



Something to talk

about

By Fay Sanders

Tucked away at the top end of East Finchley High Road is a bustling new business enterprise. Speakers Corner specialises in finding presenters and celebrities for anything from after-dinner or conference speaking to jetting away on a private plane for an extravagant birthday weekend. Many a famous name has set foot in the East Finchley offices, including motivational speaker John Peters, the former RAF pilot who was captured and tortured by the Iraqis in the first Gulf War. "We like to test out new speakers in our offices at least a couple of times a month," said co-owner Nick Gold.

Other celebrities, such as political commentator John Sergeant, comedian Michael McIntyre or the One Show presenters are also in constant contact with the company.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most popular celebrities currently being hired are economists and business speakers. Speakers Corner's clients range from blue chip companies to event organisers to private requests. The likes of BBC business editor Robert Peston were named by Gold as being much in demand at the moment to help clients understand their companies.

On a more light-hearted note, anyone from pop stars or famous chefs can be hired to perform at private functions. Madeleine Fisher, a market research analyst living in East Finchley, recently returned from a lavish weekend organised by Speakers Corner in the south of France for her cousin's 21st birthday. They were whisked away by private jets to be joined by chef James Martin to prepare culinary delights at a top French restaurant.

The next big stars of tomorrow in terms of public speaking are, in Gold's opinion, Virgin radio presenter Christian O'Connell, who tells how he got David Cameron to swear on air, and motivational speaker and conductor Charles Hazlewood, who gets suited and booted business men to sing away their inhibitions.

Film expert takes seat as Phoenix patron

By Diana Cormack

The Phoenix welcomed home one of its most loyal fans when leading film critic Mark Kermode visited to talk about and sign copies of his latest book *It's Only a Movie*. Mark began by underlining his long association with the cinema, pointing out the seat he used to occupy as a schoolboy when he lived locally.



Mark makes his mark. Photo by Diana Cormack

He went on to entertain the capacity audience in his own inimitable fashion, including tales of his childhood, a variety of stories about his life and work as a journalist, presenter and writer, followed by a question and answer session.

This event was part of a countrywide promotion of his book and proceeds for the evening were donated to the Phoenix

restoration fund. Work is due to begin on Britain's oldest continuously operating cinema in its centenary year. It seems fitting that at this particular time in the life of the Phoenix, Mark has accepted the offer to become a patron of his "favourite cinema".

To help the Phoenix Restoration Project, go to www.justgiving.com/phoenix-cinema

KALASHNIKOV KULTUR

By Ricky Savage, the voice of social irresponsibility

Escape to the country

As your bus grinds to a halt in the latest ice storm and Big Blond Boris blames it on bendy buses or the wrong type of passenger the temptation kicks in: why not quit the city, go native, escape to the country? Time to put centuries of progress into reverse.

Back when the only central heating was a fire in the middle of your hut, everyone lived in the country. Towns were small, smelt worse and had nastier diseases than the country. You couldn't head for the towns anyway, not in feudal England where you were owned by the lord of the manor.

Five centuries of plagues, wars and a shift away from growing sheep and towards making things changed that. So, why do people now want to leave the warmth and comfort of urban life to move to some uncivilised corner of the country where it's not just the sheep that are inbred? Maybe they've been watching too much TV?

The TV country is a weird place. Take the county of Midsomer, a place with a murder rate to make

the more dangerous bits of Chicago seem like a peace camp. A place where people are in and out of each other's houses with each other's husbands or wives or family silver. This is somewhere the ladies who lunch have an up-close and personal relationship with the gardener until their husbands find out or their love rival poisons him with toxic mushrooms. The less said about coffee mornings the better, especially after someone hired a male stripper. A bit like *Shameless*, but in a twin-set-and-pearls, shopping-at-Waitrose way.

And then there's the smell. The country smells, not of diesel or kebabs or the local curry house, those wonderful aromas that make the city such a fabulous experience, but of manure. Trust me, the country stinks, you are hit by the vile smell of farmyards, animals and dung everywhere. The only way to avoid it is to go to the pub where the locals are outnumbered by urbanites moaning about how they want to escape back to the city, but can't afford the house prices. So trust me on this one: if God had meant us to live in the country he'd never have given us the Northern line. Or then again...



Martin Harris from GOSH collects the cheque from Brian and his quiz assistant Rita. Photo courtesy The Old White Lion.

Quiz night fundraiser at The Old White Lion

For the second year running, the regular Tuesday night quiz at The Old White Lion became a fundraiser for Great Ormond Street Hospital.

Organiser and quizmaster Brian Hooper was determined to top last year's total of £1,050 and, helped by an amazing array of raffle prizes generously donated by local businesses, he was able to do just that. Thanks to them and to customers and staff at the pub next to East Finchley tube station, GOSH received a cheque for the magnificent sum of £1,550.

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