



# ONE MORE THING



**CIARÁN HANCOCK**

Tayto's Co Meath attraction is flavour of the month; BT hopes for festive cheer; things looking up for aircraft leasing firm; all change at Shannon

## Brown Thomas slips into tinsel mode

BROWN THOMAS managing director Stephen Sealey is hoping the snow stays away this year as the department store group gears up for festive trading.

Christmas and the new year's sale account for about 20 per cent of its turnover.

Sealey told me this week that last year's snow combined with a burst pipe in its Grafton Street store that closed the shop on St Stephen's Day, cost it about 2 per cent of its turnover.

Brown Thomas's revenues last year were flat at €206 million but its operating profit doubled to €5.38 million as a result of tight stock control and reduced costs.

It was a good performance given the recessionary backdrop, but Sealey estimates that Brown Thomas's business is down 20 per cent from its Celtic Tiger peak.

He described this year as "disappointing" with no

meaningful recovery in consumer spending in sight.

Last year's budget hammered spending from February onwards as people adjusted to the impact of the universal social charge.

"It recovered a bit during the summer," he added.

The impending 2 per cent VAT rise won't do him any favours but he's optimistic that Brown Thomas can survive the gloom.

"Our customers have a huge appetite for newness. That's why every year we bring 20 new brands into the business to move things forward."

This year saw the opening of a Christian Louboutin shoe shop

and the store also began selling children's clothes. Both have been "hugely successful", he said.

So much so that the kids range is being expanded.

Sealey had an interesting take on how savings in public expenditure might be achieved.

He cited how the Business Improvement District programme, which is funded from rates, had privatised the street-cleaning operation. This resulted in the cost of the service, which was operated by Dublin City Council, being reduced from €600,000 to €340,000 annually.

"They are more flexible and also clean private areas like doorways," he added. "It's an example of how you can deliver better value for money."



Stephen Sealey: this year the store launched a very successful children's clothes range