

Family business values help us build for future



THRIVING: Katie Langley, one of the founders of JML Contracts, says hard work, honesty, kindness and courage are behind their success. Pictures by Steve MacDougall.

Couple behind JML Contracts tell how positivity and teamwork have helped propel the firm to success

BY IAN FORSYTH

Perthshire building and civil engineering firm JML Contracts has come a long way since it was set up by John and Katie Langley 19 years ago. The thriving Aberuthven venture now has 60 employees and is currently looking at fresh business opportunities outwith Scotland. Katie told The Courier that JML Contracts has just enjoyed another successful year, with all aspects of the business showing steady growth of around 20%-25%. She went on: "Our civils side has continued to expand its pre-fill gabion retaining wall solutions

which is proving very popular with local councils, allowing them to respond quickly to flood damage caused by high levels of rainfall recently. "We have also just taken delivery of a new state-of-the-art CNC machine for our structural insulated panels (SIPs) factory which will allow us to increase throughput of our low-energy house kits by 25%. "Demand for our house kits has seen us travel as far as the Highlands and into England. "Our luxury garden rooms operation continues to expand its range from office pods, home gyms and games rooms to self-catering bothies, garden annexes and outdoor hideouts."

Asked about expectations for JML Contracts for 2024, Katie said the year has already got off to a great start in turnover with a busier first quarter than the last few years. "We hope to build on the local council contracts we achieved in 2023 and also see our new CNC machine pay for itself by knocking out SIPs house kits." John said the firm has opened a permanent JML SIPs stand at the National Self Build Centre in Swindon this year and is looking to make a larger impact and expand its house-building business into the south of England. "We are also looking to send our first house kits across to the Falkland Isles which would be our first

international contract," he added. It was back in 2005 when the business was launched by the couple. So what made them want to be entrepreneurs? Katie said: "I think the fact that both our parents had their own businesses gave us the confidence to follow in their footsteps and do the same. "My father taught us never to be scared to take a risk or make a mistake and used to say that from your mistakes you have your biggest learnings - just don't make the same mistake twice! "I think having been lucky enough to do a lot of travelling and to work in lots of different environments/countries, in

different roles and with different people gave me enough confidence and self-belief to back ourselves and give it a go. "We had plenty of prior work experience to know that if things didn't work out with our own business we could just go back to working for others. "We had very little overheads in the early days with our office at home, one work van and the basics in tools and machinery." Asked about the secret of their success in the years since then, Katie stated: "Always treat your employees and clients as you would like to be treated yourself. "Our core family business values are really important



Top: John Langley from JML Contracts with one of their SIPs buildings. Above: Katie and John with Kevin McCloud during a visit to the Perthshire factory by the Grand Designs team.

to us - we want all our employees to feel a very valued member of the JML team and we try and support them in any way we can through training, career development, frequent company gatherings/events and various wellbeing initiatives. "Hard work has played a bit part in the success of the business. In the early years, once the kids were in bed, we'd frequently be up until the early hours catching up on admin. "Our family values of hard work, honesty, kindness and courage are the same as those we instil in the business and I think one of the reasons we have such great customer reviews and an enviable

reputation with our industry peers." On the subject of their biggest achievements to date, Katie said they had appeared twice on British TV series Grand Designs. She added: "This was once in 2017 when presenter Kevin McCloud visited our factory in Perthshire to film, and the second time in 2021 when we were involved in the Garden Bothy project in Kinross. "Both were thankfully very positive experiences and gave our business money-can't-buy exposure. "We were also involved in the design and erection of the SIPs house kit for the winner of the RIBA House of the Year in 2018.

"It was a really innovative and complex design located in the Highlands with difficult access but the project was a huge, award-winning success so it was very exciting to be part of. "Our largest contract to date has, however, been the newly-located and built Crannog Centre on Loch Tay which recently opened. "We had the privilege of being involved in this project from the start, working as the main contractor, carrying out all the landscaping and civils works as well as designing and manufacturing the modular cafe and museum in SIPs which were all produced off-site at our factory in Perthshire."



Could Scotland receive an economic boost from Taylor Swift?

'Encouraging' rise in confidence with busy summer on horizon

Business confidence in Scotland rose one point during April to 42%, according to the latest Business Barometer from Bank of Scotland Commercial Banking. Companies in Scotland reported lower confidence in their own business prospects month-on-month, down 14 points at 44%. Scottish businesses identified their top target areas for growth in the next six months as investing in their team, including hiring new people and investing in training (36%), investing in sustainability (34%), and evolving their offering with new products or services (31%).

Martyn Kendrick, regional director for Scotland at Bank of Scotland Commercial Banking, said: "Scottish businesses are still facing high costs, but such an encouraging rise in economic optimism suggests the pressure on their bottom lines is starting to ease as inflation comes down. "Looking ahead, events like Taylor Swift's Eras tour, the Edinburgh Festival, and the 152nd Open golf championship are expected to drive a significant influx of tourists to Scotland over the summer so there's lots for businesses to be excited about. "From pubs and restaurants to local attractions, it's expected to be a busy summer. However, if firms are going to make the most of this opportunity for growth, they need to have robust working capital and the appropriate resources in place. "As always, we'll continue to be by the side of Scottish businesses and are ready to help firms make the most of the busy summer trading period ahead."

A net balance of 42% of businesses in the region also expect to increase staff levels over the next year, up one point on last month. The Business Barometer, which surveys 1,200 businesses monthly, provides early signals about UK economic trends both regionally and nationwide. Overall UK business confidence held steady at 42% in April, the same level as recorded in March and February. While firms' confidence in their own prospects dipped by four points to 45%, their confidence in the economy rose by four points to 39%. Meanwhile, the net balance of companies planning to increase staff levels over the coming 12 months climbed six points to 33%. Manufacturing businesses reported increased confidence this month, with a score of 45% (up 4 points) which is the highest level for three months. Similarly, confidence among firms in the services sector (42%) and construction (41%) also improved, largely driven by greater economic optimism.