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We must break down remoteness barriers to attract more staff

THE staffing shortage in the Highlands is no secret and the FSB has repeatedly drawn attention to the dire consequences for our region. But why the problem and how should we tackle it?

Well, things like the post-pandemic 'Great Resignation' and post-Brexit reduction in seasonal overseas workers are important, but the big problem is demographic decline. For while Inverness's population is healthy, the situation in many rural areas is dire, populations both ageing and declining.

So, what's to be done? Well, short-term measures like making it easier for employers to recruit overseas by including EU countries within the Youth Mobility Scheme would help many employers, but they don't solve population decline.

Success means



Business Comment

By David Richardson
Regional development manager at FSB

increasing the number of resident young people and families, which means making this region an even better place to live, work and play.

Trouble is, doing so means breaking down remoteness barriers, including transport and digital, and providing affordable accommodation – all very costly. But we – public, private, third sectors and residents – can achieve far more pulling together than we can divided, and we must hope that the Scottish Government's new Addressing Depopulation Action Plan will lead the way in increasing co-operation and collaboration.

Scoopings of success for Miele's

Michael Miele, co-founder and director of Miele's Gelateria talks about the success of Miele's.



David and Michael Miele.

Small Business Focus
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Q How would you describe your business to a stranger?

A A scoop of Italy in the Scottish Highlands. Miele's Gelateria is an independent, family owned and run Italian gelato manufacturer and retailer. We are all about creating new and exciting flavours, modern twists on old classics and totally out of the box new concepts and tastes. We make Italian gelato to the highest quality using local ingredients wherever possible. We love to have fun with flavours and mix it up so there is always something a little bit different to try. No matter how cold it is you'll always get a warm Highland welcome.

Q What inspired you to start the business?

A Our family has been making gelato and ice cream in Scotland for nearly 100 years. I have always admired what my family have done and what they had to go through to survive. It started with my great grandpa Michael in the 1920s who came over from Italy to start a business in gelato and ice cream. This was followed by my Granda Joe and his brothers and sisters. Followed by my Dad, Roberto, and my uncles, Mario and Victor. There has always been passion for gelato in our family history and I have a huge desire to continue that. I felt that myself and my brother David had what it takes to make it a huge success here in Inverness. I wanted to follow in my family's footsteps, do something that could help me provide for my family and future too, while making a product that was deserving of the Miele's name which we believe would make previous and future generations proud.

Q How has your business developed?

A It's been very exciting and taken a lot of hard

work in developing the product through our own techniques and also training with gelato master chefs in both Italy and Sicily. We have expanded year on year, opening new shop locations, trailers on the road and catering at events such as Belladrum. We have a new environmentally friendly and sustainable manufacturing facility. It's incredible to think where it started for us seven years ago to where it is now. When we set up we only planned to have one shop on Church Street with three staff so there have been some big developments. We are grateful to have fantastic people working with us and without them it just wouldn't be possible.

Q What are your plans to develop your business in the future?

A We want to continue as we have been, we don't like sitting still. We always want to keep it fresh and exciting so there will be plenty of development in years to come, but we can't give too many secrets away.

Q What lessons have you learnt from your time in business?

A I suppose one of the biggest things is, it will never be plain sailing. You have to be ready at a moment's notice to flip things on their head and continue to push forward. Covid came out of nowhere and we just had to deal with it. No-one hands you an instruction manual on how to get through it, you just have to dig deep and keep going. When you start a business there are lots of difficulties, it's all new and you will make mistakes, we've certainly made plenty. One of the biggest helps for us was meeting other local business owners and working together, sharing experiences to support each other to succeed.

It's something we try to do now to help new businesses, passing our knowledge from our own mistakes to help them and pay it forward.

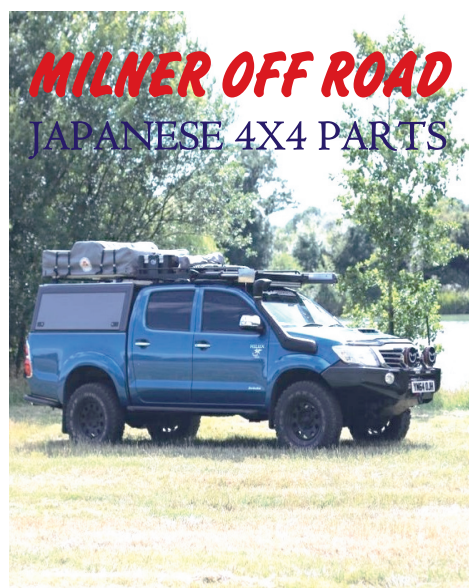
Q What do you love about working in Inverness City Centre?

A Inverness city centre is a fantastic place, full of independent businesses that all want to work together to create a memorable experience for everyone who visits from locals to tourists. It's important to keep that, to continue making Inverness a destination as a lot of people rely on the city centre far more than for just the shops. We have a strong community and it brings a lot of money to the area and we want to keep it that way. Inverness is unique and thriving, hopefully it continues to blossom to its full potential and won't fall victim to the same fate as many other towns and city centres in Scotland. That is one of the reasons we have been very much pro-change but are, like many of our other city centre businesses against the current Academy Street proposals as they stand in their current form.

Q Can you tell us something interesting about yourself?

A I was 22 years old when I wrote the business plan and approached the banks for funding for Miele's Gelateria. I was working as a chef at the time and I knew it was the right time to make the move. I was a brazen 22 year old with a vision for the future and nothing to lose. My brother, David, joined me and we went about convincing our Dad, Roberto, to join us. Everyone thought we were crazy, including the banks who told us it would never work selling "ice cream" in the North of Scotland.

We continue every day to prove them wrong. I like to think we are doing a good job of that.



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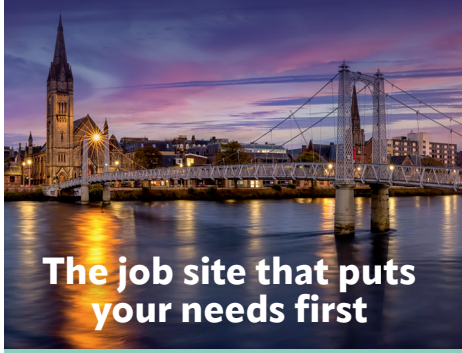
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