

999 hoax caller said spaceship was on fire

A BLAZE on board a spaceship and a mix-tape engulfed by flames are just two of the wacky 999 calls received by Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue in the past year.

The service has received nearly 22,000 emergency calls in the past 12 months, and it has released some of the most amusing it logged.

These included reports that chickens were running down a road, that a new sofa had become wedged in a doorway and that a toy helicopter was stuck in a tree.

But Roy Wilsher, the county's chief fire officer, said there was a more serious side to the calls.

"This is a bit of fun but there is a serious message behind it," he said.

"Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue, alongside colleagues in the police and ambulance service, is here to help, but we are asking people not to call 999 unless it's a real emergency.

"Such calls are a waste of time and are potentially blocking calls from people in genuine danger."

He added: "Firefighters across the county are dedicated to protecting the lives and property of the people of Hertfordshire.

"Last year they attended 2,439 fires and nearly 500 road traffic collisions, as well as many other serious and life-threatening situations.

"Let's not make things more difficult for them with nonsense or hoax calls."

■ For more information on the service and fire-safety advice, visit www.hersdirect.org/fire

Be sure to register

RESIDENTS are urged to make sure they are registered ahead of an election.

The deadline for registering for the upcoming police and crime commissioner (PCC), district and parish elections is Monday.

The vote will take place on Thursday, May 5.

To register online, visit www.gov.uk/register-to-vote

New dawn for Sun Street restaurant

'Classy but classless' group is entering a new territory



TEA TIME: From left, Andrei Lussman with group head chef Nick McGeown

By Martin Ford

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HITCHIN will be the latest town to be absorbed into an ethical food empire later this year.

Lussmanns is set to take over the Strada restaurant in Sun Street in June.

Andrei Lussmann, director of the Hertfordshire-based restaurant group, said he had been targeting Hitchin because people there travelled to its existing eateries in Hertford, Harpenden and St Albans.

"It's not unusual for people to come down from North Herts," he told the Mercury.

"We thought the demographic and audience in Hitchin would

very much enjoy and like what we offer.

"We have been looking for some time, so when the site became available we were happy to do a deal."

The Hitchin fish and grill restaurant will feature a diners' bar, which is new territory for Lussmanns.

"Every restaurant is different in terms of personality and style," said Mr Lussmann.

Characterful

The St Albans outlet has the feel of a modern city-centre restaurant, while Harpenden takes its lead from the characterful 18th-century brick building.

Hertford's character comes from the grade two listed town-

house location.

"It's partially evolution, but I like to set an identity which is personal to the locality," Mr Lussmann added.

Another feature is the attention to the food's provenance, sustainability and dealing with waste.

Mr Lussmann said: "It underpins the business.

"If you buy into it, great. If you don't, it will taste better and the staff will be charming.

"We are probably the first group in the UK that can demonstrate you can make it affordable on the high street.

"We don't pass on the extra cost."

Fourteen years on from opening its first, now defunct, res-

taurant in North Kensington, there are already plans for a fifth "classy but classless" restaurant in Hertfordshire.

Mr Lussmann said of their beginnings: "It became clear what we were after was a business of local regulars.

"We moved to Hertfordshire and ever since then, we have continued to grow.

"During the recession, we were at our best ever.

"People come back to what they appreciate."

He added: "We have grown purposefully slowly, we are different to the chains we compete with."

The Mercury contacted Strada, but it had not responded at the time of going to press.

IN BRIEF

Man hit PC and had weed

HITCHIN: A man who was caught with cannabis and assaulted a police officer has been hit with a bill for £225.

Kieron Hanlon, 28, of Bingen Road, Hitchin, committed the offences on Sunday, March 6.

He was fined £80 for the assault and £40 for the drug possession after his guilty pleas.

Hanlon was also ordered to pay costs of £85 when he appeared at Stevenage Magistrates' Court on Monday last week.

Free sessions

LETCWORTH GC: A sports club is holding free tennis sessions for families, children and adults.

Letchworth Sports and Tennis Club will host the free classes on Saturday between 1pm and 3pm.

The event takes place at Norton Common, Letchworth GC. For more details and to book a place, call (01462) 675444 or visit www.LSTC.org.uk

Barn dance

HITCHIN: Residents are invited to a barn dance in aid of a nursery.

Pig, Swig and Jig will be at Hitchin Lavender on Friday, May 20.

The event is raising money for Ickleford Pre-School and will feature a barn dance, a hog roast and a licensed bar.

More information will be released at a later date.

Inquest opened

STEVENAGE: An inquest has been opened into the death of a woman.

Emma Dodd, 40, died in Oakfields, Stevenage, on March 22.

An inquest was opened by the coroner for Hertfordshire on Friday, April 1 and adjourned.

The cause of death is believed to be suspension.



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