

Innovation award

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Winner: **Connie Parry, Hurns Brewery**

Highly commended: **Anne-Marie Rogan, Swansea YMCA; Mandy Miller, Cutz 4 Mutz Dog Grooming Academy**

Connie Parry, Hurns Brewery (see full profile p32)

Although Connie Parry has won numerous awards and accolades, the Women in Business Awards mean a lot to this affable entrepreneur. "It is fabulous to be nominated, I am very proud because it is a local event from a city that I love," she says.

Today, the company employs up to 70 members of staff, produces eight different bottled beers and several cask ales, owns 17 pubs and has a fleet of almost 30 vehicles. Turnover is in excess of £10 million pounds and growing annually, an unbelievable transformation from those early years as a school leaver.



Anne-Marie Rogan, Swansea YMCA

The majestic Swansea YMCA building was built in 1912 with the finance raised from local businesses and communities. With the help of the most prolific fundraiser in the country and thanks to

the benevolent people of Swansea, the full amount was raised in less than a fortnight.

Anne-Marie Rogan took up the position of chief executive officer with Swansea YMCA in 2007 and was delighted to be in charge of such a wonderful community business. With an Arts Council background, Rogan had run a successful arts company for nine years, before gaining valuable commercial experience from senior positions in both the public and private sectors. She was given the remit of turning around the flagging fortunes of the YMCA in Swansea during a very difficult period of transition. This beautiful Grade II listed building needed substantial capital investment, there was no disabled access, so a lift was installed, and a full upgrade began. The investment was obtained from the Big Lottery, the Welsh Government, local council and the YMCA's own resources.

Rogan spent three years consulting with local businesses and communities to find out what was needed from the new YMCA as well as conducting extensive market research. She then devised a package of innovative business ideas for the newly renovated building. There will be a new fitness centre and a new deli which fronts a nutritional training programme to educate people on the importance of nutrition with commercial kitchens for training purposes. There will be a nursery providing childcare facilities seven days a week. These new business ventures will create 28 new jobs and provide positions to train people from the local community.

New revenues streams have been created from the planned new facilities. Utilising her range of skills, Rogan ensured her objectives were achieved and has already turned a £150,000 turnover in 2007 to £1.3 million today, and going from five employees to 38. Rogan has done a lot more than transform the fortunes of the YMCA. She has given Swansea a hub for both businesses and communities to enjoy.



Mandy Miller, Cutz 4 Mutz

Cutz 4 Mutz first started trading from Mandy Miller's home but as word of her excellent dog-grooming skills spread she had to move to larger premises to accommodate demand. Miller is very ambitious and knew she would not be satisfied with simply owning a dog-

grooming parlour, so came up with the innovative idea of starting an academy for customers who wanted to become dog groomers.

Miller has devised three Lantra-accredited courses; a practical grooming skills course, a foundation course and a business start-up course that covers all aspects of setting up a dog grooming business. Students who have completed the business start-up course have gone on to set up their own successful dog-grooming salons.

Knowing that there would be a lot of competition from other dog-grooming trainers, Miller had to think innovatively to give her business a competitive edge. Miller provides free accommodation for the duration of the courses, something her competitors were not offering. This, coupled with creative marketing campaigns, has proved to be very successful for the business. Students have travelled from Brazil, South Africa, India, Ireland and all over the UK to receive Miller's expert tuition. Miller also offers a free 24-hour, seven days a week helpline service for former students.

Miller works with the Welsh Assembly, Job Force Wales, local schools and colleges on their retraining course requirements for students and is very proud of her dog grooming academy, saying: "My courses are creating new jobs and careers in a tough economic climate."

The next innovative business venture is to sell the Cutz 4 Mutz brand as a franchise, which Mandy is hoping to launch by the end of next year. Former students have already registered their interest and are eagerly waiting to purchase a franchise.

Miller's long-term goal for her business is to become the number one in the country. "My aim is that Cutz 4 Mutz will become the largest independently owned grooming academy in the UK."