

# Record growth is a sign of the times

By IAIN DEMPSEY

A LIMERICK sign business has achieved the fastest growth within a world-wide franchise network and has become the network's largest single operating unit in Europe.

Don Wallace's badge and sign manufacturing business has achieved the fastest growth rate in the Recognition Express franchise network and Don has invested over £125,000 to bring in more equipment and staff.

The business in Hartstonge Street was set up in 1988 and after just three years turnover had improved so much that an additional sales office was opened in Dublin to ensure a wider market could be reached.

Now the company employs 26 people and claims 90 per cent of Ireland's badge market, including catering for all of the country's major airlines, banks, hotels and supermarkets.

It is on target to achieve at least 20 per cent growth this year.

"I was aware that with growth figures of 15 to 20 per cent year on year, the badge market would not



Don Wallace, right, is presented his franchise owner of the year award by Terry Howarth, managing director of Recognition Express Europe

be able to sustain such growth indefinitely," said Don.

"The only option was to broaden our portfolio and

make the move into manufacturing signage products as well as badges. Our move into signage has paid dividends. We

began by producing internal signs to match our customers' requirements and found a lot of work through our dealings

with existing customers such as Ryan Hotels, Jurys and Superquinn. But then came our next challenge. We kept receiving enquiries about external signs and while we were taking nice orders for internal signage, we were having to turn away larger orders for external signs."

Don invested over £125,000 for equipment, manufacturing staff, a salesman for the Munster region and new transport.

This is the biggest investment ever made by a Recognition Express franchise.

"We have consistently employed the best people with the result that our products are of the highest quality," said Don.

"This is the cornerstone of our business and the basis for our reputation. And by ploughing a large proportion of profits back into the business we have reaped the rewards of strong growth year on year.

"We hope to continue to prosper in the future by expanding into new markets through further investment and by employing the best from the local area to fulfil these ambitions."

Don previously managed several public companies including 10 years working for the Smurfit Group.

## Learn more about the EU

By DEARBHLA LOOBY

LIMERICK people who want to find out more about the European Union will have access to the European Commission's new information service. The Commission has launched the information service to give European citizens fast, easy access to information about Europe. The Europe Direct service offers free telephone helplines, a direct response service via e-mail and links to information and advice facilities. The free help-line number for Ireland is 1800 553 188.

Launching the new service, Viviane Reading, European Commissioner responsible for Education and Culture said: "Europe Direct will help to bridge the gap between EU citizens' desire for information and their access to it. There is a wealth of information out there, but often people simply do not know how or where to find it."

"Now they have a single point of contact that can set the process of help in motion. Europe Direct will also allow the Commission to collect valuable feedback about citizens' interests and concerns, for use in developing future policy."