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Next generation challenge

The Apprentice finalist Kate Walsh was among the judges at a business event to find the next generation of Alan Sugars and Karren Bradys in the West Midlands.

Ms Walsh was judging the Coca-Cola Enterprises Young Chamber challenge, which asked schools from across the West Midlands region to create a new drink for the London 2012 Games.

Ten schools from the West Midlands had to present a concept, business plan and marketing strategy, complete with a radio jingle to advertise the product.

Ms Walsh, who co-hosts Live from Studio Five on Channel Five, said she was very impressed with the enterprising skills of all the teams.

She said: "I wish I would have had something like this when I was at school. I studied business at GCSE and A-level but we didn't do anything as hands-on as this or as relevant to the workplace."

"The Apprentice as a programme has brought business to the masses and kids engage with celebrity and what they see on the television and today was in a similar vein where you have a deadline, you need an idea, you must consider all the aspects of a business and then present it back."

"That makes it so much more interesting and fun for students and schools should incorporate a lot more of it into school."

The event took place at the headquarters of the Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce, in Binley, and the winning team came from Stoke's Clayton Hall School.

Ms Walsh was joined on the judging panel by Stuart Agate, regional director of Coca-Cola Enterprises, David Hooper, from Advantage West Midlands, Derek Kozel, from Young Chamber, and Luke Crawford, from Touch Radio.

Kate Squires, Young Chamber co-ordinator in Coventry and Warwickshire, said: "This event was a great example of what enterprising young minds can achieve."

"It is also very important that bright young individuals are engaged with

hands-on business and it's clear from this event that practical challenges really bring out the best in them."

West Midlands SMEs are 'most pessimistic'

New research shows small business owners in the West Midlands are the country's most pessimistic about their region's prospects during the recession.

Just 15 per cent believe the West Midlands is better placed than the rest of the UK to withstand the downturn, compared to 56 per cent in the South East, 44 per cent in the South West, and 32 per cent in the North East and East Midlands.

A total of 31 per cent of small business owners surveyed in the West Midlands have had to make cuts to their workforce in the last six months, with a further 17 per cent admitting they will be forced to make further job cuts to balance their books.

The survey, carried out by Clifton Asset Management, also revealed that just 60 per cent of the region's small business owners are aware of the Enterprise Finance Guarantee (EFG), the Government's flagship scheme to help them through recession - again the lowest figure for any UK region.

And all this negativity has severely

dentented the region's small business owners' retirement plans, with a full 80 per cent reporting that they felt retirement was further away now than it was a year ago, with a further 22 per cent saying they had put any thoughts of retiring on hold permanently.

"While many commentators have spent the last quarter desperately trying to talk up the economy our research with the people at the sharp end, UK small business owners, paints a very different picture," said Anthony Carty, a director at CAM.

"Small businesses are in the eye of the storm right now and over half in the West Midlands believe the recovery is going to be long and slow. This chimes with Government forecasts that we could be into 2011 before the recovery is properly underway, meaning retirement in the current climate remains a pipe dream for the majority of our respondents in the region."

On the issue of the Government's EFG, he said: "It is a sorry state of affairs when awareness of the Enterprise Finance Guarantee in the West Midlands has fallen from 72 per cent in the last survey to the current 60 per cent, and all at a

time when the region's economic situation has clearly worsened."

Midlander opens bar in Singapore

A Midlands businessman has spread his passion for his hometown club across the globe after creating a home for them a most 7,000 miles away, in Asia.

Despite years of travelling the globe with the Army, one thing that has remained constant for Coventry born Colin Chamberlain is his passion for his home city's football team.

The Sky Blues fanatic is now based in Singapore where he has established the island city-state's first official Coventry