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the Puffins
Catherine Merrigan
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Mike Collard shares his
path from 1960s activism
to a simpler way of life
in West Cork from page 2

A Sherkin Island renovation
Part of our spotlight
on Green Homes
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February 2 – February 29, 2024, Vol 22, Edition 258

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Dr Jilan Wahba Abdalmajid, Palestinian Ambassador to Ireland with Palestinian students Anas Almasri, 1st Yr and Amir Almasri, 3rd Year at Kinsale Community College during a visit organised by the Kinsale Peace Project. Picture: John Allen

Public consultation open for greenways

Cork County Council is inviting members of the public to have their say on early-stage plans for two new greenway projects in Cork County. Public consultations for both the Skibbereen Sections of the West Cork Greenway and the Cork to Kinsale Greenway are now open for submissions.

These initial public consultations are designed to provide information on the projects and to invite feedback on the study area, the constraints and opportunities located within and any other features that the design team should consider.

For the West Cork Greenway, it is proposed that all routes will originate in Skibbereen and connect to the communities of Baltimore, Schull and Drimoleague.

For the Cork to Kinsale Greenway, it is proposed to develop a

suitable route creating connectivity between Cork City and Kinsale, linking two important tourist destinations, while acting as an active travel route for local communities and an alternative to commuting by car.

Mayor of the County of Cork, Cllr. Frank O'Flynn is encouraging communities to get involved and have their say on the first step in these exciting projects for Cork County, "The community plays a pivotal role in shaping the future of these projects. We encourage feedback and input to ensure these greenways align with the needs of residents and businesses in the area. Our common goal is to provide greenways that are sustainable, accessible, safe, and attractive for locals and visitors alike."

The first public consultation for

the West Cork Greenway – Skibbereen Sections will be online until February 23, 2024 at www.wcgskibbereen.ie Information will also be available to view at Skibbereen Library during the consultation period.

The first public consultation for the Cork Kinsale Greenway will be online until February 29, 2024 at www.corkkinalsegreenway.ie. In-person events will also be held at the Viaduct Restaurant on Wednesday, February 7, 2024 from 2-8pm and in Kinsale Library on Thursday, February 8, 2024 from 2-8pm. Information will also be available to view at Kinsale Library during the consultation period.

Alternatively, submissions can be made by post to Greenways, Cork National Roads Office, Richmond, Glanmire, Cork, T45 WA44.

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Breaking free of the urban jungle towards the forest

When student couple Mike and Cathy Collard dropped out of Oxford University and travelled to West Cork to look for a house up a remote mountain between Glengarriff and Bantry, they were searching for a simpler life, as far away from the perils of nuclear power and American imperialism as they could get. Theirs was a love story that intertwined activism and free spirit with hardship and hope and was the impetus for the creation of Future Forests, today one of Ireland's most successful plant and tree nurseries. Mike Collard, 72, shares with **Mary O'Brien** what it was like growing up, as the son of radicals, at the heart of London's activist scene in the 1960s, his religious awakening, and what drew him and his late wife Cathy to create a life without modern conveniences in the wilds of West Cork.

While originating from very different backgrounds, Mike and Cathy felt somehow connected from the moment they first laid eyes on each other at Oxford University. Mike was a student of politics, philosophy and economics and Cathy of politics, philosophy and psychology. Both fiercely rebelled against the colonialist discourse prevalent at Oxford at the time.

The son of radicals – Elizabeth Collard, a political activist, well-known champion of Arab causes and noted economic analyst on the developing world; and William Dudley Collard, a left wing British barrister and writer – Mike was born right in the middle of London and enrolled at the private and very posh Westminster School, whereas country girl Cathy, the daughter of teachers, grew up in the heart of rural Devon.

Born in India of Irish descent – the family can trace its heritage back to an uncle of Clonakilty's Michael Collins – Mike's mother, Elizabeth Collard (nee Shields Collins) was the inspirational force behind the renowned Middle East Economic Digest (MEED), which she published in the wake of the Suez Crisis.

