

Kick-off for rugby skills in Wales

North Wales could soon have its first wheelchair rugby team, thanks to Manweb.

Budding rugby stars of the future are also to get a boost from Manweb, which has vowed to help youngsters learn the basic skills by extending its support of the work of rugby development officers in schools across the region.

The double boost for Wales's top sport was unveiled at Friar's School, Bangor, when Steve Parsonage, Great Britain wheelchair rugby team coach, met up with local youngsters and Dafydd Myrddin Hughes, under 18 International.

They also unveiled a plaque at the school marking its involvement in the youth rugby development scheme.

Also coaching the youngsters at the school were north Wales schoolboys Dafydd Mali and Owian Evans, who were both helped by Manweb's rugby development support.

David Clarke, Manweb Marketing Director, said: "We are delighted that we are able to expand our support of the rugby development scheme in north



Manweb Marketing Director David Clarke in a scrum with rugby stars of the future at the launch of Manweb's school sponsorship.

Wales, which has already reaped benefits - such as the success of these two players.

"It forms part of Manweb's commitment to help the communities across the region which we serve."

Austin Thomas, District Director for North Wales Rugby Union, has welcomed Manweb's support.

He said: "This commitment for north

Wales means that we will be able to encourage even more youngsters to take up rugby.

"We will also help in the formation of a new north Wales disabled rugby team by supporting training sessions at centres across the region.

"I hope that the new team will be able to take part in a major competition in Cardiff next year."

Good health for Brian

The only time a former Manweb employee ever called at a company medical centre - and then only for treatment to a wasp sting - he was told there were no medical records for him.

It was no surprise however, for Brian Jones, formerly a jointer's mate at Llandudno Junction, had never had a day off work through sickness in his 37 years company service.

Now enjoying retirement at his Penrhyn Bay home, Brian remains in good health which he puts down to plenty of fresh air, sensible eating and a tot of whisky at night.

"My job had always been out in the open and when I first started as a labourer in 1960 I used to follow the depot's van and trailer on my bike," said Brian, who, before joining the company, worked outdoors on a local farm.

"At Manweb there was lots to do to keep me busy, including outdoor work on the expressway through Colwyn Bay and around Conwy and Betws-y-Coed."

Brian still maintains his love of the outdoors by visiting the farm to help out. Gardening, good cooking from his wife Mavis and his regular tot of whisky still keep him going strong.

A former AEU shop steward, Brian



Personnel manager Mike Townson (left) and Wales Regional manager Alan laird (right) give Brian a health check

maintains links with Manweb as a Benevolent Society representative.

Mike Townson, Personnel Manager, Power Systems Wales Region, said, "Brian's sickness record is absolutely remarkable and probably unique. Even the most sturdy and conscientious of us will succumb to illness at some time, particularly over 37 years, but Brian never has. It's a remarkable achievement."

Trophies find new home

Three trophies, which were once displayed in the Sports and Social Club cabinet at Sealand Road, have now found a new home - three homes to be precise.

When Contact published an appeal in June last year to find 'rightful owners' for the trophies, one response came from Mrs Sybil Cooper, a former PA in the Revenue Section, who retired in 1984 after 30 years' service.

Sybil was Captain of the all-conquering Manweb Ladies' First Aid Team, which reached its peak in the 1960's, winning trophy after trophy. Between 1963 and 1971, the Manweb team won five national trophies.

Sybil said: "We started in the fifties in competitions against the top teams from the other electricity boards, with the finals being contested between the best teams from each area."

She says she was interested on reading the item in Contact. "I knew two of the five trophies were lost during the move from Crane Street to Chester, but I was pleased to be able to claim the remaining three."

Now, Sybil proudly displays one at home and has given one each to Betty Johnson and Sybil Timmins, former employees who were her team mates at the time.

CONTACT

NEWSLETTER FOR MANWEB PEOPLE

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GAS SALES HIT TARGET

By Sarah Batley

More than 61,000 homes in the north west and north Wales have now signed up to take gas from Manweb, only three months after the offer was launched.

"We have now beaten our target of 50,000 customers by February 27," says David Clarke, Marketing Director.

