



She'll take the strain of waiting for a plumber

■ Mariella — will even put music on your iPod to save you time.

YOUR boiler's just broken down, you've forgotten to pick up the dry cleaning, the kids need collected from school and the dog hasn't been walked in days — but you have to be at an important meeting in five minutes.

You don't need to be Einstein to know time is relative. And there's simply not enough of it as our lives get faster and busier.

What use is being told that the gasman can only come to fix your boiler sometime between 8 am and 1 pm? You can't ask the boss for more time off, so that means cold water and no heat until you can be there.

What you need is a helping hand.

That's where a concierge service can help. They're all the rage in America and are beginning to appear in London, too.

Now the first in Scotland is going great guns.

Brainchild

Based in Bearsden, Dickory Dock is the brainchild of former Maltese businesswoman Mariella MacLeod.

Mariella (41) and husband John, a chartered accountant, moved to Glasgow from the Mediterranean island five years ago. Without a British work permit Mariella found herself, for the first time, with time on her hands.

But in 2003, and with a big Maltese wedding to arrange — for about 500 guests — Mariella planned most of it online. She says, "I was amazed how you could get so much done on the Internet, and how calm I was at doing it."

Mariella had worked for 18 years in admin jobs and had even been head of Malta's Junior Chamber of Commerce, so she knew a thing or two about organising other people's lives.

"Many people live alone and

By Sarah Johnson

work all day so are unable to carry out simple tasks. Waiting for a plumber to fix the toilet can mean taking a day off work. Who wants to take a holiday to do that?

"I've quite a few single male clients who need help with household chores and everyday things like remembering to buy flowers for their mother's birthday.

"There's nothing, within reason of course, that I can't or won't do — as long as it's legal.

"One of the most common problems people have is with house-sitting.

"Getting started two years ago was my biggest challenge. People were letting me into their lives and giving me keys to their homes, so trust was very important as the job requires discretion. Many of my referrals came by word of mouth.

"We came up with various names, but Dickory Dock was perfect as it was memorable and fun. The nursery rhyme is all about time and my business is about making the most of the time you have.

"The first job I ever had was to find a tree surgeon!

"The hardest jobs are the ones you least expect, like organising broadband for clients. I once spent hours on the phone dealing with call centres.

"Then there was a boiler I had to arrange to get fixed. Whenever we thought it was repaired, it broke down again. It took a while to resolve but my client was just glad I was there to take the strain, as he simply didn't have the time.

"I've one female client who's a lawyer. She phoned me one day in a blind panic. She was going on holiday the next morning and had been so busy she hadn't had time to go out and buy so much as a swimsuit, sandals, or books, never mind pack!

"I spent a morning shopping for her and left a couple of choices of clothes and shoes in her house so when she got home from work all she had to do was choose what she wanted, get packed and still be at the airport for 7 am the next morning.

"I'd even put her favourite music on her iPod.

"The same client hates shopping, so one time I went with her as her own personal shopper.

"I promised I'd give her an honest opinion. It was great, and she bought some lovely clothes.

Relationship

"Now we've decided to do this a couple of times a year when she needs to revamp her wardrobe. I'm not a fashion expert but we've a good rapport.

"The more I use suppliers and tradesmen the more we build a relationship. I ask them to phone me half an hour before they're due to arrive. That saves me having to wait for them. It also saves my clients time as they don't have to pay me for waiting around.

"I want to continue building the foundations of Dickory Dock in the Glasgow area, with a view to franchising later, but for now I'm just enjoying running my own business and living in Scotland.

"I don't want to get carried away before Dickory Dock is well established and developed. I have to be very strict with myself.

"But luckily I've my very own live-in accountant to keep an eye on me!"

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