A secretary to the first World Youth Congress during World War II, later on her outrage at the plight of the dispossessed Palestinians led her to become a leading figure within the Arab community and the British Labour Party, and an advisor to Prime Minister Harold Wilson on Middle East affairs. In 1967 she helped to establish the Council for the Advancement of Arab British Understanding (CAABU). "She was astonished by the lies that came out in the media during the Six-Day War between Israel and the Arab States," shares Mike, adding sadly: "She would be spinning in her grave at what Israel is doing to Gaza today."

A member of the Anglo-Soviet Law Association, Mike's father, William Dudley Collard, was a lawyer for the Communist

Party of Great Britain.

After WWII, both Elizabeth and William were very involved in the resettlement of displaced persons in London.

"My parents were card-carrying communists at one stage," shares Mike, who is in the process of writing his memoirs. "My father became disillusioned with institutional communism, Stalinist in particular, so he became more focused on social justice, whereas my mother channelled her fighting spirit into the Middle East."

Mike's first taste of activism came as a babe-in-arms marching with his parents and uncle in the Aldermaston marches, anti-nuclear weapons demonstrations, which took place in the 1950s and 1960s in the UK.

This set the backdrop to his teenage years and, on March 17, 1968, he was one of an estimated 10,000 people in London who demonstrated against the Vietnam War and Britain's support for the United States, clashing with police outside the US Embassy in Grosvenor Square. His activism saw him taking part in an occupation of the Hilton (just for a few hours) and he was part of the group that broke the story of the American bombing over Cambodia and Laos when the media ignored it.

"Then I went home to tea in Belgravia, so I was living this mad life of opposites," he shares laughing.

"I was the sort of hippy who used to feed sugar lumps to the horses of the police officers," he clarifies.

It was when Mike witnessed his fellow protestors breaking branches off trees and trying to stab these same horses, that he started to feel conflicted.

"I realised that when you protest and win, it's possible to become what you're thrown down."

Struggling to find a political system he could live comfortably with, during his gap year before starting university, Mike travelled to Italy, where he instead found religion.

The son of Humanists, his

first introduction to Catholicism was at the age of seven, when his Irish nanny brought him with her to Mass. Mike enjoyed the experience so much that he bought himself a wooden cross of St Francis of Assisi, which he held on to throughout school and university, before finally losing it much later on to a compost heap in West Cork.

His trip to Italy resulted in a profound spiritual experience around St. Catherine of Siena "She's a great saint who believed we could have heaven on earth," he shares. "The sky opened up for me outside her cathedral in Siena. There was this immense energy in the town, perhaps because of the annual festival, or perhaps, as with all great cathedrals, from the devotion that took place there over the years."

