

THE **Herald**

Business



Plymouth is working - with room for more

THE number of people out of work in Plymouth continues to fall - with job vacancies now outstripping benefits claimants.

For the first time in recent years the number of jobs advertised as unfilled in the Plymouth area surpassed the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA).

There were 3,326 people claiming the benefit last month, Jobcentre Plus said, a year-on-year drop of 22 per cent from 4,267 in April 2014.

Meanwhile, the Universal Jobmatch

by **WILLIAM TELFORD**

Business Editor @WTelfordHerald

website was reporting 3,589 jobs were vacant in the Plymouth area - 3,027 of them full-time positions.

And Jobcentre Plus said there were continuing vacancies in construction, care and particularly retail and hospitality, with jobs in the pipeline at the new Wildwood restaurant in the Royal William Yard, a proposed Tesco at Tavistock and 60 jobs to be filled at that town's new JD Wetherspoon outlet.

It comes as, nationally, unemploy-

ment fell by 35,000 in the three months to March, with UK employment reaching an all-time high of 73.5 per cent, outstripping all major economies.

Meanwhile, *The Report on Jobs: South*, which includes data from Plymouth but not London, said the number of people placed in permanent roles in the South of England rose for the thirty-third month running in April.

In Plymouth, the improvement has continued across the age groups.

The number of 18- to 24-year-olds out of work last month was just 830, down 32 per cent year-on-year from 1,125.

Just 650 people aged over 50 were claiming JSA in April, down four per cent from 680 a year earlier.

And there was a 30 per cent drop in the number of people claiming JSA for more than six months, from 1,735 in April 2014 to 1,205 last month, and a 34 per cent fall in claimants for more than a year, down from 1,080 to just 710.

"These figures are really strong," said Carlie Richards, from the Jobcentre Plus offices in Exeter Street. "The employment rate in the South West is now the highest of any UK region."

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Family wrap stars

A Plymouth packaging firm is celebrating 80 years in the business - story and more pictures on page 9



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■ Southern Packaging Products' MD Alan Southern, brother Colin and son Nick at their Breakwater Road depot



The paper trail

Family firm has it all wrapped up after 80 years



A PLYMOUTH family business started from a front room in 1935 is celebrating its 80th year.

by GRAHAM BROACH

The Herald

The Southern Paper Company – now Southern Packaging Products – was founded by Henry Southern, known to all as Harry.

founder Harry, is managing director, while his brother Colin, aged 77, though semi-retired, still liaises with established customers in Plymouth City Market.

In the 1930s, he worked for a company making paper bags, but left and went out on his own to sell products including paper, paper bags and greaseproof paper.

Alan's sons Nick and Darren are respectively the company's operations manager and IT co-ordinator.

Initially, the "warehouse" was his front room. The company grew, diversified into cardboard boxes, plastic bags and bubble wrap and changed its name to reflect its new range.

Alan said: "We have a small fleet of vehicles and supply customers in Plymouth, Cornwall and as far east as South Dorset."

One thing that hasn't changed is the firm's bank which, after several takeovers, mergers and acquisitions of its own, is now NatWest.

"Nowadays, 95 per cent of what we sell on the industrial side – packaging for manufacturers' products – and only five per cent to shops."

Southern Packaging Products now operates from an industrial unit near the Royal Mail sorting office at Breakwater Road, Plymstock.

"As a long-established family business we don't go in for big gestures, but we look for opportunities for expansion as they arise, through gaining new customers and acquisitions."

It has five employees and turns over £800,000 a year, selling products by famous-name manufacturers such as Jiffy and 3M.

"We are aware of what is happening in our industry and have a lot of contacts."

Alan Southern, aged 70 and the son of

He added: "Competing against large firms is not easy, but it sharpens the mind!"

Rees is going places – just like his heroes

REMEMBER the name Rees Southern, because in years to come he could be the next Chris Dawson – or your MP.

by GRAHAM BROACH

The Herald

Entrepreneur Rees has just bought an internet holiday company at the tender age of 13 with money saved from wheeling and dealing on eBay.

of insight and is already a member of LinkedIn."

The Torbridge High student, from Roborough, is now the proud owner of Super Travel Bookings, a commission-based business offering discounts on travel, accommodation and holidays.

Rees, the eldest of three brothers, also has political ambitions, and plans soon to join the Young Conservatives.

He is currently saving to launch another online business called Connect Plus, though this may take some time since the website will cost up to £20,000 to construct.

Rees said: "I was 12 when I did my first deal; I bought some phones on eBay for £300, unlocked them and sold them for £750."

But Rees is hoping that the Conservatives' surprise victory in the general election may give him a small boost by making him a profit on a signed photo of David Cameron he bought on eBay for £80.

"I found Super Travel Bookings for sale on a website, thought it had good potential and bought it for £500."

Rees is the son of Nick Southern, operations director of Plymstock-based family firm Southern Packaging Products.

"It's an American business and I made 150 US dollars in booking fees in the first two weeks."

But no silver spoon has been involved in his success so far.

Although the business virtually runs itself, Rees is constantly looking for ways to improve and expand it, and is currently in talks with three major airlines about a sponsorship or partnership agreement which would give him a large advertising budget of between £50,000 and £2 million.

Nick said: "I am very proud of him. He saved the £500 himself by buying and selling things like laptops and phones on eBay."

His aim is to grow Super Travel Bookings into a major player and be running several more start-up businesses in 10 years' time.

"His heroes are Chris Dawson and Peter Jones (below); he's very business-orientated, has a lot

Although business is in his blood, Rees is also interested in politics, plans to join the Young Conservatives at 14 and has long-term ambitions to become an MP.

For the moment, he's doing well at school, has an active social life, plays tennis and belongs to a gym.

One way in which he is different from many teenage boys is that he doesn't play computer games, seeing them as a waste of time.

And what of his plans for Southern Packaging Products?

"I would like to join the family business and help to grow it into a multi-national company," he said.

Don't bet against it.

Don't bet against it.



■ Young entrepreneur Rees Southern shows off his travel website



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