

# LIGHTING UP BLACKPOOL: T

It's only days until the town once again switches on its world famous 'I

The Council works hard to ensure the Illuminations shine brightly year after year. But it's no mean feat.

Approximately 45 staff, including talented artists, electricians, joiners, mechanics, painters, engineers and hi tech boffins work all year round to ensure the displays are ready.

Altogether 65,000 staff hours are spent on maintenance, preparation, erection, operation and dismantling the features.

*Blackpool Brief* has an illuminating chat with some of the creative staff involved behind the scenes...

## Creative Minds Join Forces

This year's Switch-On marks an exciting turning point in the Illuminations history. It's the first time that Blackpool has invited an internationally acclaimed designer to contribute to the much loved, annual spectacle.

Interior design guru, Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen, fell in love with Blackpool whilst filming for BBC One's *Holiday Programme*, and has now designed and created a brand new feature, known as 'Decodance'.

But what's it been like working with a design guru as prestigious and renowned as Laurence?

The Illumination artists Shoichi Yasuda, John Cowell, Sarah Barton, Ami Hui and Jane Armistead spill the beans...



Some of the Illuminations staff talk to Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen about the latest stage in the design project

### How exciting has it been working with 'LLB' on his designs?

In the words of the group, "nerve wracking, interesting and challenging". But the team, headed by Shoichi Yasuda, has performed miracles to realise the artwork supplied by Laurence into the full sized illuminations figures now displayed on the Promenade for all to see.



The team outside the Illuminations Depot at Rigby Road

### How much creative input have you had? How closely have you worked with him?

Jane Armistead explained: "We have had lots of creative freedom, Laurence was very clear as to the style and content of what he required but has allowed us a large degree of free expression in terms of how we develop his concepts into full scale illuminations features." Due to the scale of commitments in Laurence's diary he has had to operate via email and telephone alongside key visits made by him at strategic points so the team fully understood the brief.

### How much time have you given to the project?

The project was only agreed in January, commencing with a visit by Laurence to meet the team and has been in full production since then. Laurence actually designed the items over his Christmas holiday period so time has been at a premium throughout the life of this project. Since then all the artists have worked on the scheme alongside other projects with some extra assistance from work experience placements Emma Fox and Chris Hewitt. Effectively, four artists have worked full-time on it.

### What will you take from the experience, professionally and personally?

As the project commenced the feeling was that it was potentially very daunting due to the time pressures involved and high profile and unusual nature of remotely working with the designer but as time progressed it became easier and as Ami Hui said: "We found ourselves explaining our methods to him." Without fail all the artists have enjoyed the project as Sarah Barton confirmed: "It's been really enjoyable, we are all really glad all the long hours have paid off and are genuinely pleased with how it has turned out and hope the public will enjoy it too." All of the team have learned a lot and

tested themselves against a very high quality standard, a very tight schedule and have delivered under terrific pressure.

Richard Williams, Production Manager said: "The team were amazing - they hit every deadline we set them and have produced a fantastic product that does the service proud."

### How proud are you to have worked on what will hopefully be one of the highlights of the Lights?

The team are "very proud" of what they have done and feel that they have once again set new standards in artistic and creative endeavour. As John Cowell noted: "This has been one the best features we have worked on in years, a really enjoyable experience."

### How do you feel about the unveiling? Nervous? Excited?

"Relieved, excited and a little bit nervous" said the team! The finalised feature has yet to be illuminated in the real Promenade environment competing with powerful street-lighting and other distractions but the team are confident that the artwork will hold its own as a piece they are rightly proud of, making this a clear and distinct highlight of the 2007 display.



Electrician Daniel Doherty does some last-minute tweaking to one of the features



# The Team Behind the Switch-On Lights' - one of the biggest and brightest events in the Council's calendar.

## Heading up the Team

Michael Wilcock, newly appointed Head of Illuminations, said how impressed he was with the amazing creative skills and teamwork he has found since his arrival.

Michael joins us after a long career in private industry where he held senior management posts with large multi-national companies focused primarily on manufacturing and the supply chain delivery.