"Currently half the people we approach are taking up the opportunity to cut their gas bills. Many new gas customers are in our traditional area and we are also signing up homes in Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Cumbria".

"As well as the direct savings of up to £75 a year, people are also looking at the back-up service we can provide," added David.

Service

"This means ensuring that the gas supply will come with exactly the same safety standards as in the past. We are also launching a new gas maintenance package which covers non-emergency maintenance and servicing for central heating."

Despite objections from British Gas, which will not be able to supply electricity until September this year, gas regulator Ofgas ruled that Manweb and other new entrants in the market can continue to sign up customers.

"We believe the gas regulator's decision is in the best interests of the consumer and we are continuing our sales effort throughout the region using door to door sales teams and direct mail," said David.

Merseyside, Greater Manchester, and Lancashire on 27 February. On 27 March Cheshire, Shropshire and Staffordshire will open while north and mid Wales opens on 24 April.

See pages 4 and 5 for news of Manweb's new gas call centre at Warrington.



Sun beckons for Pat

A day's leave became a bumper holiday bonus for Employee Learning Co-ordinator Pat Lewis.

Pat, who is based at Manweb House, had hurriedly arranged a day off to look after her daughter Katie, who unexpectedly had to be taken to hospital.

Later, at home in West Kirby, Pat turned on the TV in the middle of 'This Morning', the Richard and Judy show. She was just in time to hear a phone-in competition question, which she decided to answer.

Next day, back at work, there was a message on her answer-phone, asking her to contact Granada TV. "I thought it was a wind-up at first, but when I enquired around the office, I realised no-one knew anything about it," said Pat.

It was quite a surprise when she contacted the television company and was told she had won a holiday to the value of £1,000 to anywhere in the Mediterranean area. "I just couldn't believe it," she said.

Now Pat is ploughing through the holiday brochures to find a suitable location for herself, husband Alex - a former Manweb employee - and her other two daughters Lisa, 14, and 16-month-old Jessica. She is pictured (left) with Alex, Kate and Jessica.

Time ticks on for Millennium

The impact of the Millennium date change on every business operation worldwide has been described as a 'time bomb'. But while some sit back and wait for the explosion, the more enlightened have already set about defusing the situation.

Manweb is an integral part of the ScottishPower group approach. Each Business is responsible for its own Year 2000 (Y2K) compliance and has a Year 2000 Co-ordinator and project in place.

The Manweb Year 2000 project team is responsible for Manweb specific areas and is working closely with Power Systems and Energy Supply Project teams to ensure that there are no gaps nor duplications in the Programme.

The group-wide project is led by Ian Russell, ScottishPower's Finance Director, who is the sponsor. A Year 2000 Programme Office is in place to co-ordinate the projects, with Jim McCaffrey as Year 2000 Co-ordinator.

The target for Year 2000 compliance of critical systems is 30 September this year, with an ongoing programme for less critical systems.

The three areas covered by the programme are: IT Systems (as requested by the businesses), Business Operations and Automated Control Systems.

The main problem is actually a design limitation in a number of products including process control systems, IT systems, PCs and assorted desktop applications, access and safety-related items - in fact, most items with embedded microchips and date functionality.

Dates

When such systems were originally programmed, the year 2000 wasn't taken into account. Dates were often abbreviated, for example 10 January 1998 became 10-1-98.

Unfortunately, in this system, the year 2000 emerges as 00. In other words computer systems are not able to recognise the difference between 20th century and 21st century dates. This could lead to wrong calculations, unpredictable results and even system failures.

Computer chips with this flaw are installed in many pieces of equipment already in use and even in equipment now on the market.

One of the first tasks of the Manweb Y2K team was to conduct an inventory in September last year which logged all pieces of equipment with date functionality. A red sticker was placed on



Project Co-ordinator Brian Sheppard, seated, second left with the Y2K team, which aims to defuse the time bomb.

all items which could be at risk as non-compliant. The aim is to create a group database for Y2K compliance date achievement.

It will be assumed that everything is not compliant until the project team proves otherwise. A green sticker will be issued to prove compliance. If you see a piece of equipment without a sticker, which may have date functionality, please contact your co-ordinator.