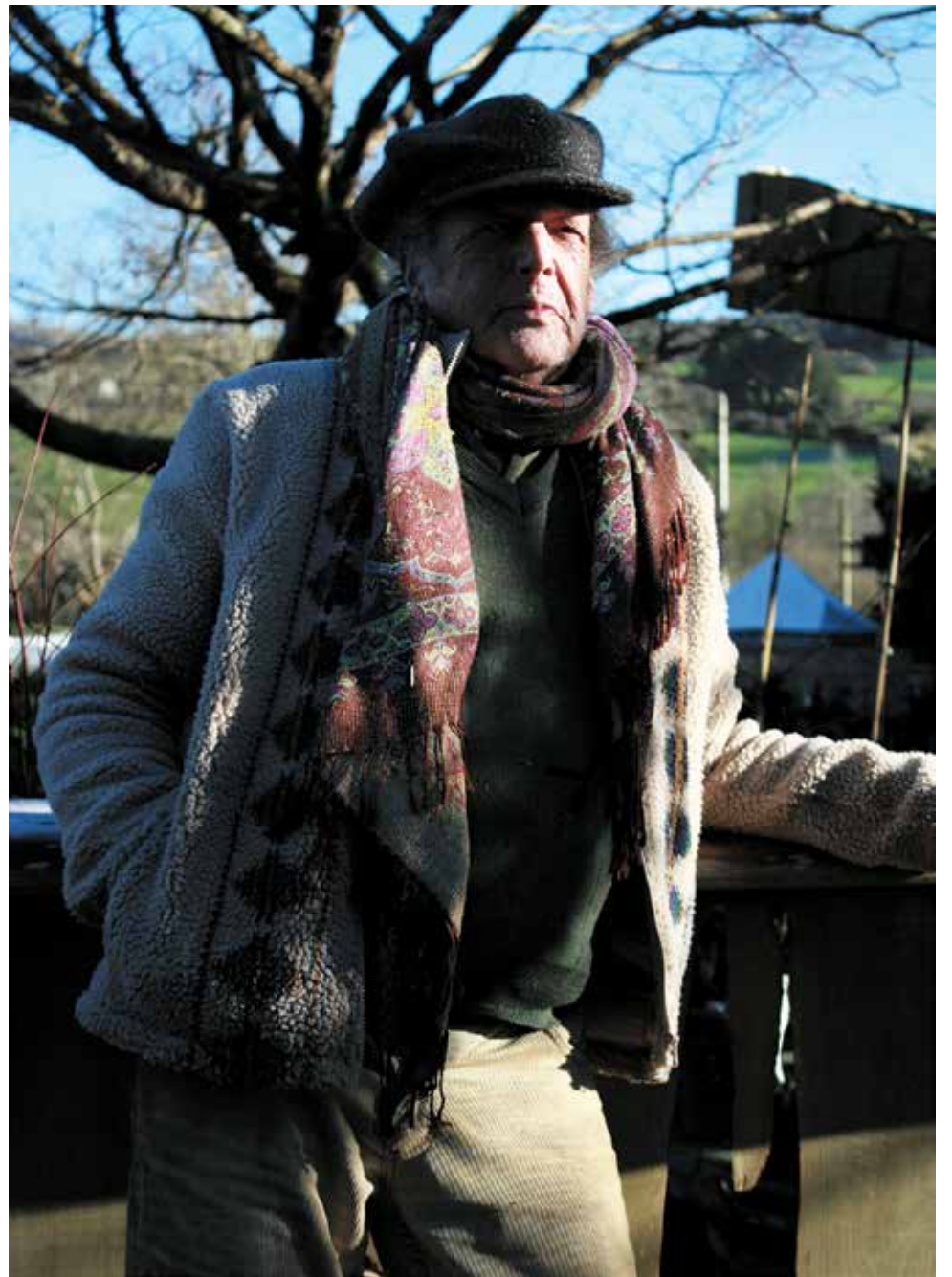
This religious awakening proved a turning point in Mike's life.

"I came to the realisation that the only answer to all the war in the world is to have a peaceful internal life," he shrugs.

After passionately forswearing casual relationships, soon after, the young Mike, now 18, met his true love Cathy, who also felt drawn to a more spiritual way of life.

The couple made a pilgrimage to Glendalough where, after sharing another profound experience, the iconic St Finbarr's Oratory in Gougane Barra, as well as Mike's Irish heritage, focused their attention on West Cork.

Mike was also searching for an answer to a philosophical, political and economic question that had been troubling him for a while: "Is it possible for a person to live on his allotted share on this earth, which at the time was about an acre, without exploiting other people?" "There was no literature available on stuff like that at the time," says Mike. So the couple, who had dropped out of Oxford by now, packed their bags and, in the summer of 1971, set off to West Cork to put it to the test. "We came here to find out if, in fact, it was possible; it was an experiment



Mike and Cathy Collard dancing at a 'Stations'

as such," explains Mike, adding that the first book on self-sufficiency came out around the same time.

They made a quick detour to the very first Glastonbury festival along the way. "Michael Eavis himself (the dairy farmer who founded the famous music festival) took our money and gave us free milk," laughs Mike.

After landing in Ireland, Mike and Cathy hitched their way to Glengarriff in search of a house, the purchase of which would be made possible by an almost-forgotten-about inheritance from Cathy's Irish grandmother.