His role is to guide the transformation of this vital service into a world-class business, creating exciting, topical and entertaining Illuminations shows that will ensure our visitor numbers grow and enhance the local economy.



## A Day in the life of... Shoichi Yasuda

Senior artist Shoichi Yasuda moved to Britain in 1985 joining the Illuminations department in 1990 where he has worked as an artist on a myriad of projects culminating with this latest one the "Decodance" project.

### How many are in the team?

There are five talented artistic specialists who create the multiple visual images seen throughout the display.

### Describe your average day....

There is no such thing as an average day and that is what attracts me to the role. My day can vary from simple painting through to highly detailed intricate spray work.

## Switch-On

BBC TV Time Lord David Tennant will be swapping the powerful controls of the TARDIS for the controls of Blackpool's free light show when he flicks the all-important **switch on Friday August 31**.

Tennant will be guest of honour for the exciting event which will be broadcast live on BBC Radio 2 on **Friday 31 August 2007**, complete with musical entertainment from leading artists and bands.

**\*\*Blackpool Illuminations shine along 6 miles of Promenade for 66 nights from Friday 31 August until Sunday 4 November\*\***

## Other New Features This Year

### DOCTOR WHO

Sci-Fi fans are in for a treat with the 2007 display as the most mysterious, menacing and mean monsters from the more recent series of BBC Drama's hit programme *Doctor Who* make their Illuminations debut.



### SPACE INVASION



2007 sees the arrival of aliens on Gynn Island with the opalescent mother ship hovering over 40 feet in the air battling it out with eight spaceships arranged in formation defending their territory.

Using colour-changing LEDs representing space and strobes representing mini explosions, Gynn Island will be out of this world.

### What are some of the main challenges you face in your role?

The main challenges are improving and developing the overall quality of the display as an artistic attraction. We are always up against the clock and this can prove very challenging.

### What's your most enjoyable part of your job?

I love getting my hands dirty, doing the job and the opportunity to express my creativity. We all take great pride and satisfaction in seeing the final product on the Promenade as well.

### What one thing could you not do your job without?

I could not do this job without the wonderful hard working team of artists in my section; at the end of the day this is a team effort.

## Light Bites

### → GREATEST free show . . . ?

The Illuminations now cost £2.4 Million to stage. The equipment is worth £10M.

### → THE Lights are pretty heavy. . .

The Illuminations equipment actually weighs more than 711,000 kilograms, equivalent to 350 Blackpool trams! There are one million lamps of various types and styles, and the cable and wiring for the Lights stretch more than 200 miles!

### → ILLUMINATIONS world tour . . .

The Lights have many international connections. Illuminations have been sold to countries around the world. They've bedazzled in Barcelona, and sparkled amidst the sun and sand of Saudi capital Jeddah. And Libyan Colonel Gaddafi even once sent an emissary on a mission impossible: to buy up Blackpool Illuminations lock, stock and light bulb!

### → TRIPPING the Lights fantastic . . .

Blackpool was the first town to have electric street lighting and visitors first came to marvel at Blackpool's Lights in 1879 when just eight arc lamps bathed the promenade. The nearest to modern-day displays was first staged in May 1912 to mark the first royal visit, made by Princess Louise, to Blackpool. The first results were so impressive the Council bowed to pressure to stage the Lights again in September, and the rest, as they say, is history. . .

### → ALL systems glow . . .

Big names to 'flick the switch' include the Bee Gees, Shirley Bassey, Chris de Burgh and Westlife. Switched-on-stars of yesteryear have included George Formby, Jayne Mansfield and Gracie Fields. Even animals have got in on the act - a rather impatient Red Rum did the honours in 1977 . . . and Kermit the Frog leapt at the chance two years later!

## Competition Winner

The winner of last edition's exclusive competition to win a guest pass to the VIP Switch-On ceremony will be revealed in the next issue.



Senior artist Shoichi Yasuda has thoroughly enjoyed the 'Decodance' project