

1,000 days of The Leisure Review

Depending on when you start the count, The Leisure Review will be celebrating 1,000 days in existence on or about 1 May. Mick Owen, TLR's managing editor, took time out from hand-stitching bunting to consider how the intervening two and a bit years has gone.

Lady Jane Grey, or was it Gray, only got 1,000 days to be Henry VIII's second queen. After that she was beheaded and became the second line of a mnemonic and a byword for the ephemeral nature of fame. Whether The Leisure Review makes it through a second thousand days will depend on luck, macro-economics and the propensity of the advertising departments of a few big leisure companies to put their hand in their corporate pocket. The creative team which produce the magazine certainly think the idea of an independent magazine for the sport, leisure and culture sector has legs.

As the editor, Jonathan Ives is the beating heart of the monthly magazine and he has made his ambitions for the title clear: when TLR was conceived it was a print journal for the leisure profession, not a web-based one. Early planning sessions – held in The Catherine Wheel public house in Goring – focused on the question of who or what would pick up the mantle of The Leisure Manager, the magazine of the Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management (ILAM). ILAM had been publishing a sector magazine for decades and despite some perceptions that it was too much a reflection of the institute – “staid, stolid and focused on grass” – The Leisure Manager fulfilled two roles. “That magazine was a real forum for professional discussion,” said Ives, defending what was, for a time, his baby, adding, “and a source of information, updating and industry knowledge for managers in swimming pools, parks and leisure centres.” Ives argues that the gap still persists, with no title in print covering everything from sports development to the arts and from facility management to parks with in-depth discussion and informed comment as standard.

When The Leisure Review was created the concept was of a deliberately old-fashioned approach to magazine publishing, albeit in a modern medium. The name is intended to be redolent of gentlemen's clubs, smoking jackets and high-backed leather armchairs and early readers happily bought in to the conceit, writing letters to the editor rather than “dropping a text” or “zipping over an email”. The first and by far the most consistent correspondent over time has been Nick Reeves, chief executive of the Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management (CIWEM) and a former colleague of the editor at ILAM, who has proffered closely argued opinions on subsidised exhibitions, the meaning of ISPAL and the social roots of association football. People have argued with him – with some debates going on for months in real time – and others have shared their views on the ruck in rugby and the state of Scottish sport. One exceptional month also saw the publication of two letters of complaint about the same article, one from Sport England's Mike Diaper and one from Steve Grainger, chief executive of the Youth Sport Trust. Ives was sanguine about the complaints. “I think we should be pleased they are reading the magazine and taking it seriously,” he said. “If one of our staff team or correspondents makes a case that is critical of an agency or a programme it seems only right that, should anyone take the time and trouble to rebut it, we should afford them the same platform.”

TLR has been no stranger to controversy and were once threatened with legal action over the use of a four-word phrase (according to a legal eagle acting for ISPAL, “the phrase ‘National Sports Development Seminar’ does belong to my client”) but detractors who claim that the magazine is out to make trouble or attack sections of the industry are, according to Ives, are missing the point: “We do not court controversy. We do point out where we, or our contributors, think agencies, organisations or even individuals have got something wrong. And we do have a diary column, written to put a smile on people's faces, which can tend to the scurrilous, but we take our journalism seriously. If we have a fault it is a refusal to accept anybody's spin, hyperbole or PR bullshit at face value. Unless, of course, it's our own.”

With only one ‘premium partner’ currently advertising in the pages of TLR, the average web-savvy reader might wonder from whence the magazine draws its financial support. Ives is happy to explain: “We'd love to have more supporters linked to our front page and even to individual articles but finding organisations that we would be happy to see accessing our carefully built reputation – for independence and originality of thought, since you ask – is difficult and we forgot to include a rabidly commercial colleague when we put the team together so we have set up a separate company called TLR Communications Ltd to generate some revenue.”

TLR Comms, as the business end of the enterprise is referred to, “provides publishing, communications and design services to clients across a variety of industry sectors” and

www.theleisurereview.co.uk



Mick Owen: The Leisure Review's managing editor



Jonathan Ives: The Leisure Review's editor

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The tools of the TLR Comms trade

has worked for clients as varied as a management consultancy in the health sector and a publishing company that needed an editor for its vehicle recovery magazine. As Ives explained, "It's our facility with the written word, backed by a strong design sense and our innate need to over-deliver, that keeps customers coming back." Within the sport, leisure and culture sector TLR Comms has worked for England Squash and Racketball, the IDeA, CLOA and the High Peak School and Sport Partnership, among others. Ives is a big advocate of the white paper as a marketing tool "because it tells people what you do, in an accessible way without sounding like it's been written by a advertising copywriter working in a PR agency – if its done well that is." Tasked on his attitude to the public relations industry, Ives is characteristically precise. "At The Leisure Review we love PR people," he said. "They are unremittingly pleasant, often bubbly and they supply us with countless leads and ideas. Without them how else would we know who has designed a new widget, recruited a new widget designer or relaunched last year's widget design tool with an exciting and cutting edge twist?" And as a partner in a communications practice? "Still loving them, if only as their output helps prospective clients benchmark our quality."

With the clock ticking on the interview timeslot – Ives' has a new baby to keep an eye on after all – the final question had to be asked: is it true that one of your main reasons for starting this magazine was to get free entry to art exhibitions and sporting events? "With hand on heart?" said the editor of one of the most honest and straightforward titles in any marketplace and a breath of fresh air in the one it serves. "Yes."

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