



23 May 2018

Full speech of Nik Hardy,

President of Burton & District Chamber of Commerce

Good afternoon and a very warm welcome to this, the Burton & District Chamber of Commerce AGM.

It is a great pleasure to be hosting the event today and I'm particularly pleased to see so many businesses represented from across the area.

For those who don't know me, my name is Nik Hardy and, just a short 12 months ago, I was delighted to be voted in as president of this chamber division.

I spoke then of my enthusiasm for the chamber and how invaluable it is to the local business community.

The last year has proved, yet further, to me that there is a great appetite for a strong and successful chamber in this region. A chamber which works tirelessly on behalf of its members to help them develop and thrive – both individually and collectively.

It's fair to say that the first 12 months of the presidency have had their challenges. It was just 2 weeks into the term that I unexpectedly launched my TV career - with a live interview on the BBC Midlands Today.

Sadly, my specialist subject of the day was not Burton Albion, or even Hardy Signs – but instead I was quizzed regarding the second of the now infamous, Burton Bridge closures.

It was clear that the president's role would require a step outside of my comfort zone from time to time in representing the business community and I felt ready for that challenge.

However, nothing could have prepared me for just how committed I would need to be... In November last year – I have to confess, I slept with Richard Wileman.

Now, I hasten to add that there was, of course, a sleeping bag and a cardboard box between us at the time, and we were joined by around 240 other volunteers here at the Pirelli Stadium.

The 10th annual YMCA sleepout, I'm delighted to say, raised in excess of £50,000 and I'd like to offer my personal congratulations to Paul Laffey, and his team at Burton YMCA for their continued dedication in helping the homeless people of our community.

One of my key objectives as president is to encourage our members to take advantage of the wealth of support available to them and as such I'd like to give special mention to the Stoke and Staffs Growth Hub.

Twenty-eight marked 25 years in business for Hardy Signs, the company that I founded, way back in 1993. Having demonstrated growth through job creation, Hardy Signs have been successful in achieving grant funding – facilitated by the growth hub, for vital capital expenditure in Marketing and development.

It is due, in no small part, to this support that Hardy Signs has enjoyed, and is very proud of, our growth. We recognise that the Chamber and affiliated business resources are an integral part of the growth journey.

If I can leave one message with the businesses in the room today, it would be to seek out and take advantage of these opportunities.

On that note, I would also encourage members of the Burton and District Division to take full advantage of the support available within the wider umbrella of the Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce.

Ten divisions form part of the larger group - under the guidance of CEO Paul Faulkner – who I'm delighted to welcome here today. The group provides extensive support, events and member services which all businesses can benefit from.

Members in the room who would wish to hear more, please speak to Burton divisional director Chris Plant and his team, who provide a vital link to the Greater Birmingham area. The group is currently offering a Brexit Health Check – a free personalised report on how Brexit may impact your business with tips and resources to help you get Brexit-ready.

Myself, Chris and the rest of the Chamber Council are dedicated to growing the group and I'm really keen to show local businesses the value of joining us. It is testament to their hard work that our chamber has continued to prosper over the past 12 months – a trend that I'm committed to maintain during my 2nd year in office.

Now, before our main event, I would like to welcome to the stage Chris Belyavin who will offer a short introduction to the charity 'The Donna Louise Trust' which does some amazing work right here in our community.

I'd now like to introduce our headline guest speaker - Shalini Khemka.

Shalini is the founder and CEO of E2Exchange. She is also a Business Adviser to the Mayor of London and Commonwealth Entrepreneurs Adviser. Please welcome Shalini to the stage...

Thank you Shalini for your time and inspiration today, and fascinating presentation. Thank you also to Chris from The Donna Louise for his words. I'd also like to offer our appreciation to Ben, Fleur and the rest of the team here at the Pirelli Stadium. In addition to the excellent hospitality afforded to us today, the club continues to be act as an ambassador for business in our town and beyond...has certainly continued in raising the profile of the town nationally, just a few months ago taking on the now treble winning team of Man City in the semi-final

of the league cup here at the Pirelli Stadium. On behalf of Burton & District Chamber, I offer our congratulations & thanks and I look forward to continuing that successful relationship.

My final thanks go to you. Each and every one else in the room who represent the companies at the beating heart of business in Burton and surrounding areas. I very much look forward to the next 12 months of my presidency, I look forward to being inspired by your growth and I look forward to being proud of your success.

I'd like to conclude with a quote from Winston Churchill –
Success is not final – Failure is not Fatal – It is the courage to continue that counts