

THISWEEK

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Hitchin BID's Hazel Wisbey, Tracy Hunt and Cameron Clare.

Picture: STEVE HUNT

news



People for People's Kenny Arnold with Broom Barns head Jane Currant. Picture: BROOM BARNS PRIMARY SCHOOL

Reverse Advent calendar

Pupils at Broom Barns Primary School in Stevenage hit upon the idea of doing an Advent calendar to help people in need, but with one important difference - it's in reverse.

Instead of taking out a piece of chocolate, parents and families are being asked to donate gifts that will be passed to homeless people and those less fortunate through the Stevenage-based group People for People. Broom Barns head Jayne Currant said: "For many people, Christmas is a time of excess

and indulgence - plates are piled high with basted turkey, stuffing and pigs-in-blankets. "There are presents, treats and each morning, leading up to Christmas, you may open your Advent calendar for a present or sweet. However, for some families, it is a really difficult time and they can struggle. "This is a way of helping those most in need over the Christmas period." The school contacted PFP founder Kenny Arnold and he visited the school to talk to the children about helping others.

'We don't switch off - it all starts again in January!'

The Christmas lights are now shining bright in Hitchin's Market Place - and the Comet has gone behind the scenes to meet the team behind the annual display and much more.

JP ASHER
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Surprisingly few people give the proper credit to the Hitchin BID, or Business Improvement District - which is funded by Hitchin businesses and runs all sorts of things in the town, from safety events to stegosaurus-themed fun. The BID was behind the big Christmas tree lights switch-on, alongside community company Ladder 87 - and events manager Tracy Hunt told the Comet almost everything for the big day was arranged back in January. "Next month we'll be doing it all again," she said. "We have to book the stage, and decide things like if we want someone in to switch the lights on. In conjunction with Ladder 87, we now hold a contest to choose a

child from the area to do it. "And we'll need to pick street food vendors. Health and safety means you can have too many, and we get loads and loads of requests for stalls at the switch-on." The Comet also spoke to Hazel Wisbey, one of the BID's town centre rangers. She and her fellow rangers, Ron Broadbent and Cameron Clare, stay in touch with the Churchyard office by radio. Hazel said: "We do anything that's required to help people and keep them safe at the switch-on - we have maps of what goes where, and we also keep an eye out for any pickpockets that might be there when the place is crowded." Asked what sets Hitchin's lights apart, BID manager Keith Hoskins - who has overseen 21

switch-ons - reflected on how the event has grown from a small ceremony to a must-attend Market Place filler, with £30,000 a year now going on Christmas lights. A new BID manager is set to take over in January, with Keith to continue as town centre manager. He said something for his successor to look at might be to have the lights in the streets and on the tree come on together. The BID is set to hold its annual BIG Weekend this Saturday and Sunday, with fun in Market Place from 10am to 4pm each day. There will be a giant snow globe and a Santa Express landtrain on both days. On Saturday, a Father Christmas procession will come from Hitchin Boys' School at 12.30pm, and Hermitage Road shops will stay open until 8pm. On Sunday, the Snow Lion and a Rotary lantern procession will be among the entertainment.

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FREE ENTRY

The Hitchin British Schools Museum

Victorian Christmas Fair

Friday 8th December - 4.30pm - 7.30pm
Saturday 9th December 10am - 2pm

Experience a traditional Victorian Christmas in our Headmaster's House.
Plenty of stalls to kick-start your Christmas shopping.
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BRITISH SCHOOLS MUSEUM

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