pre-tax profits of £14.4m from a turnover of £29.4m last year.

The figures came before the company enjoyed a record month of new sign-ups and bet numbers in June due to the World Cup, plus volatility in the financial markets.

The company plans to launch further financial trading products later this year that it hopes will help keep customer and bet levels growing.

It is also relocating to new, larger premises in Upper Marlborough Road, St Albans, later this year due to growing staff levels with now more than 100 people employed by the firm.



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