## Media release for the Garden Centre Association

## GCA 2014 conference hits all the right notes

THE GARDEN Centre Association's (GCA) annual conference has this week (January 26 – 29, 2014) been declared a huge success.

The organisers have confirmed they received excellent feedback from the delegates who attended the conference from Sunday, January 26 until Wednesday, January 29 at the Hilton Blackpool Hotel.

Will Armitage, Chairman of the GCA and Managing Director of Armitage's Home and Garden in West Yorkshire, said: "This year's conference has been another resounding success and it is great to hear all of the brilliant feedback from those who went along.

"The event was not only inspiring, but it was also thought provoking and I really enjoyed listening to all of the guest speakers. They gave us all some great advice to take away. Of course it was a wonderful social occasion too with members able to share their experiences with other like-minded business people."

The line-up of speakers included Dr Steve Peters, the psychiatrist behind the GB Olympic cycling team, Dave Fishwick, star of Channel 4's Bank of Dave, Mark Berrisford-Smith, who is Head of Economics for HSBC's commercial banking business in the UK, David Oliver, a partner in PwC's Retail Consulting team and Alex Hunter, who was the Global Head of Online Marketing for the Virgin Group.

Will added: "Not only was the event a formal conference but it was also a great opportunity to meet new faces from other member garden centres and suppliers and reconnect with familiar ones. The networking opportunities for attendees are really important."

Delegates also had the chance to visit supplier stands, attend a champagne reception and a black tie dinner.

Mike Lind, Managing Director at Monkton Elm Garden & Pet Centre, which is based in Somerset, said: "I really enjoyed this year's conference and found the guest speakers particularly interesting. Dr Steve Peters' talk was a real eye-opener and gave me food for thought. Dave Fishwick was particularly inspirational as he articulated his fight against the bullies of the banking world and what you can achieve if you really want to.

"One of the best aspects of the GCA conference, in addition to the excellent speakers, is what you are able to learn from other garden centre owners and operators. We all want to provide the best experience and service to our customers and there is a great willingness to share experiences with the aim to give our customers at our respective centres the very best experience and service possible.

"The GCA also provides all garden centre members with an insight into the future and how the latest thinking in IT, marketing, branding and macroeconomic trends will impact on our businesses over the next few years. There is so much to share and learn. I will definitely be going again next year."

The conference, which is supported by headline sponsors Davidson Richards and Westland Horticulture, provided delegates with pertinent information on key aspects of the garden centre industry to assist members in achieving their business goals.

The information shared focused on a wide range of topics, including merchandising, marketing and management.

Michael Burks, Managing Director of The Gardens Group, said: "The GCA conference was another resounding success and I really enjoyed it. It was also great to walk away with an award for our restaurant at Poundbury Gardens.

"The conference offers an excellent selection of guest speakers and it's always extremely interesting to hear what they have to say. I was particularly interested in what Mark Berrisford-Smith had to say about the economy and the way it has affected member garden centres. It's good to hear things are on the up."

The Gardens Group includes Castle Gardens in Sherborne, Dorset, Brimsmore Gardens in Yeovil, Somerset and Poundbury Gardens in Poundbury in Dorset.

Tammy Woodhouse, Managing Director of The Millbrook Garden Company Limited, said: "I really enjoyed this year's conference. A particular highlight for me was being a part of the winning team in the Greenfingers Challenge Cup and helping to raise a huge amount of money for charity."

The Millbrook Garden Company Limited is a family-run, independent company and serves the South East of England.

Will continued: "The annual conference is definitely not one to be missed and everyone is already looking forward to next year's event, which will take place at De Vere Carden Park, Chester from January 25 until 28, 2015."

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 details about the GCA conference, please call 01993 871456. Alternatively, please visit <a href="www.gca.org.uk">www.gca.org.uk</a>, log on to <a href="www.facebook.com/pages/Garden-Centre-Association">www.facebook.com/pages/Garden-Centre-Association</a> or follow the organisation on Twitter at <a href="www.twitter.com/GC\_Association">www.twitter.com/GC\_Association</a>.

## **ENDS**

For further media details, please call Porcupine PR on 01278 446801 or email <a href="mailto:Cherry@porcupinepr.co.uk">Cherry@porcupinepr.co.uk</a>. Alternatively, please contact Iain Wylie, GCA Chief Executive on 07843 633408 or email <a href="mailto:Iain@gca.org.uk">Iain@gca.org.uk</a>.

**Photograph caption one:** Previous GCA Chairman Peter Burks with new chairman Will Armitage.

**Photograph caption two:** Star of Channel 4's Bank of Dave and guest speaker, Dave Fishwick.

**Photograph caption three:** Guest speaker Alex Hunter, who was the Global Head of Online Marketing for the Virgin Group.

**Photograph caption four:** (From left to right) Manager of Decco Limited, Keith Willey, with Monkton Elm Garden & Pet Centre's Shop Manager, Steve Searle, Managing Director, Mike Lind and Plant Advisor, Will Michieli.

**Photograph caption five:** (From left to right) Westland Horticulture's Key Account Manager, Phil Harrison, North East Sales Manager, Martin Jenkins, GCA Chairman, Will Armitage and Westland Horticulture's Regional Sales Manager, Jamie Allsop.

**Photograph caption six:** (From left to right) Bon Bons Ltd Director, Peter Julian, Joy of Plants Managing Director, Terri Jones, Gardman Ltd Marketing Director, Sarah Downing and Gardman Ltd Senior National Account Manager, James Brindle.

**Photograph caption seven:** (From left to right) Armitage's Garden Centres' Marketing Manager, Jo Dales, Financial Controller, Paul Thickett, Retail Operations Manager, Sharon McNair and Taylor's Bulbs' Commercial Director, John Taylor.

**Photograph caption eight:** (From left to right) Director of Trelawney Garden Leisure, David Danning, Director of Cowell's Garden Centre, Martin Cowell, Trelawney Garden Leisure's Director, David Dymons, Manager and previous GCA Chairman, Peter Burks.