"Two months after leaving Uni, Cathy suddenly remembered that her grandmother had left her over £400 which, when we looked into it, turned out to be over £2,000 in ICI shares," says Mike.

The plan was that Mike's sister and his best friend Colin would join them in Glengarriff so they could use Colin's motorbike in their property search.

By the end of the week, there was still no sign of their friends and the motorbike, so Mike consulted the I Ching or 'I' as it is known, an ancient system of Chinese symbols used for foretelling the future. "Taoism is my other strand of spirituality,"



Mike and Cathy leaving London for West Cork in 1972. Mike is on his Triumph 650 Thunderbird, the sidecar filled with wholefoods, and Cathy is on the far left.

he explains.

“The ‘I’ told us to stay another day.”

Lo and behold, the motorbike did arrive the following day, and Mike and Cathy drove to meet the only other people they knew in the area, a couple from Oxford who had bought a house in Bantry. “They directed us to the nearest estate agent, where it felt almost like we were consulting a country doctor,” he laughs. “He was fascinated by us and our ‘disease’ of wanting to grow vegetables.”

The couple only had time to see one of the two properties available, so – after consulting a local shop lady, who reckoned, having taken stock of her customers, that Maugha was the place for them – that’s where they headed. “We found a big wide plain, a bit grey and featureless, in the Borlin valley,” remembers Mike.

Feeling uncertain now about West Cork, they made a quick trip to Kerry to check what the neighbouring county had to offer, before rushing back to sign the papers for the two-storied, three-chimneyed farmhouse in Maugha. It was August 1971.

“Just in time it turned out, as the Dutch owner had changed his mind about the sale,” shares Mike. “It really felt like we were being driven there.”

They returned briefly to London before moving permanently to West Cork in February 1972.

After the inheritance was divided up between the expense of the house, £1,400; a motorbike with sidecar and insurance, £200; and a supply of wholefoods £200; the couple had £200 left in their pocket to start their new life together.

Mike had spent six months after leaving university working in a walled garden in Oxford, so he quickly found a job as a gardener for the local vicar in Bantry, a position which paid £2 a day. “I think perhaps my Englishness and the fact that I read books is what really got me in the door,” he laughs. With Cathy selling her crocheted hats in local shops, together the

young couple managed to make ends meet..

Fascinated with wildflowers since the age of eight when he was given a book by his mother’s good friend, the great Julian Huxley, a pioneer in the scientific field-study of animal behaviour and early advocate of conservation, Mike loved the natural world and working on the land. “Julian was the David Attenborough of his time,” he says. “Another great man in my life, he gave me a book on every birthday, taught me about orchids and inspired my lifelong interest in evolution and the natural world.”

The Collard’s new home was located in the Borlin Valley, reputedly the second last area in Ireland to be electrified, around 1975. Still determined to live a simple life, Mike and Cathy got the house wired for the bare minimum, a light socket, but soon afterwards decided to switch off the power completely. “It spoiled the magic, the soft light” explains Mike, adding “we were also very stubborn and trying to prove something.” It was nine years later – for the sake of their children’s schooling – before they relented to the ‘convenience’ of electricity.

Mike and Cathy had eight children together, six surviving. “Two babies were born with Edward Syndrome,” shares Mike sadly. “Edward Syndrome, also known as Trisomy 18, is a rare but serious condition that causes most babies to die before or shortly after being born.”

The family converted to Catholicism and travelled to mass on occasion by donkey and cart.

“We were drawn to the Catholic way of burial and the intimacy of the mountain community and the station Masses,” recalls Mike. “The Christianity of the stones.”

The family mostly drew water from a stream diverted over a rock near to the house, known as “the spout”. There was also a well on the property. Clothes were washed by hand in a big pot over the open fire and using an old clothes wringer machine.

They kept animals and made blackpudding and sausages at home from their own pigs.

Strong and eager to learn firsthand the ways of old Ireland, Mike found work easily with local farmers – fixing roofs, saving hay, working with hand tools and cattle and learning the skills of basketmaking, thatching, stone quarrying and building as he went. He fell into a pattern: Three days working at home, three days outside the home and one day off. “It’s my experience that it’s the right pattern,” he says.

