

NEAL BUTTERWORTH

Pro-Chancellor,

'Under Neal Butterworth's editorship, the *Daily Echo* has made a remarkable difference to people's lives.' These words were written earlier this year when Neal was presented with the Rotary International Humanitarian Reporting Award for 2007. The President of Rotary International went on to say that Neal's work 'has highlighted many humanitarian global issues over many years, both locally and internationally'. The *Echo* has also received the Newspaper Society's Campaigning Newspaper of the Year award, in 2001, for (amongst other things) its well-researched investigations into relationships between crime and drug use, and its pressure on MPs and the NHS for action on behalf of elderly and vulnerable people. In addition, the paper has helped to raise more than £6million for good causes, and that achievement was recognised when Neal was named a Paul Harris Fellow by the Rotary Club of Bournemouth, an international honour named after the Rotary founder and only awarded for outstanding service.

Neal Butterworth was raised at Altrincham in Cheshire and educated at Manchester Grammar School. How this lifelong Manchester United fan came to play three seasons for Manchester City, only he can explain. Convinced he wasn't good enough to be a footballing millionaire, at the age of 18 he became a journalist. His progress was extraordinarily swift and his talent was recognised by Eddy Shah, who owned the Messenger group and made him editor of one of his free weekly papers in the Manchester area. Neal thus became the UK's youngest newspaper editor at the age of 23.

He moved south to work for Southern Newspapers, owner of the *Echo* and *Advertisers* in 1987. This was an important development for him in professional terms, and a happy return in a personal sense because, in his own words, he had 'fallen in love with the place' when he came as a child on family holidays. He started as Group Assistant Editor for free papers (and 20 years on he still writes a witty and often irreverent column for the *Advertiser*) and in 1998 became Editor of the daily title. He also edits the *Advertiser* and the *Dorset Society* and *LifeTime* magazines.

Neal Butterworth's editorship has been marked by departure from tradition. The *Echo* changed its title from an evening to a daily paper, reflecting a national trend: Dad no longer comes home to his dinner and his evening paper. Now increasingly it attracts a new readership, across all ages but mainly in the 40-plus age-group, who want local news but whose horizons extend beyond Bournemouth and the surrounding area. It sets out to be a true local newspaper, through its strong traditional news desk, but also seeks to reflect life and everyday conversations by meeting people's appetite for news of popular culture. In this way the *Echo* maintains a substantial circulation at a time when many provincial newspapers are declining. The digital edition is building a new and growing audience; it attracts more than one million 'hits' a month, a third of which come from outside the area and include many people

living or working abroad. In this and other ways it fulfils Neal's ambition to establish it as a 'paper without boundaries'.

When Neal came to the *Echo* he found that its relationships with the community were crumbling. He has successfully rebuilt them, whilst maintaining the paper's reputation for being a hard-nosed campaigning paper, which last year earned it the Daily Newspaper of the Year title in the South and London. As a working and independently minded Editor, Neal has become a leading and influential figure in Bournemouth and the surrounding area, with his acute insight into public life and politics. A change-maker himself, he has shrewdly but affectionately watched Bournemouth change from a retirement capital into a more cosmopolitan town still trying to settle on an image which will place it in a European context. In this connection he strongly affirms the key role of the University, where he has given guest lectures in The Media School and participated in 'meet the professionals' evenings. He also shared the floor with Bill Bryson in an evening to raise funds for Alumni Scholarships.

Pro-Chancellor, I have the honour to present Neal Butterworth, and ask you to confer upon him the degree of Doctor of Letters.