At Manweb the project is sponsored by Chief Executive Charles Berry with Brian Sheppard from Property Services as Y2K Project Co-ordinator. Bob Campbell, Information Systems Manager is responsible for Buildings and John Wolfendale for Manweb Contracting.

If not properly managed, the 'timebomb' will have devastating effect on the business, its people and its contracts.

New Year, New Look

This year will see many changes for Manweb, with the company selling gas for the first time to householders, and competition in the electricity market.

Manweb has now been part of ScottishPower for more than two years and has been successfully integrated into the group along with Southern Water.

As the marketplace opens up it is important that the whole group is easily recognised by customers and so ScottishPower is undertaking a major exercise which will lead to changes for some well-known logos, including those for Manweb and Southern Water.

The new logo for Manweb will be introduced across the company in the coming months in such a way as to save money, through economies, rather than to cost money. A working party to oversee the implementation has been established and all items that currently bear the Manweb logo will be reviewed.

The replacement of these items will be phased, taking advantage of cost reductions from group or single point purchasing.

The changes across the group are aimed

to improve the corporate identity and lead to brand development. As Manweb Chief Executive Charles Berry points out: "What football team plays in different jerseys? It is important that we shall share in a common identity."

At the moment ScottishPower uses six different identities, showing the different parts of the group, but without a consistent approach.

Research shows that well established regional names, such as Manweb and Southern Water, should be retained. But as the integration of services - water, electricity, telecoms, gas - is a strong selling point, the group identity needs to be promoted alongside regional identities. The plan is for a blend of regional and group identities, with each separate part - such as Manweb - trading under its own name while its identity will continue to incorporate the group Powermark logo and the suffix, A ScottishPower Company.

A ScottishPower corporate identity information sheet will be appearing on noticeboards soon. For more details contact Corporate Communications at Manweb House.

BOOST FOR REGION

Manweb contributes more than £388 million to the regional economy and supports more than 7,000 jobs indirectly, according to a detailed study carried out by a leading business consultancy.

Business Strategies Ltd reviewed the 1996-97 activities of Manweb, along with ScottishPower and Southern Water.

The review also showed that ScottishPower nationally contributes around £5.6 billion to the UK economy and supports 153,000 jobs nation-wide, directly or indirectly.

Manweb Chief Executive Charles Berry said: "We have always believed that the company played an important economic role in the region and this research underpins that belief."

by Sarah Batley

"We are now providing other services, with 1,000 customers a day signing up for gas from Manweb, and so our contribution to the regional economy will increase."

The report estimates that every worker within Manweb supports at least another job in a local service. This takes into account the magnitude and distribution of the knock-on effect in terms of purchases of goods and service by Manweb in the region, with spending by the company locally supporting 1,970 jobs. Spending by employees accounts for 1,770 jobs in the region.

These knock-on effects are felt throughout the Manweb region, mostly in the wholesale and motor trade sector.

Other sectors included services such as gas and water, retailing, social activities, and manufacturing.

The total impact of the company on the regional economy was £388.97 million. Most of this impact was mainly in the north west of England, with a contribution of £295.34 million and more than 5,000 jobs. In north Wales Manweb contributed £93.62 million to the regional economy and 2,010 jobs supported directly or indirectly. Retailing in Wales received the most benefit from company and employee spending.

The report adds that the impact of Manweb on Wales is less than that on the north west of England because people travel from Wales to shop or use other services.

His master's voice calls to stardom

A dog's life is the good life... Well, it certainly is for a handsome black and white Jack Russell owned by Manweb Meter Reader Dave Leigh.

For Nipper is a much-photographed celebrity mingling with the top names in show business.

When Dave bought him eight years ago as a companion to the family's older dog Toby, the new puppy reminded him of the famous HMV dog named Nipper - so that's the name Dave chose for him.

Luckily, not only was the name the same, but Nipper proved to be just the dog music company HMV were looking for to star in their promotions.

So when Dave and his wife Mary entered Nipper for a competition on Esther Rantzen's 'That's Life' show, in conjunction with HMV, Nipper won and set up the celebrity lifestyle which has been part of the dog's life ever since.

For many years Nipper has attended numerous HMV events, which often involve stars opening stores or promoting record albums.

"It's the largest musical retailer in the country with about 100 superstores," said Dave.