When the family’s pigs got sick and debt began building up, Mike was forced to find better paid employment, so he joined the Forestry Service for three years, where he learned the rudiments of tree handling and planting ‘mountains’ and became aware of the potential to plant a much wider range of species including native trees.

With the rest of Ireland embracing the new, Mick and Cathy continued to grab hold of the old with all of their might. Things weren’t easy but there was much joy.

Mike trained their donkey, a small stallion, and in the summer months raced him at the donkey derbys that took place north of Bandon. “That was great fun, some great memories” he says, recalling the time the local Sergeant in Enniskeane, a man with a big moustache, won the veteran sulky race and joined them in the pub afterwards, where he played the accordion for two hours.

Traditional Irish music is an important thread running through the Collard family tale. Just across the bog, according to Mike, was the best music household in West Cork at the time, the O’Flynn’s, where so many of the famous Borlin Wren Balls took place, more-often-than-not on New Year’s Eve. Mike and Cathy both joined the Borlin Wren.

“I’d be called on to go out on Christmas evening, much

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There is no greater crime on this planet than the crime of genocide.

To intentionally attempt to wipe an entire national, ethnical, racial or religious group off the face of the earth. No one makes an accusation of genocide lightly. Or without evidence. We all know the weight and the history of that word.

But what is happening in Gaza if not a genocide?

Over 26,000 people have been killed by Israel in just over 100 days. The majority of which are women and children. And this is only an estimate, the actual numbers are believed to be much higher. Because the number of Palestinians dying and dead beneath the rubble of Gaza is impossible to quantify. The scale of the death and destruction is unimaginable.

Israel is not hiding their crimes. They are not hiding their intentions. They have signalled them at every step of the way, broadcasting them to the world. We have heard the genocidal language of senior Israeli politicians and military leaders calling for the absolute destruction of Gaza.

“We are fighting human animals, and we are acting accordingly” were the words of the Israeli Defence Minister just days after the brutal and indefensible Hamas attack on October 7. The words following this statement were ominous:

“We will eliminate everything – and they will regret it.”

And despite these words, and the actions that followed. The world, largely, has failed to act.

South Africa are one of the few brave countries who have decided to match their words with action, in taking Israel to the International Court of Justice on crimes of genocide.

On Friday, the International Criminal Court gave their preliminary judgment – it was a clear win for South Africa and must be a turning point in this horrific conflict. The court called on Israel to take every action possible to prevent genocide in Gaza, including ensuring that humanitarian aid and basic services reach people in Gaza.

While the court stopped short of ordering Israel to end their military bombardment of Gaza, it is difficult to see how Israel could comply with the court’s order to protect civilian life without a total and complete ceasefire.

Genocide is the worst human rights crime and the fact that Israel must now defend itself against allegations it engaged in genocide is a dark stain that will forever be attached to that State’s government.

There are also questions to answer for Israel’s cheerleaders in the international community – particularly the United States, the UK and Germany – who have watched the wholesale



SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

Holly Cairns TD

slaughter in Gaza and endorsed Israel’s right to engage in this massacre.

There is overwhelming evidence to support a genocide case against Israel.

With South Africa’s genocide case set to proceed to a full hearing, Ireland can no longer sit on the fence. The Irish Government’s stance on South Africa’s ICJ case has been extremely inconsistent. The Taoiseach initially said that Ireland would not get involved and that he was “uncomfortable” in accusing Israel of genocide.

Thanks to public and political pressure, the Government’s position has shifted massively.

This week, the Social Democrats put forward a motion calling on Ireland to support the ICJ case and to take our responsibilities under the Genocide Convention seriously. The Government said it would “strongly consider” intervening after South Africa submits its substantive case, which could be months away.

Today it was welcome to see the Government finally begin their legal analysis of the case, which is hopefully the first step towards a formal intervention. There can be no further delay in Ireland strongly and loudly declaring their support for South Africa’s case. The people of Palestine do not have the luxury of time.”

