

Media release for the Garden Centre Association

Customers kit themselves out with new clothes during December

SHOPPERS at garden centres across the country were kitting themselves out in new clothes during December (2014) according to the Garden Centre Association's (GCA) Barometer of Trade (BoT) results.

Sales of clothing were up 13.99% during the month compared with 2013 with a year to date change of 8.01%.

Will Armitage, Chairman of the GCA, explained: "As the weather becomes colder it's no surprise to see people buying more clothing during their garden centre visits.

"The choice available to shoppers at our centres is becoming broader so they are able to pick up things such as clothing alongside their plants.

"Pets & Aquatics also did well at 7.94% up and catering up 4.95% with a year to date change of 8.70%. Another good performer during the month included Food Hall/Farm Shop at 4.11% up and a year to date change of 6.80%.

"Despite momentum of Christmas sales slowing during December, it was still up 1.83% with a year to date change of 10.55%. Overall sales figures for member garden centres were 2.82% up with a year to date change of 8.87%"

The GCA BoT reports are compiled using actual sales figures and provide an up-to-date trading position statement. They are made available mid-month following the end of the prior month after all member garden centres have submitted their results.

The reports allow members to compare their trading positions with other centres.

Katie Eckley, Shop Manager at The Old Railway Line Garden Centre in Powys, said: "We relocated and expanded our clothing department in the autumn and it really paid off for Christmas sales. It is now outside our restaurant, which provides a great browsing area and sales have increased by over 150% compared to last December as a result of this and our expansion in the range.

"Catering is getting stronger and stronger and the restaurant team were busy every day of the week during December, not just weekends. Sales were up by more than 16% compared to last year and our breakfast and tea's with Santa completely sold out.

"Our other strong departments during December included food, which was 14% up and gift and homeware were both 17% up."

Millbrook Garden Centre, which has two centres in Kent and one in East Sussex had a positive December.

Tammy Woodhouse, Managing Director, said: “We had a positive December, our Gravesend centre was 8% up on last year. We found good growth in clothing sales and we plan to expand this department in 2015, adding new ranges and styles to suit all ages.

“Another strong performer was our pet department, especially on gift and Christmas pet accessories from Pet Face.

“Our cafés had their best ever Christmas with more customers than ever before. Partly fuelled by Christmas events like breakfast and supper with Santa but also lots of coffee and cake.”

Haskins Garden Centres also saw strong sales throughout December.

Chief Executive, Julian Winfield, said: “Haskins has had very strong sales in December, up 10%, which follows 12% in November at our garden centres located at Ferndown, Southampton, Angmering and Cophorne. Gifts have also done very well at 16% up. Clothing, 34% up and restaurant, 7 up%, have been the best performing departments.

“Our Christmas and gift business has been growing since 2006 and we have been able to benefit from the problems in the high street and competition from the internet, by having a good impulse retail offer in our well-presented garden centres.”

Another garden centre who saw positive sales in December was Garsons Garden Centres, Esher and Titchfield.

Ben Thompson, Director, said: “Catering performed very well in quarter three and specifically December. Our Titchfield restaurant closed the quarter at 17% up, which we mostly attribute to a higher quality offering as cover numbers have not increased. Coffee is of a higher more consistent quality and this has brought in greater customer numbers.

“Our Esher restaurant closed the quarter at 2% up, a slight increase, but is at capacity until our exciting new restaurant opens this September.

“Sales in our Titchfield store’s pet department were extremely strong for the third quarter, with a major increase in dog and cat products. Main increases were seen in dog toys, treats and beds. We have also had a number of good sales on tortoises, with add on sales of starter kits and tortoise tables. A revamp of our fish room, including new LED lights, a new floor and better displays has seen a rise in sales of fish, aquatic plants and tank ornaments.

“Clothing accessory sales were particularly strong with promotions on decorative scarves and a new range of costume jewellery and handbags performing particularly well. Our customers have also been buying wraps and ponchos as an alternative to jumpers and cardigans. Outdoor wear sales, from suppliers such as Regatta and Jack Murphy, have also been strong in both ladies and menswear categories.”

The GCA represents nearly 200 garden centres nationwide.

Through sharing information and its inspection programme, the GCA helps members to achieve high standards in customer service, plant quality and reliability.

For further information, please call 0118 930 8918. Alternatively, please visit www.gca.org.uk, log on to www.facebook.com/pages/GardenCentreAssociation or follow the organisation on Twitter at www.twitter.com/GC_Association.

ENDS

For further media details, please call Porcupine PR on 01278 446801 or email Cherry@porcupinepr.co.uk. Alternatively, please contact Iain Wylie, GCA Chief Executive on 07843 633408 or email Iain@gca.org.uk.

Photograph caption one: Will Armitage, Chairman of the GCA.

Photograph caption two: The team at The Old Railway Line Garden Centre in their restaurant, which saw sales increase by 16%.