"We've been the length and breadth of the country with Nipper and been photographed with many stars, including Paul McCartney, Cliff Richard, Bob Geldof, Rowan Atkinson, many Coronation Street stars and the groups Blur, Simply Red and Eternal."

Dave and Mary are also well-treated by the music company, often staying all-expenses-paid in top hotels. Such is the status of Nipper that one hotel broke its 'no dogs' rule to provide suitable accommodation.

Last year Dave and Mary took Nipper to various functions.



Meter Reader Dave Leigh with HMV dog Nipper at home in Orford, Warrington.

They met Vera Lynn in Edinburgh and attended the Chelsea Flower Show, at which a rose, named after Nipper, the original HMV dog, was introduced. Toy fluffy dogs, using the Leigh's Nipper as the model, have also been made.

A former self-employed brickmaker, Dave, who joined Manweb four years ago at Warrington, uses flexi-time and holidays to enable him to arrange 'dog days'. His son, Dave junior, who works for Manweb as a trainee electrical distribution manager, also takes time out occasionally to accompany the dog to events.

However, Nipper's celebrity days may be coming to an end, admits Dave. "He's getting a bit too old."

But it may not be all over for Dave, as the family recently bought another Jack Russell with the same markings and, so far, the same temperament as Nipper - features HMV will be looking for in a successor.

It's all systems go for gas from Manweb

There's a buzz of excitement in Warrington these days as a highly-motivated team approaches its own 'cup final'. The team in question is that at the new Domestic Gas Customer Service Centre, and their 'cup final' is full de-regulation during 1998.

Reporting to Martyn Jones, Head of Customer Service, are Andy Jarvis, Gas Customer Service Manager, and Simon Verdon, Gas Operations Manager, who are successfully guiding five team leaders, a training officer and 13 newly-recruited staff through the 'preliminary rounds' ready for 'going gas'.

Andy, who has been with Manweb for 15 years, started in the Customer Accounts department, under the old district structure, and has worked his way up the ranks. Since regionalisation in 1992, Andy has held several management positions within the customer service organisation, culminating in his current role following his move to Warrington in April 1997 as Call Centre Manager.

"We've got a real challenge and a great opportunity ahead of us," said Andy. "The domestic gas market is opening up and there is a lot to play for in trying to follow the group's philosophy of 'building businesses' - in our case the domestic gas business. It's the intention of the team to make our venture a successful one, and we are going for it in a positive, motivated frame of mind. We have the gas experience of our colleagues in Scotland to learn from and we are busy trying to utilise their knowledge in setting up the business in the right way.

"Added to this is the wealth of customer service knowledge that we have in our people who are forming the basis of the gas business. This should help to get us off to the best possible start. After all, when training people on new systems you can teach them which buttons to press but you can't teach them experience in dealing with customers."

Dream

Gas Operations Manager Simon Verdon is also looking forward to the challenges ahead. He said: "My aim is to successfully launch the gas and multi-utility business in Warrington and be the first area of the group to realise the dream of dual fuel and virtual call centre operations. Furthermore, we wish to expand the customer base by affinity partnerships and retain customers by proving we are the best at what we do."

The team leaders are: Frank King (Correspondence), Annabel Pounder and Barbara Smith (Call Centre), Alison Pendleton (Credit Management), Jackie Hatton (Records) and Alan Pendleton (Training). Their teams, all volunteers, were recruited from Manweb Customer Service, mostly based at Warrington.

The team leaders and training officer all spent some time in Scotland last year with their colleagues and counterparts in ScottishPower Gas, gaining experience on new systems relating to gas to complement their years of customer service experience gained with electricity.

"Manweb's systems for electricity are so good it will be difficult to mirror them right away in Manweb Gas," said Alison, who has 19 years' customer service experience. However, she is sure that once the Multi Service Project has 'kicked in', this will put the business ahead of all competitors in the field.

Training

Alison pointed out that she, her team leader colleagues, and those initial 13 recruits were all delighted to be in at the start. They firmly believe that, with the commitment the team has already shown, becoming one of the most successful gas suppliers is just around the corner.