Bantry Credit Union to open six days a week

From February 12, Bantry Credit Union will open six days a week, Monday to Saturday. It will be the first time in the credit union’s history that it has been open for business on Wednesdays.

It will be open from 9.30am to 5.00pm on four days (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday). On Wednesday and Saturday it will be open from 9.30am to 1pm.

Announcing the change, Bantry Credit Union Manager Finbarr O’Shea said “This is a really good-news story. While traditional banks are retreating from rural Ireland, the credit union will be open six days a

week for the first time ever.”

Until now Bantry Credit Union has been closed on Wednesdays, which was the traditional half-day for businesses in the town. The credit union has been open on Saturdays until 4pm. From February 12, the credit union will now open on both Wednesday and Saturday until 1pm.

Explaining the change to a half-day on Saturday, Finbarr said that the pattern of transactions has changed a lot in recent years. “People can now have access to their accounts online. They can transfer money to their account online. And they can apply for and draw down

loans online. This has resulted in a significant reduction in footfall at the credit union office on Saturdays, especially in the afternoon.”

Finbarr commented “Extending our opening hours to six days a week is a vote of confidence in our business and our community. The credit union is committed to providing the best possible service to its members and the general community. While we continue to roll out more digital and online services, we remain totally committed to providing all our services in person. Just as we always have done.”

Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the February edition of West Cork People.

As I write this, we approach St Brigid’s Day on February 1, a day that was celebrated widely in old Ireland as the beginning of Spring. For some reason, January this year has felt especially long, so our new bank holiday celebrating Ireland’s only female patron saint, combined with the arrival of Spring, is particularly welcome: A time to salute new beginnings. Hopefully the weather will start behaving itself!

This month, I had the pleasure of spending some time with Mike Collard who shared the story of his heritage, escape from London in the 1970s with the love of his life Cathy and building of Future Forests in West Cork. Running from nuclear power and American Imperialism, this young couple’s journey to the wilds of West Cork and determination to live a life without modern conveniences makes for a fascinating story.

With the busy summer season not too far off, Catherine Merrigan gives an insight into life on the tiny rocky island of Skellig Michael, where she spends six months of every year as a guide, surrounded by puffins – the affectionate, funny and feisty actions of these clownish birds ensuring never a dull moment in isolation.

With the recent controversy surrounding the renaming of Páirc Uí Chaoimh, history and sports buffs will be particularly interested in Pauline Murphy’s article this month, where she looks back on the history of the stadium, its namesake and some memorable games from past years.

Also in history, Kieran gives us a feel for the true Napoleon, a character he says the movie failed dismally in capturing.

With renewed interest in renovating vacant homes due to Ireland’s property crisis and more and more people looking into home energy upgrades, we shine a spotlight on some of the grants and loans available.

The role of a caregiver is never easy and often isolating. In her End of Life Matters column this month, Melissa gives space to one of the most important roles in our society.

We are delighted to welcome Lorraine Dufficey, who in her new fitness column, reminds us of the importance of movement for good health. This month Lorraine delves into the most recent research in the field of longevity and immunity.

In entertainment, Lauren catches up with alt-folk musician Seamus Fogarty, who will pass through West Cork on his tour next month, playing Levis’ on March 2.

For this and lots more, see inside. I hope you enjoy the read over the long weekend.

Mary



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Towards the forest... cont'd from page 3

to Cathy's consternation, to gather promises from local musicians to join the Wren the following morning at 10am," he remembers. "Starting at Coomhola, travelling all along the Borlin valley, there would have been a crew of about 15 of us, three carloads on the day, all dressed up in women's clothing, blowing whistles and trumpets and gazoos on the way up to all the houses before visiting the pubs in the local towns. That first year, we even blackened ourselves with boot polish!

"There was a king and a jester and I often played the role of captain," he adds. "I'd love to see the tradition of the Wren revived locally."

