

Office weather centres to close

Costs will hit quality and accuracy of forecasts, says union

by JOHN GASKELL
and MIKE EDWARDS

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clients will be worried. "Certainly, there will be a fear among customers of that," said its spokesman. "We will be meeting them to explain that there will not be a loss of quality. For example, we do global forecasts and are the best worldwide forecast organisation for hurricanes, which shows that you don't have to be on the spot to do it. "We closed Nottingham and Plymouth in 1995-96. Accuracy levels have continued to increase since then. Improved computing systems and better graphics have

led to better methods of communicating the forecast to the customer." The IPMS also challenges as "absurd" the closing of the Southampton weather centre, which provides forecasts based on local knowledge for sailing in the Solent. The task is to be transferred to a new UK centre for marine forecasting services 400 miles north, in Aberdeen. But papers seen by *The Sunday Telegraph* show that all closures are to be presented as "a strategy for growth". The official Met Office statement to be issued later this month by the forecasting director, Colin Flood, will

claim that "the changes are necessary to allow us to provide a competitive and growing range of services while increasing our production efficiency". "Where appropriate and with the agreement of the customer, we intend to place forecaster consultants at their own premises," it says. "This approach is already an important feature of many of the services we provide to the Armed Forces and has become prominent in the BBC regions." Customers will be provided with "increasingly accurate forecast services by combining the best of traditional and new methods". The new forecasting

network will contain six "enhanced centres" at Glasgow, Belfast, Cardiff, Manchester, Birmingham and London. There will also be a smaller National Meteorological Centre for "generating guidance, modifying outputs from automated systems, monitoring and responding to environmental emergencies and severe weather, and international commercial and aviation work". Mr Flood's statement adds: "We recognise that closures are never without pain." Staff affected by the closures will be switched into other forecasting or consultancy jobs or will be retrained. Others will be able to take jobs in applied meteorology, broadcast meteorology, sales and marketing.

Promotions expert claims Shell stole his Smart card idea

by DAVID HARRISON

A BUSINESSMAN who claims Shell stole his ideas for its internationally successful Smart card promotion scheme, is this week launching a multi-million pound lawsuit against the oil company.

If John Donovan wins he stands to collect millions. If he fails he will lose everything — including his home.

The case — alleging breach of contract and misuse of confidential information — opens in the High Court on Thursday and is expected to last three weeks with costs running up to £1 million.

Mr Donovan, 52, says that Shell took his ideas — which he gave to it in confidence — and developed them without consulting or paying him.

"I want what I am entitled to and I want the world to see that Shell is not the company it claims to be in its glossy propaganda brochures," he said.

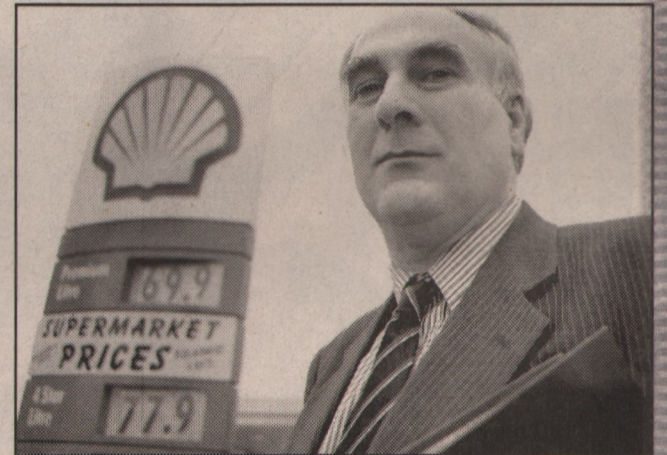
Shell denies the allegations and is counter-claiming £100,000 for breach of a confidentiality agreement.

Richard Wiseman, its legal director, said Mr Donovan was "misguided" and had been wrongly encouraged by Shell's previous payments.

Mr Donovan has received £60,000 and another substantial undisclosed sum in settlements from Shell after claiming the theft of other ideas.

Mr Wiseman said Mr Donovan's expertise was no longer appropriate for the type of promotions Shell was doing.

The court case is the culmination of a six-year campaign by Mr Donovan and his father, Alfred, 82, which has seen them picket Shell's London headquarters and buy two Shell shares each to give them access to annual



Pump action: John Donovan has fought Shell for six years

general meetings. At risk in the latest action is their detached home near Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk.

The Donovans began devising promotion schemes in the late Sixties when Mr Donovan senior owned a chain of petrol stations in East London and Essex.

In 1981 they struck their first deal with Shell for a "Make Money" promotion scheme — in which petrol purchasers had to find two matching halves of a "banknote". Shell gave them £500 to help to develop the idea.

