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Cleaning up with ecology as his USP

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Aylesford-based Ridge Crest Cleaning was set up just four years ago, but has already clocked up a massive 2,200 per cent growth in yearly sales to a whopping £2.15 million.

That makes it one of the fastest growing companies in the UK and a big feather – or should that be feather-duster? – in founder **Ian Beach**'s cap.

The firm offers a complete range of services to commercial, public sector, leisure and industrial premises using only environment-friendly and biodegradable products.

That's its big USP – unique selling point – and it achieved a breakthrough in 2005 with the launch of the UK's first green cleaning contract in partnership with Maidstone Borough Council.

Ridge Crest Cleaning's commitment to the environment is now an integral part of the company's ethos, with recycling, paperless working and the use of LPG-powered vehicles forming the day-to-day means of conducting business for the company's 350 employees. They are also working towards becoming carbon neutral by 2010.

This year, in partnership with Welsh rugby captain Ryan Jones, a successful operation was launched in Wales. Mr Beach spoke to KOS Media.

Q What is your business background?

A I've worked in the service industry for over 30 years in a range of senior management roles for some of the UK's leading business organisations. My first managerial positions were at the RAC where I became the organisation's youngest general manager at 26. In the 1990s I held senior roles in two of the UK's top 50 fastest-growing companies.

Q What motivated you to set up Ridge Crest Cleaning?

A There was a point where I recognised that I wanted to run my own business. When I set up Ridge Crest Cleaning in 2004, I had spotted a gap in the market for an environmentally friendly facilities service which was committed to the highest levels of customer service and quality.

It was clear to me that many larger cleaning organisations had acquired the smaller ones at the expense of a quality, personal service.

Clients were crying out for the days when they had a close business relationship with senior people in their cleaning services supplier.



ON REFLECTION: Ian Beach has turned Ridge Crest Cleaning into a polished outfit

Q Do you find it difficult to get the right staff to work for you?

A I understand what businesses and other organisations are looking for when hiring a cleaning contractor.

I recruit hard-working and trustworthy staff. I believe encouragement and support are the most effective ways of getting the best from people, along with strong management back-up.

I have hand-picked every member of my operational management team. I make sure I look after them with a generous pay and benefits package. In return I expect commitment and high standards in everything they do.

Q Do you have special training for staff?

A We ensure that all our staff are well trained and achieve British Institute Cleaning Science (BICS) standards. Many also receive the Cleaning Operators Proficiency Certificates (COPC).

BICS is the largest independent professional and educational body within the cleaning industry. Equally, my management team is trained to at least NVQ level 2/3 specialising in leadership, motivation and planning, all critical areas of competence in our industry sector.

Q Is going green 'business-friendly'?

A We pioneered sustainable cleaning. We are able to deliver lower costs for all our clients while reducing the impact on the environment.

So yes, it is business-friendly and cost-

effective. Use of fewer but more effective products offers up to a 20 per cent cost saving when compared with non-sustainable cleaning contracts. Many of our clients can see an immediate return on investment early in the contract.

Q What are your plans for the future?

A We aim to develop our position within the education sector and build on our 'best value through partnership' approach to continue to expand our operation.

Q What do you sponsor and why?

A I'm a keen sponsor of environmental initiatives and sporting endeavours. We made a substantial donation to the Gift for Learning campaign to complete the new build of Tonbridge Grammar School and supported Skinners School Eco-Schools award-winning project.

At Hamstreet School we sponsored the installation of solar panels for their swimming pool and initiated rugby coaching.

Other initiatives have been set up with the Welsh Rugby Players' Association, Hope for Children, Ospreys rugby; Ashford Rugby Club, Skinners School and Chatham House School. Our nominated charity is Hope For Children.

Q How do you relax?

A My overriding passion is rugby. I also part-own a two-year-old racehorse – Sapphire Prince – and three yearlings from the USA. They are with local trainer John Best.

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