'Scoraíochts' were a part of the fabric of life. Mike used to regularly visit a neighbour, a great storyteller, whose memory stretched back as far as throwing eggs at the redcoats accompanying bailiffs up the valley in 1907.

"I listened to the old people and learned as much as I could from them," he says. "I used to say 'I was 18 months in the university of Oxford and 18 years in the university of West Cork', but now, it's 52 years!"

In 1979, Mike's mother Elizabeth Collard died and the family business, the Middle East Economic Digest, was sold. Mike used his share of the sale to start a small business up the side of the mountain in West Cork selling plants, as well as renting some land near Kealkil from a local farmer where he built a sawmill. Today this is where Future Forests, run by the second generation of Collards,

now stands. "It was the beginnings of Future Forests," says Mike.

He smiles remembering the little nursery at their home. "The kids would be running around barefoot with customers calling in to Cathy for tea. It was an extension of our daily lives."

"I could see the future in planting trees," he continues. "Shelter, fuel and jobs... I felt that for my children to live in this landscape, the most important thing I could do for them would be to create employment."

The rented land was in poor condition. "It was a bad piece of land, all springs and bog; the neighbour down the road said it wouldn't feed a snipe!" laughs Mike.

Mike started working the land, eventually getting it in good enough shape to grow trees on, while at the same time importing hardwood trees like lime. "I was more of a tree planter than a nursery man so the business was mostly about sourcing rather than planting at the beginning," he admits.

Throughout the '80s, Mike was producing the cheapest timber around, with six months of the year focused on planting and six on cutting and processing the timber, which mostly serviced the shed building needs of farmers.

Mike's first office was a stake in the ground with an ammunition box placed on top.

For the next ten years, while Cathy ran the nursery from home, Mike drove between 20,000 and 30,000 miles a year, building up the business.

"I was hardly home a day in the spring," he recalls sadly. "I do regret that now, that I didn't spend more time with my family in those years, but at the same time, this, Future Forests, wouldn't have been possible without the sacrifice."

Cathy passed away in 2000, age 50, when their youngest child was just ten.

"Cathy taught me how to be happy at night in the country, with the hawthorns and the rustlings," reflects Mike quietly.

The arrival of garden designer Mary Reynolds at Future Forests the following year proved a welcome distraction from his immense grief.

"She wanted us to help her build a garden at the Chelsea Flower Show in 2002," explains Mike. Between the jigs and the reels – "I left my son Christy in front of the fire with her and they fell for each other," says Mike smiling – Mike, Christy and the crew at Future Forests came to Mary's rescue and helped her build the gold medal Chelsea garden that launched her career and established Future Forest's reputation as one of Ireland's finest plant and tree nurseries, the story of which was later made into a movie called 'Dare to be Wild'. "In which Christy and I are badly portrayed... thank God," he adds laughing.

When Mike pulled back from the business after this, his daughter Maria and her husband Matt came on board and, following Mike's retirement 10 years ago, they now run the show. "With great panache," adds Mike. His son Christy runs a timber construction business on the land, as well as taking responsibility for the infrastructure at Future Forests.

Today Mike has come full circle: He has returned to a slower pace of life – basket making, keeping animals, growing veg, occasionally attending Mass, reading and now writing his memoirs. He still loves music and dancing, on one occasion even out-dancing Liam Ó Maoiláí up on stage at a local venue, to the delight of the audience and Mike's later embarrassment. "I got swept up in the moment," he admits bashfully.

He travels now and then and locally has given in to the convenience of an electric bicycle, on which he's often to be seen sailing down the mountain, waving or sometimes stopping for a chat – he is well known and liked in the locality – on the way to Future Forests.

"It's interesting," he muses. "I think most of the blow-ins remember us having a hard life and the locals remember us being full of fun. I'd say both are true. We wouldn't have had as much fun if we hadn't undertaken the hardship lightly."





