

Special Feature

Ascott is Top of the Shops!

Ascott's Community Village store has been voted top of the shops, taking three awards in three months. Just before Christmas 2007, the shop won 'Best Village Shop/Post Office' for the South in the Best Rural Retailer Awards.



invitations to the regional award winners' ceremony at the House of Lords in February 2008. Radio Oxford's Bill Heine, who opened

the shop in 2003 and has been a staunch supporter ever since, invited Alan Chubb and Nigel Wild to co-host his show and talk about the shop. The dynamic duo (the jury's still out on which is Batman and which is Robin) spent three hours singing Ascott Shop's praises.

Part Time Again!

Hard on the heels of this recognition was news of the award of 'Best Village Shop in Oxfordshire' from Oxfordshire Rural Community Council. And in February 2008, it was party time once more, runner up as 'Best Village Shop/Post Office' in the Best Rural Retailer National Finals.

First conceived in 2005, this competition is the brainchild of the Countryside Alliance, and celebrates the spirit of our rural communities and the retailers who work so hard to keep them ticking. It is supported by the *Daily Telegraph* and *Farmers Weekly*.

A call in mid-December to Alan Chubb, Chair man of the shop's management committee, brought the news that we had won the competition for the South, a region that stretches from the Isle of Wight through to Northamptonshire. Close on its heels came a package containing our certificate, two smart 'Best Rural Retailer' aprons and

Then to the House of Lords

The House of Lords ceremony not only celebrates regional success, but is also the culmination of the contest, when national winners and runners- up are announced for each category. Every regional winner turns up with fingers crossed and bated breath, hoping beyond hope to win a coveted national award. A whole group of us accompanied Alan and his wife Julie and we had a ball. We met so many of our fellow retailers and volunteers, all of whom are so committed to local shopping and local buying. It was no great surprise to find that the joys and sorrows of running the Ascott Shop are the same everywhere.

Speaking to a packed audience, Countryside Alliance Chair man Kate Hoey MP opened the ceremony and

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spoke of her delight at the increasing popularity of the Best Rural Retailer awards, a clear indication of the groundswell towards locally sourced, community-based shopping which supports not only local farming but also returns money to the community. Ascott Shop won a Highly Commended Certificate for runner up as Best Village Shop/Post Office in the United Kingdom, in a contest that attracted 2,500 entries overall and 1,000 in the Village Shop/Post Office category itself.

Working Miracles

Simon Hart, Chief Executive of the Countryside Alliance said:

“The loss of the village shop some years ago on the owners’ retirement was keenly felt by the whole community. A volunteer group worked miracles, raising funds, fitting out the bare shell and stocking the shelves. The result is stunning and has become pivotal to the community. Over 40 volunteers run the enterprise and are passionate about serving and uniting the local community, devoting countless hours to that end. In July, the village was overwhelmed by floods for the first time in 150 years, forcing many from their homes. Barely escaping the waters, the shop was manned by a rota of volunteers, donating emergency packs to the needy and serving a never-ending stream of customers with staples, ready meals and some wine to ease the pain. Not only that, the store became a nerve-centre for help and information. This truly is a shop at the very heart of its community.”

Third Award

Our third award is from ORCC, one of 38 rural community councils in England, who promote thriving, sustainable rural communities. This annual competition

offers two awards, one for best commercial shop and ours for best community shop.

In early February ORCC’s judge, Chris Coe, presented Alan with a certificate and a cheque for £250; the well-attended award presentation was held outside the shop front and filmed by ITV’s Thames Valley News.

Something Special

Chris, a seasoned retailer, spoke warmly of the shop: *“I visited three times, twice as a mystery shopper and the third time, I announced who I was. On every occasion, it was obvious that the Ascott Shop is something really special. The warmth of the welcome, the passion of the staff to serve the community, the quality and variety of goods on offer, the emphasis on local buying, all convinced me to give the award to Ascott.”*

Come and Savour the Magic!

The shop opened in November 2003 and has starred on BBC’s Countryfile and ITV’s Heart of the Country. Over 40 volunteers and three paid staff run the whole operation. We are open 6 ½ days per week and could cost you less than driving to Witney or Chipping Norton. Of our 30 suppliers, 21 are within 50 miles. Our mantra is freshness and quality. We don’t stock battery chickens or eggs, with us it’s free range all the way.

Meat is from Callow’s Farm and Foxbury Farm Shop and fresh bread comes from Huffkins in Burford. Wines are from Oxford Wines, beers from the Hook Norton and Wychwood breweries. Our target for 2008 is to eliminate plastic bags. Come and see for yourself, you will be very welcome!

Nigel Wild