The practices and procedures for domestic gas, and the subject of another phase in Alan's training programme, have been devised and documented by Alison, Alan, Simon and Kevin Mawdsley, Gas Marketing Regional Customer Service Manager



Pictured with Martyn Jones, Head of Customer Service (third from left), are (L-R) Andy Jarvis, Alison Pendleton, Barbara Smith, Frank King, Alan Pendleton, Simon Verdon, Jackie Hatton.

The entire team is motivated by its mission statement - 'Business growth and customer loyalty through service excellence' - initiated from the team.

As Frank King explained: "We'll have to get used to the fact that, in a fully competitive market, retaining the customers we already have will be as important as gaining them in the first place. Customer attitudes will be different. They'll be well aware that they can go elsewhere for their supply. "We must aim to meet and, if possible, exceed their expectations and build up their confidence in us."

Team Spirit

Frank, who has worked in Customer Service for 19 years and has recently spent time in Scotland while involved in the 1998 Change Programme, says he is now looking forward to the challenge of building a team capable of providing the extraordinary service required to retain customer loyalty in the newly-opened gas market.

The team leaders who went to Scotland for an overview of systems and to see how various departments work together in the gas supply business, say they have learned some useful lessons.

"Although ScottishPower Gas has only been operational for about 10 months in Scotland we learned a great deal from them, especially about team spirit, which saw them through a sometimes difficult start-up period," said Frank.

"They warmly welcomed us, gave us their time freely and passed on their knowledge despite the pressure of work."

Alan Pendleton, whose 10 years at Manweb includes training staff in all aspects of customer service, found that the common language was football.

"It's easier to make conversation if you know about the game in this soccer-mad part of the world," said Alan, who joined his Scottish colleagues to watch a Celtic home match.

Jackie Hatton, who has been working on gas since day one, has had five years' experience on industrial and commercial gas.

She admits: "I enjoy the challenge of gas so much that, when ScottishPower acquired us, I followed the gas business to Scotland to work in Cathcart House."

Jackie says she's built up a good working relationship with her colleagues in Scotland, where she worked for eight months. "I feel that the knowledge and experience I have gained will enable me to meet the challenge of the ever-developing gas market head-on."

Looking forward to 'new and exciting times', Annabel Pounder, who joined Manweb in 1992, says: "My aim is to encourage and inspire the gas team to facilitate the provision of extraordinary customer service.

"We hope to surpass the already excellent level of service our Scottish counterparts have provided with the result being customer capture and retention through our unrivalled reputation."

Barbara Smith, after working for several years in customer service with Manweb, says she is also looking forward to using her experience in providing excellent customer service to a new customer base through Manweb's Gas business.

"This job will be totally different. We know and understand electricity; now we'll have to get our heads around calorific jargon and really start thinking gas," she said.

"As a call centre team leader, I think it will be important to ensure that our customers are greeted with friendly and efficient service at all times to ensure customer loyalty," she added.

Alan Pendleton, who will assist in training the

Loyalty

whole team to become a super-efficient unit, says: "The marketing and sales staff have done a remarkable job in capturing so many customers. It's absolutely necessary that we retain them. This will be achieved by having a highly-motivated and well-trained team."

The team is progressing through the 'preliminary rounds', from 1 February 1997 when deregulation took in south east customers, to February this year, when customers in Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, Hull, Lancashire, the



Representatives from Ofgas recently visited the new Warrington gas call centre. Pictured (L-R) are Manweb Gas Sales Representative Claire Pritchard, Gas Sales Manager Ruth Hughes, Gas Operations Manager Simon Verdon, Ofgas North West Regional Manager David Sidebottom, Ofgas Northern Regional Manager Bob Todd, Ofgas Midlands Regional Manager Janet Marsh, Ofgas Regional Manager Helen Woolridge, and Manweb Gas Sales Representative Shelly Batho.

East Riding of Yorkshire and York will follow. The 'cup final' will be reached in June when the rest of the country is deregulated.

The domestic Gas Service at Warrington is on schedule to become a highly successful business.

Paying bills on the Internet

Manweb is to increase its services on the Internet following successful completion of a high security hacker proof network.

Currently customers visiting Manweb's site can register for the company's new gas service. Soon they will be able to pay their gas and electricity bills on the Internet using their credit cards.