The scheme was a success and others followed: a £4.5 million Mastermind promotion; a scratch card game offering £2.5 million of food prizes from Harrods; a card game endorsed by Bruce Forsyth; and a £4.5 million Star Trek promotion.

"We were putting up ideas in confidence," Mr Donovan said. "We both respected that. We worked exclusively with Shell on a handshake basis."

Mr Donovan's company, Don Marketing, was paid about £50,000 for each idea plus a percentage of printing costs and other fees. But the relationship changed in 1992 when Shell

appointed a new national promotions manager, he said.

In April 1994, Mr Donovan issued a writ against Shell over the use of a "Make Money" scheme. He threatened to sue each of Shell's 2,000 forecourt businesses.

He accepted a £60,000 settlement and continued to fight Shell over a Nintendo promotion and a film promotion called "Now Showing".

The Donovans formed a pressure group, The Shell Corporate Conscience Pressure Group. In October 1996 Shell paid another, larger, sum to settle the outstanding claims.

In March 1997, when Shell launched the Smart loyalty card, an ambitious promotion involving companies such as Woolworth and British Airways, Mr Donovan claimed that it was almost identical to a scheme he had first proposed in 1989. He claims that the oil company took an option on it in 1990.

He also alleges that Shell used an undercover investigator, Christopher Phillips, to look into his financial affairs. Shell's lawyers admit that they hired Mr Phillips, but only to carry out "routine credit inquiries".



at Glaze beach. They fell in love setting up the National Beach Safety Centre Photograph: Simon Burt

at Cornwall on Baywatch

courses for lifeguards and "Junior Baywatch" courses for children. Mr Griffiths, 33, a paramedic for 17 years who started the Lifeguard Training Centre in Newquay in 1994, teaches the courses. If trainees pass the final examination, they are awarded certificates from the Surf Life Saving Association of Great Britain or the Royal Life Saving Society.

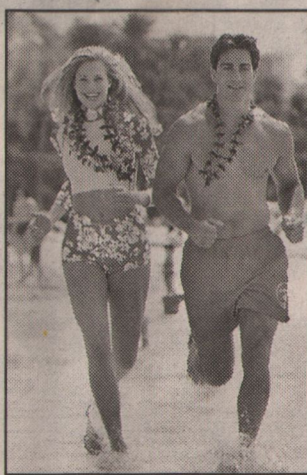
The courses are free to coastguards, ambulance workers, lifeguards and cliff-rescue teams; private individuals are charged £195, including accommodation.

Comparisons with *Baywatch*, whose stars

include David Hasselhoff, Brooke Burns and Michael Bergin, have been inevitable, Mrs Griffiths said. And she admitted some similarities.

"Watching the men and women training on the beach is a terrific spectator sport," she said. "We have already had holidaymakers and visitors coming down to do just that. I enjoy it myself. The men are all rather chunky."

But Mr Griffiths was keen to promote the serious intent. He said: "Life-saving is a lot more than red swimming costumes; it's deadly serious. What we are offering is a location where expertise can be pooled so that the centre can become a place of excellence."



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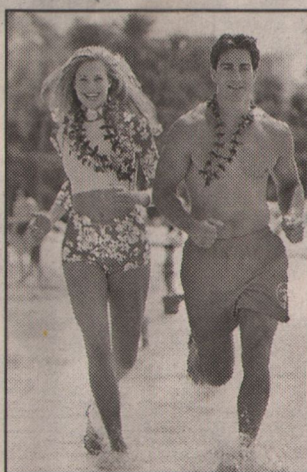


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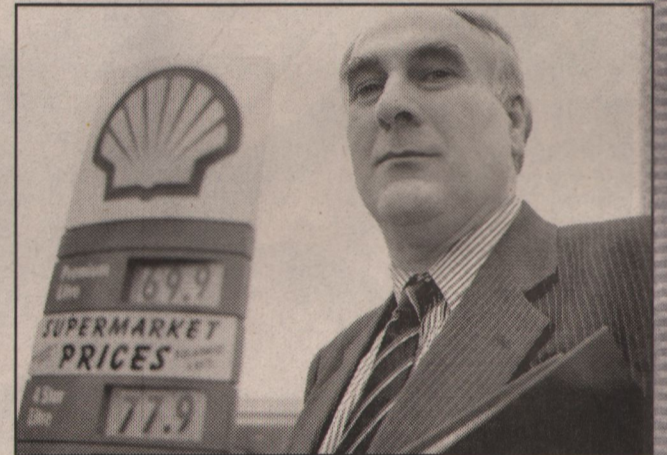
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