

Redundancy isn't the end of the world for everyone



We may still be feeling the squeeze, but a conference coming to Newcastle this month shows the recession can be a springboard to entrepreneurship. JOANNE BUTCHER meets three people who have had drastic career overhauls.

REDUNDANCY is a terrifying prospect, and one which the credit crunch is bringing to an increasing number of families.

In the three months up to November last year, an extra 7,000 people on Tyneside lost their jobs, bringing unemployment rates to 9.8%.

But for some, losing a regular career is not the end - it's an exciting opportunity to strike out alone.

Former journalist Anna Harris discovered a new business venture when she took voluntary redundancy.

Alongside her father John Lognonné, the ex-farming correspondent set up The Grape Unknown, a wine importing company based at the family farm near Hexham, Northumberland.

"It seemed the right time to move on when redundancies were offered," said the 38-year-old, a mum to John, six, and Elizabeth, two.

"Dad wanted something to supplement the farm and he loves wine and travelling. As I was leaving my job, I decided to join him.

"I am no wine expert, and at first I was quite apprehensive about going into something new.

"But I've found my skills from journalism are very useful. I think there must be a lot of people who have the skills to be a success in another, very different job, but who don't know what they can do."

On February 22, the major conference Chance to Change comes to Newcastle's civic centre, aiming to encourage some of the North East's 126,000 unemployed people to follow in Anna's footsteps.

Carole Beverley, chief executive of the Entrepreneurs Forum, said increasing numbers of people were looking at establishing their own businesses.

"No one is ever going to suggest that starting a business is the easy option - such a step into the unknown can be daunting or even intimidating.

"But there has never been a better time to give it a go because you're not alone.

"There are plenty who are in the same position and plenty who've been through it, come out the other side and never look back. Their stories are always inspirational."

For Kate Grantham, from Gosforth, Newcastle, running her own business is the best thing she has ever done.

The former primary school teacher gave up her job when daughter Erin, five, was born.

"My priorities changed when I had my daughter,"



NEW START Former teacher Kate Grantham with daughter Erin. Far left, some of her work

“It is an intimidating prospect to leave the comfort of a regular job with a regular income but it can be a great opportunity

income but if you research it carefully it can be a great opportunity.” Even those not brave enough to start out on their own are using the credit crunch as a chance to try something new.

Teacher training applications in the North East alone were up by 47% last year, and the Training and Development Agency for Schools have reported a flurry of workers switching from boardroom to classroom.

High-flier Mike Tuer left a lucrative 20-year career in corporate banking to teach at a comprehensive school in a deprived area of inner-city London.

"Since about 2005 I had been seriously planning a change of career," Mike, 43, said. "Teaching was something I had always wanted to do, because when I was at school in Beacon Lough, Gateshead, not many people left with O-levels. Without the energy and commitment of my teachers, there is no way I would have had the life I did.

"There were a lot of considerations - I had to take over a year out to complete the training and I have taken a significant pay cut. But it was the right time to make the move."

To register for the Chance to Change conference visit www.chancetochange.co.uk, telephone 0870 850 2233 or email info@entrepreneursforum.net

Kate, 34, explained. "I wanted to be at home while she was young. Once she started school, the idea of going back to the classroom didn't appeal - I wanted a job with flexibility, so that I could take time off in holidays or if she was ill."

Kate stumbled across Smallprint, who make unique silver jewellery using children's finger, hand and footprints. Suddenly everything fell into place and within weeks she was running her own franchise from her Gosforth home.

"Some people did worry when I said I was setting up my own business on top of having a young child," she said. "But friends who had children were very supportive and they were my first customers.

"Business is now going really well, despite the recession, and I can work hours which suit my family." Kate added: "It is an intimidating prospect to leave the comfort of a regular job with a regular



THE GRAPE UNKNOWN Anna Harris with her father John Lognonné



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