Manweb, through ScottishPower, has been working with IBM to provide the high level of security necessary and has become the first UK company to gain IBM's new e-business mark. This business mark is only given to customers who meet the necessary requirements and signifies the high security of Manweb's electronic site.

The advanced Internet security platform - developed by IBM to meet the need of credit card companies - will protect credit card numbers and, when legally accepted for business, digital signatures. To test security IBM has used professional hackers who have been unable to break into the Manweb site.

Chief Executive Charles Berry said that around five per cent of Britain's homes currently have Internet access and this will grow rapidly, in particular with the availability of TV top devices.

"We believe the Internet will come into its own over the next few years as more and more people link up to manage their household budget", said Charles.

Manweb plans further services on the internet including a 'Virtual Shopfront' for Electricity Plus, ScottishPower's electricity retailing business, and on-line half hourly updates on energy usage.

Wheeleasey does it for Hayley

Aromantic trip to the seaside by disabled acycling enthusiast Hayley Anne Reed has led to the development of a unique cycle - the Wheeleasey.

It has been backed by the Cycling Project for the North West with support from Manweb, which has been matched pound for pound by Sportsmatch, a business sponsorship incentive scheme that is administrated by the Institute of Sports Sponsorship on behalf of the Department of National Heritage.

Hayley, a Director of the Cycling Project, who lost her mobility after a cycling accident, asked for help from Liverpool based Chevron, which specialises in cycles for the disabled and light weight active users wheelchairs. They came up with several prototypes, which Hayley has road-tested. Now the new Wheeleasey, designed by paragliding paraplegic Vincent Ross, has gone into production, with the first hand cycle made for two based at the Wheels for All site in Liverpool.

Bill Tubey, Merseyside Regional Manager, said: "We are delighted to help this cycle to be created as we are committed to helping disabled and disadvantaged people in the communities we serve."



Bill Tubey, Merseyside Regional Manager, helps disabled cycling campaigner Hayley Anne Reed (right) launch the Wheeleasey with TV presenter and former Brookside actor Simon O'Brien and Hermine Briffa (left) from the Cycling Project.

On the move to new roles

IT is said that moving house is one of life's most traumatic times. But that must be like planning a picnic compared with Bob Campbell's task of moving hundreds of Manweb staff from location to location.

Bob, with his project team from ISD, ScottishTelecom and MCS, recently finalised the last move after an eight month relocation programme which had to be planned like a military operation.

Local co-ordinators were; Dave Winter, Liverpool; Efon Griffiths, Cheshire; and Dave Grady, Wales.

Bob Cambell, Building Manager Property Services, based at Wrexham, planned the project in response to the need to reorganise Power Systems into a regional operation to mirror ScottishPower's organisation. This obviously meant moving staff between various offices and sites.

Between 30 and 50 people were involved in each of the many moves. The first task was to reach agreement on the allocation of space for each department, including desk layouts and resolving the 'who sits where' situation.

Detailed information had to be accumulated and analysed regarding the moving of computers, telephones and other key equipment.

Then the move itself had to be organised so staff involved could pack up on the Friday afternoon and start work after unpacking in their new location on the following Monday. This obviously meant a great deal of weekend work for the team.

"The first moves started towards the end of June last year and have involved long, often unsocial hours for the team and many other staff," said Bob. "But everyone has been so understanding, and despite the difficulties and disruption, have coped well in a stressful situation."

The moves called for new office accommodation at Rhyl, planning three levels of accommodation at Prenton where 37 groups of people were moved over 10 weekends, increasing office space at Liverpool and replacing existing space at Rhostyllen.

Developed

As a result three Power Systems' regional offices have been established at Liverpool, Prenton and Rhostyllen with staff being devolved from the central functions at Prenton and Manweb House.

In addition logistics is no longer a central stores function supported by stores at each depot. Instead regional based stores have been established for Merseyside at Lister Drive, for Cheshire at Warrington and for Wales at Rhyl.

Also at Rhyl, the depot has been restructured with staff moving to refurbished accommodation in the industrial building.

Finally, to enable ISD to relocate to Queensferry it was necessary to first move the Metering Business into a new office which was provide on site. This has allowed them to bring the Revenue Protection staff from Bromborough to complete the team.

