

# Sarah has her future covered

A FORMER brand manager with Jaguar and Land Rover who launched her own business at the start of the year has now started a franchise operation to cope with the demand for her products.

Sarah Pittendrigh was working for an events business when the recession hit and the company went into liquidation. But she had already spotted a gap in the market to supply chair covers and table linen for the events market.

Ms Pittendrigh, who is based near Hexham, said: "It had been suggested, while I was in my previous company, that we bring the supply of chair covers and table linen in-house as an inconsistency in service and quality among our suppliers was apparent.

"At the time I thought it was something that to do well, it had to be a specialist project for which we did not have the time.

"However after losing my job and realising I wanted to keep the autonomy associated with self-employment, I saw there was a big opportunity in the North East to deliver chair covers and table linen aimed at the top end of the market."

She set up Simply Bows & Chair Covers in January and since then, has supplied goods to some of the North East's top venues including Close House Hotel, Doxford Hall, Seaham Hall, Wynyard Hall and Rockliffe Hall.

The business has provided chair covers and accessories for more than 180 weddings in its first year and Ms Pittendrigh opted for the franchise route to expand the business.

"Franchising Simply Bows & Chair Covers has enabled me to grow the business while at the same time allowing me to concentrate my efforts on the Northumberland and Durham areas which I have retained for myself," she said.

"I had started to get enquiries from the likes of Grosvenor house in London, however having travelled a lot in my previous role, I was keen that my new venture allowed me to be able to spend more time with my family."

Two franchisees have been recruited - one covering the Sunderland and Tees Valley area and one for Tyneside. She has also received interest from Manchester, Leeds and the Scottish Borders and from Spain and Canada.

The business now employs nine freelance staff and is looking to create two permanent jobs in the spring.

Ms Pittendrigh worked with Business Link to launch both her original idea and the franchise, and she was able to secure funding from the North East England Investment Centre.