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TO CELEBRATE
REG'S 100th
BIRTHDAY
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Local caterer Vic cooks up an MBE

WOKING businessman Vic Laws said he was gobsmacked when told he was going to receive an MBE in the New Year Honours List.

Mr Laws, who runs his catering consultancy business, AVL, out of his home in Horsell Park, found out about the gong while waiting to board a plane to the US in November.

But the 69-year-old had to keep a lid on celebrations until his achievement was officially announced on New Year's Eve.

Vic said: "The notification of the award came by letter which my personal assistant opened.

"She rang me to tell me while I was waiting to fly to the US on holiday.

"It was a complete surprise. I was gobsmacked. I could not celebrate, as you are not allowed to say anything until it becomes official.

"It was very hard to keep it secret. I was meeting my two daughters in the US and did not even tell them, though it almost slipped out a couple of times.

Amazed

"I did not tell my daughters until Saturday. I stayed up until midnight for it to be announced by the London Gazette and emailed it to them. They were amazed."

Vic's colourful career in the hospitality industry has seen him work in hotels and airports, win the contract for Wembley Stadium and help feed The Pope, have disagreements with Jamie Oliver and train inmates at High Down prison to be become waiters.

He added: "Getting the MBE is the top highlight of my career.

"I have had loads of tweets and received about 70 texts on New Year's Day when the news was released."

The reaction to the MBE was a million miles away from the lonely beginnings of the consultancy business Vic started under the stairs of his then home in Twickenham after being made redundant in 1986.

He moved to Woking in 1993 after meeting his wife Thelma, who passed away in 2009.

Vic said: "I had been used to working for big companies and all the benefits that brings.

"When I started out on my own, I was in the room under the stairs,

by Steve Judge

working on an old Amstrad PC with just my dog to talk to. It felt very strange.

"I was not that busy to start with and in one month in February 1987 brought in just £27. I set up an outside catering business to get things going, then I got retained by Surrey County Council, which got me started in local government and everything picked up from there."

Vic was nominated for the award by the Institute for Hospitality for his services to the catering industry.

His love of cooking was instilled at an early age by his mother, while growing up in Harrow, Middlesex, where he would enter his Victoria sandwich cakes in local allotment society competitions before moving on to catering college.

As a consultant Vic has worked for the Aviva Stadium in Dublin and local authorities, which involves overseeing school dinners and an exchange of opinions with celebrity chef Oliver.

Vic said: "He does a great job in raising the profile and has helped increase the funding for school dinners.

"I had lots of communication before the school dinners programme started in terms of the angle they were taking.

"They painted a picture of all school dinners being bad, but that is not the case. The standard of school meals in Surrey is very high."

The work Vic gets the most pleasure out of at the moment is through his association with The Clink restaurant at HMP Prison High Down in Sutton, where he helps train the prisoners.

He added: "It is an incredible place. You would never believe you were in a prison when you go there.

"I help train prisoners to be waiting staff and help get them employment working in the catering industry.

"It is a great project and has a 70 per cent success rate. The guys are just so keen to learn and to get work."

BARCODE



CAREER HIGHLIGHT – Woking businessman Vic Laws, MBE

Woking top of table for house price rises

WOKING recorded the largest increase in the value of property in the UK for 2011, according to the Halifax Town House Price Survey.

House prices soared by an unprecedented 16 per cent in the town centre, with the average home now worth £299,654, up from £257,590.

With 2011 a stagnant year for property growth, Woking's table-topping feat comes as a welcome surprise.

Martin Ellis, housing economist at Halifax, said: "There have been significant differences in performance across the country.

"The town recording the biggest rise is within easy commuting distance of major commercial centres.

"In contrast, the majority of towns that have fared worst in house price terms are outside southern England where economic conditions have tended to be less favourable.

"Uncertainty around the economy is unusually high as we go into the new year.

"This makes it especially difficult to predict the course of house prices over the next 12

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