Manweb takes lead on disability

When you are winning the next big challenge is to make sure you keep ahead. And that's just what Mike Townson and his Personnel colleagues are doing in maintaining the company's lead with its Policy on Disability.

Mike, Personnel Manager Power Systems Wales Region, claims: "What we've done in this area up to date has been widely regarded as best practice." But he emphasises that as new legislation supercedes the old, he will ensure that everyone is armed with the appropriate knowledge to help in meeting requirements of the latest Act, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.



Amanda Rothwell, Mailroom Assistant at Warrington, pictured with Mike Townson, discussing Manweb's Policy on Disability.

As Mike explained: "We must comply with the new raft of legislation coming in to promote the interests of disabled people in obtaining and retaining employment."

The company's commitment to people with disabilities was acknowledged as long ago as 1988 with a 'Fit for Work' award from the Department of Employment. In 1995 the company received a SCOPE award for excellence in support of people with disabilities. "We were also one of the first host companies for employing people with disabilities on the Sheltered Placement Scheme," said Mike.

Under the scheme Manweb shared employment costs with sponsoring organisations like SCOPE and was able to employ people with disabilities ranging from slight to severe. "One placement with 90 per cent disability is now working full time for the company after joining us through the scheme," said Mike.

Now to promote the latest legislation and to ensure that Manweb stays leader in the field, Mike and his team are embarking on a company-wide awareness campaign.

The Manweb Policy on Disability states: "We will consult with staff and their representatives so that we make sure our policies and procedures reflect the best practice and fulfil the requirements of current legislation. We will tell our managers and staff and understand their responsibilities.

"We will review this policy every year to make sure that it carries on promoting equal opportunities in employment and access to services for people with disabilities. We will tell our managers, staff and their representatives about any changes to policy."

The latest awareness campaign is already under way with the policy statement having been agreed by the Executive.

"We will bring together this policy and our existing code of practice for the elderly and disabled," said Mike. He has already consulted RADAR (Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation) for advice on disability matters and has negotiated a package of work with them. This includes:

- * A desktop review of procedures
- * Access audits on Manweb premises
- * Recommendations for any necessary changes
- * A training package

The campaign started with a presentation to the Manweb Executive followed by management briefings to promote awareness in line with the booklet 'Management Guidelines'.

A service of half day seminars has commenced for all personnel staff giving a detailed look at the legislation.

Customer Service staff, including staff at high street service centres and receptions, will have a half day too, concentrating mainly on the aspects of the new legislation relating to Access to Goods and Services for People With Disabilities.

Employees not covered in the above will have a half hour briefing session, carried out at their workplace, centred around a brief video presentation.

"Staff need to understand their obligations in dealing with people with disabilities," Mike emphasised. "They could encounter cases of discrimination among colleagues, customers or potential employees. We need, therefore, to reinforce our existing policies so they know how to react or where to get help.

"All we are doing is reinforcing and updating our existing good policy," Mike added.

By-mid 1998, everyone from the Executive down, will have attended some form of seminar or presentation.

Employees requiring further information, help or advice regarding the Disability Discrimination Act, should contact their local personnel section.

Charity honour

The company's support of RADAR was acknowledged when John Illidge, Head of Human Resources, and Mike Townson, were invited to the Association's Annual People of the Year luncheon.

One of the priorities of RADAR's Charitable Trust is to help disabled people live independent lives. The luncheon celebrated the extraordinary achievements of people who have acted with bravery and dignity in terrible circumstances, overcome individual challenges or were sporting heroes.

Manweb customer Christine Evans, Consultant Urologist at Glan Clwyd Hospital, north Wales, received a People of the Year award. She was nominated by her disabled patients and colleagues for her great dedication and for her enthusiasm helping patients to realise his or her full potential.

RADAR Director Bert Massie said: "This year's award winners have shown courage, dedication and commitment, some of them in their daily lives and some in the face of extreme adversity. We are proud to offer recognition of their achievements and we are very pleased to have your company support."

Mike Townson said: "The package of training and awareness raising we have agreed with RADAR recently will ensure that we are able to stay ahead on disability issues."