

Major award win for Mary Tomes



Mary Tomes has scored a major triumph by winning the inaugural Gaia Award at this year's prestigious 2010 NatWest everywoman Awards.

The award, sponsored by The Barefoot Foundation, is given to the most inspirational and successful female entrepreneur who runs a business with a clearly defined social and/or ethical purpose at its heart.

The awards were presented at a glittering lunch ceremony held on December 1, at The Dorchester Hotel in London's Park Lane.

Speaking from the stage, a delighted Mary, managing director of Oxford-based Colourful Coffins, said: "To win this award was absolutely fantastic, a real honour. It is thanks to the hard work of my team that we have achieved such success, if it wasn't for them I couldn't tell everyone the Colourful Coffins story."

Thanking the sponsors and organisers, she added: "This is the perfect close to the year for Colourful Coffins."

The event was attended by VIP guests from the worlds of business, government, entertainment and the media, and Mary was such a popular winner that many of the audience gave her a standing ovation when she returned to her seat.

Winning the Gaia Award came as a complete surprise – she had already been shortlisted for the Hera Award, presented for the most inspiring entrepreneur aged 50 and over, but the judging panel had been so impressed by her green credentials and her passion for the business that, unknown to Mary, they nominated her for the Gaia Award as well.

Dawn Gibbins MBE, founder of The Barefoot Foundation and one of the judges, said Mary's passion and her determination was an "inspiration to all".

"It was a great pleasure to give the Gaia Award to Mary, I believe in her philosophy of life celebrations not funerals, we need to celebrate the lives of the loved ones we have lost and Mary's work brings a sparkle of hope for families at a difficult time," she added.

Dawn is a positive promoter of British manufacturing, having served on the Government forum which set up the MAS (Manufacturing Advisory Service) and she concluded: "I am so proud to give this prestigious award to an ethical, sustainable British manufacturer."

Congratulating Mary, Karen Gill MBE, co-founder of everywoman, said: "The NatWest everywoman Awards are growing from strength to strength each year. The standard and number of entries gets higher every year, resulting in an increasingly difficult judging process! This is a testament to the extraordinary contribution of female entrepreneurs to UK plc."

In the lead-up to the big day, Mary had been interviewed by the judges in London, providing an overview of the company she started with husband Kevin in 2004, and explaining why Colourful Coffins' entry into the funeral market was such a bold and entrepreneurial move.

Judges were impressed by the fact Colourful Coffins puts environmental issues so high up the agenda. It was the first picture coffin company to introduce 100% recycled cardboard coffins; partners with carbon offsetting organisation Climate Care to offset greenhouse gases each time one of its coffins is cremated; plants a tree in its own memorial woodland each time one is buried, and only uses bio-degradable paper or cotton wraps and environmentally friendly inks.

“The judges were very interested to about our green issues and also why the introduction of bespoke picture coffins was so innovative in the first place,” said Mary. “Like many people, they weren’t aware of how traditional the funeral market can be, so it was good to be able to explain what a difference it makes to bereaved families to be able to choose a personalised picture coffin which is a real celebration of the life they have just lost.

“I feel passionately that the work we do makes a difference and the sheer numbers of thank you cards and letters we receive tells us we are doing something right. It is a very special privilege to be involved in helping families through some of the most difficult times of their lives and we’re constantly looking for new ways to do even more.”

The annual NatWest everywoman Awards, now in their eighth year, are designed to celebrate inspirational business women who have achieved significant success and who are acting as inspirational role models for the next generation of aspiring businesswomen.