



Hall in a day's work for thriving tech start-up

By John Lawrence

Two years ago, we reported on the launch of new tech start-up Sharesy by East Finchley entrepreneur Felix Atkin, which aims to bring together community venues who have spaces to hire with the people who want to hire them.

Where some start-ups may struggle, Sharesy is soaring. Since February 2022, the company has grown steadily to a team of 10 and generated more than £750,000 in community event bookings for school halls, church halls and other neighbourhood spaces.

This comes at a time when schools in particular need to generate all the extra income they possibly can to pay for rising costs. And it has helped to solve a problem for many people who often don't know where to start when trying to find a venue for a party or special occasion.

Case study:
St Mary's CE Primary School in Finchley Central found its hall lettings dropped off significantly after the pandemic due to lack of time and resources. Those that did come in tied up the school's business manager in reams of paperwork.



The lettings platform set up by Felix Atkin and his team has helped St Mary's get back on track. After falling to a low of £500 per month to an average, hire income is now up to £2,500 per month.

The school is using the money generated to complete projects they'd had to put on hold, such as important building work and new classroom resources.



Founder: Felix Atkin

Why it works

Felix, who has had roles with Sony Playstation and BT in the past, said: "Hiring a school or church hall isn't new, but the experience today requires 30-plus interactions back and forth by email, phone or in person. In most cases, Sharesy has reduced this to zero."

"Existing venue hire platforms focus on marketing for larger venues, as they can generate bigger profits from high-cost bookings but that means smaller community venues are being largely ignored as a result. We focus on the smaller community venues, which are often overlooked and usually in desperate need of help."

Sharesy is expanding across north and west London with 350 venues on offer. Options in East Finchley include Finchley Youth Theatre in the High Road and Martin Primary School's two halls and playing field.

Felix says listed venues can generate between £12,000-24,000 on average per year, with top performing venues generating over £120,000 per year. Find out more at Sharesy.com



Trunk call: Barnet Council workers dismantle the felled tree in Cherry Tree Wood

Tree felled in Cherry Tree Wood

By Roger Chapman

Every now and again we lose a tree in Cherry Tree Wood. Recently, a mature oak, over 100 years old, on the main path through the wood was felled. It had been identified by Barnet Council in one of its regular surveys as one that was dead and needed to come down for safety reasons.

Under the recently released Woodland Management Plan all felled wood should remain on-site as dead wood is extremely useful to increase biodiversity and can be used to create natural play or seating.

However, in this case the tree and its stump have been totally removed. The Friends of Cherry Tree Wood are in contact with the council to see why this felled wood was removed in this case.



Marionettes: Puppet workshops are on offer

RICKY SAVAGE ...

Artificial Incompetence

Until recently, the only thing that passed as an intelligent lifeform on planet Earth was human. We had evolved enough to order a pizza and operate a remote control. We could even manage to drive a vehicle, walk upright and read without moving our lips. Well, most of us. But not anymore, because someone has come up with the thinking computer.

Artificial intelligence is the new kid on the block, capable of writing an entire work by Dickens in less time than it takes to download *The Archer*. Okay, what it calls a new Dickens may not be anything like Charles ever wrote, but who cares, everyone will want to read Oliver Copperfield, or David Nickleby on their smarter-than-you-are phone. Except it won't be authentic, even if it has the necessary squalor, grime, cliffhangers and happy endings. Why? Because artificial intelligence is just a copycat, not the real deal. That's technology for you.

Who remembers that the lunatics at British Leyland once came up with an intelligent talking car that would tell you to slow down, look out there's a cyclist or you've run out of petrol. On a good day it would refuse to start because it was upset that it was raining. On a bad day it would lose an argument with itself and break down on the North Circular in the rush hour.

But things have moved on since then and now AI can do the full customer service. I know, I tried it and, according to Rip Off Water and Sewage, I'm called Ronald Sausage.

Why not embrace the change, I hear you say, be like the rest of the kids in your class, get AI to do your homework, churn out identikit essays and enjoy the thrill of getting a full Eurovision null points for originality and 100 for cheating? That's the problem, it's not so much artificial intelligence, as its mad brother, artificial stupidity. As my grandmother said, if God had meant us to use computers he'd never have given us the Biro.

Strings on me... for puppets and jazz

Puppetry and jazz are two of the new projects started this year by the DaCapo Saturday Music Centre, based at Wren Academy in North Finchley.

Funded by the National Lottery, the Afternoon of Music and Puppets is open to children, adults and families. It combines puppetry with music-making skills and is in partnership with the renowned Little Angel Theatre.

Meanwhile, the Saturday morning jazz band is led by Austin Carroll, a prize-winning jazz trumpet graduate from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, who has developed an approach to teaching jazz incorporating movement and voice as well as the actual playing.

DaCapo Saturday Music Centre also runs a mix of one-to-one instrumental lessons, ensembles and musicianship classes, with two free choirs, one for children and one for adults, and open to all.

Find out more about visiting or joining from September at www.dacapo.co.uk/saturday-centre

Former councillor

John Davies, who served as a Labour councillor for East Finchley from 1982 to 1994, has died aged 82.

He also served for a time as leader of the Labour group in Barnet. John came to national attention in the 1987 General Election when he stood against the incumbent Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in her Finchley constituency. She was re-elected of course but he succeeded in denting her majority.