

The Cloud Hotel

Leading lady

Award-winning New Forest businesswoman and owner of The Cloud Hotel, Avril Owton, who is the current chairman of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight branch of the Institute of Directors (IoD), became a member of The Leading Women Entrepreneurs of the World at the organisation's 11th annual gala and celebratory event in South Africa.

An accomplished speaker focusing on building a business and personal development, Avril returned from a weeklong celebration held in Cape Town, Sun City and Pretoria, where the gala event was televised.

A not-for-profit organisation established in 1997, to identify, honour, promote and encourage female entrepreneurial excellence, The Leading Women Entrepreneurs of the World has been dubbed 'the premier global award for the world's women business owners'. Each year up to 15 new women are inducted and receive a pearl ginkgo pin and The Leading Women Entrepreneurs of the World Award. Avril was one of two UK honorees amongst 12 in 2007; Donna Karan and the late Anita Roddick are some high-profile past names, but the majority of honorees are more low-profile high-achievers. Avril arrived at the Table Bay Hotel at the Waterfront in Cape Town for a cultural



Avril Owton receiving the award with (left) The Leading Women Entrepreneurs of the World chairperson Cheryl Womack and (right) Dr Anna Mokgokong, 11th annual gala honorary chair

celebration packed with colour and music. One of the most poignant aspects of the trip was a visit to Robben Island, for a guided tour of the infamous prison, now an official UN World Heritage Site, where Nelson Mandela spent 18 of his 27 years of incarceration. Other visits included the wine-growing Constantia Valley and a tour of the Parliament of the Republic of South

Africa before flying to the event's second location, The Palace of the Lost City Hotel, at Sun City.

The gala and induction dinner in Sun City was the highlight of the week and began with a spectacular firework display for 500 people, comprising honorees, guests and South African dignitaries.

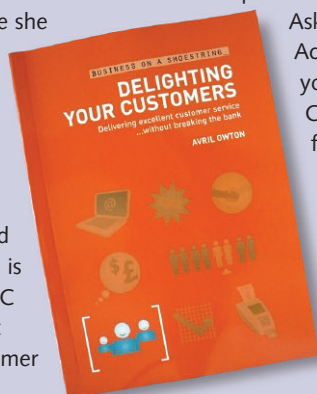
"I was initially a little overawed, because it's so prestigious. I had to pinch myself as I walked up to collect my award and remember 'it's real and I'm here'. I am immensely proud to have been made a member because everything that I have achieved in business, I have done on my own. I've returned inspired and with renewed energy - and it puts Hampshire on the map," said Avril. "The cultural exchanges between women from all over the world were another hugely enjoyable aspect of the trip."

The week concluded with a game drive, traditional outdoor Boma dinner and closing luncheon in the historic Presidential Guest House.

• *If only the England rugby team had enjoyed similar success when 'taking on South Africa'!*

A real delight

Avril Owton marked the publication of her first book, 'Delighting Your Customers on a Shoestring' with an official book launch at The Cloud Hotel, where she welcomed friends and colleagues, higher education teachers, media guests and IoD branch members. They enjoyed wine and canapés whilst Avril signed copies of the book, which is published at £8.99 by A&C Black. A business guide, it covers all aspects of customer



service and is based upon how she turned a failing hotel into an award winner. Chapters include Understanding your Customers, Creating a Customer Service Strategy, Making a Positive Impression, Adding a Personal Touch, Asking for Feedback... and Acting on it, Learning from your Competitors, Handling Complaints and My Formula for Success.

"I have realised another one of my ambitions with this," said Avril. "As I say at the conclusion, 'have confidence' and 'to achieve great things, you must first dream great things'."

Quality rating up in the clouds

The Cloud Hotel has increased its merit percentage from 77% to 82% following an AA inspector's report. Although the 17-bedroom hotel at Meerut Road remains two-star due to the way in which hotel facilities are assessed by the rating system, it now has one of the highest merit percentages for a two-star hotel in the area.

Owner Avril Owton said: "This assessment reflects the hard work put in by my staff every day. They have all contributed to this."

Previously known as quality percentage ratings, the increase from 2004-05 was from 61% to 77%, and with this latest merit percentage of 82%, the hotel has gained more than 20% in three years.

Charity fundraising

Both local and national charities have benefited from ongoing fundraising at The Cloud Hotel. It was the venue for two autumn charity events which together raised £1,064.

A traditional cream tea raised £481 for Oakhaven Hospice Trust at Lymington, which provides specialist palliative care and support to residents throughout the New Forest and Waterside areas. The hotel also participated in the annual World's Biggest Coffee Morning in aid of Macmillan Cancer Support and raised a further £565.

In late summer a cream tea with scones by Linzi's of Lymington was staged as part of the annual Hampshire Food Festival fortnight, and raised £388.50, which was split between Naomi House children's hospice and Marie Curie Cancer Care.

Wedding belle



Popular Polish waitress Beata Pawelczuk has swapped her surname for a new married one, upon her marriage to Adam Marciniak, which took place in her home town of Gdynia in northern Poland in November, celebrated by 50 guests. She's been working at The Cloud for 18 months and received a fun send off from the staff - especially cheeky chef Pete Lovell, who decorated the bike she cycles to work on with tin cans, balloons and various noisy trailing items to wish her good luck. Congratulations to Beata and Adam, who honeymooned in the historic city of Krakov.

IoD retrospective

Avril Owton is currently exceptionally busy in her role as chairman of the IoD's Hampshire and Isle of Wight branch, which has more than 2,000 members, 45% of whom hold posts of managing director or above. It is one of the largest branches in the country, with an office at The Rose Bowl, home of Hampshire County Cricket Club, and is part of IoD South.

"Mentor Magic has seen experts advise a range of inspirational entrepreneurs during three heats," said Avril, "and concludes with a gala dinner and the winner being announced at the De Vere Grand Harbour hotel on December 12."

The branch also held the 'biggest branch breakfast' to date at the Solent Hotel, Whiteley, when speaker David Smith presented findings from a report looking at what the future holds for Hampshire small

businesses and the importance of environmental policies.

"To succeed in business you have to be more than merely good these days - you have to be excellent. The IoD is a first-rate organisation for networking, but its aim is to provide not only such opportunities, but also director development and a collective voice on issues connected with business," explained Avril.

Plans for 2008 include a ladies' luncheon at Chewton Glen on February 4, with speaker skincare guru Linda Meredith, who has launched an exclusive range of facials at the hotel's luxury spa, and a visit to the Farnborough International Air Show, which runs from July 14-20.

• *IoD info from branch administrator Pauline Warren, 02380 473500, or email admin.hants@iod.net*

Forthcoming dates

Book early for The Cloud's autumn and winter fixtures, popular events which range from charity fundraisers to the Burns Night supper.

The annual three-course Christmas dinner in aid of Macmillan Cancer Support takes place on December 2, at 7 for 7.30pm, with carols by Highcliffe Junior Choir.

Meanwhile dust down your tartan for Burns Night, which features a four-course dinner with Major Harry MacFayden piping in the haggis and Scottish country dancing. This takes place on January 26, again 7 for 7.30pm.

The Valentine's Dinner takes place on the actual day, February 14.

Make a note and call 01590 622165 or email enquiries@cloudhotel.co.uk for more information/booking.