Mike making a creel out of willow, a type of wicker basket, which the local farmers used for drying potatoes

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Keeper of the puffins

In April, Dingle resident Catherine Merrigan, 58, will pack her bag and travel across to Skellig Michael, the spectacular rock and UNESCO World Heritage Site, where she spends six months of every year as an island guide and warden to over 8,000 breeding puffins, which arrive there in the spring, covering every available ledge on the island. There are only three guides on the island at one time during the summer, all living in small

wooden cabins high up on the side of a cliff, each furnished with a bed, gas cooker and fridge. Water and food supplies are brought over from the mainland, if weather allows. Catherine tells **West Cork People** how her role is akin to living in a live David Attenborough programme. "It's tough, it's raw, but it's also very special and I love it," she shares.

A native of Wexford, Catherine left home to travel when she was 17, spending the next decade working on sailing and diving boats around the world and learning about different cultures and creatures as she went.

After taking up the post on Skellig Michael in 2000, she has since been dividing her time between Dingle, Skellig, and sunnier climes during the winter months.

Always feeling a great draw to the natural world, a connection that was nourished by her late grandmother, Catherine has been fascinated by Skellig Michael since first setting foot on the rock. Although isolated there, she is never lonely or bored. No day is ever the same. "I call it Sky TV, it's constantly changing," she says.

In the morning she is often roused by the puffins, the pitter-patter of their tiny feet as they walk into the cabin offering a soft awakening. They are curious and playful creatures, poking their bright orange beaks into her wardrobe and under the bed. "One day I was doing yoga outside the cabin and one

walked across my tummy," she laughs. These affectionate and funny creatures make good company. "I quite literally hang out with the puffins all the time," she explains.

Puffins are sometimes called the 'clowns of the sea'. "They remind me of little Charlie Chaplins walking about the place," says Catherine, who has snapped thousands of photographs of their antics over the years.

Puffins can be territorial and feisty too. "One of my jobs is to break up puffin brawls," she laughs, describing some of their fights as "ferocious. Beak to beak and rolling downhill."

With 15 boats visiting the island every day during the busy summer season, Catherine's role is to inform, giving talks and tours, as well as to safeguard the puffins and their burrows. "Some people are so touched by the place that they cry," she shares. "I love seeing people's reactions to the island and the puffins.

"You could also step foot on the island and not see one puffin," she adds. The chicks are hidden inside the burrows



until their parents return in the evening. "It's an incredible sight, watching the sky fill with circling puffins before landing," shares Catherine, who says they're not the best fliers. "They're kind of like a wind-up toy," she laughs "and sometimes they land on each other's backs."

Every year a puffin returns with the same partner to the same burrow. "A pair has only one chick each year. They come back to the island to lay their egg after spending the winter diving for sprats in the North Atlantic Ocean near Canada," explains Catherine.

While it provides much beauty and wonder, the natural world can also be a hard and uncomfortable place. "It can be tough, you know, when you see gulls flying in and ripping apart puffins. It breaks my heart," shares the island guide.

Catherine does her best to

help injured birds or chicks that get thrown out of a nest. "I have successfully reared puffin chicks, bringing them to the sea in the dark of night to avoid predators."

When she's not caring for the puffins, Catherine is out and about with her camera, rarely missing a sunset or sunrise. Music is in her blood – she's a descendant of Chief Francis O'Neill from Bantry, the great collector of Irish music – so it's no surprise that on occasion she'll sing or even play her flute to an appreciative feathered audience.

When the season draws to a close in October, Catherine will return to Dingle, where she keeps the Skelligs in her sights in-between facilitating movement and music workshops in local schools, hospitals and care homes. When she does fly the coop, you might find her in the Canaries or West Cork.



Christopher O'Sullivan TD

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Author walks with West Cork ghosts in new book

English university, experiences pregnancy and childbirth, and nurtures her son in his early years.

'Resting Places' offers up an Irishwoman's elegy for two Revolutionists, Oliver Cromwell and Terence James MacSwiney, a meditation on the unexpected correspondences between the English Civil War of the seventeenth century and the Irish Civil War of the 1920s, a prayer to John Milton and William Shakespeare, and a keen for a Famine Road and for the troubled history of the plantation town of Bandon. It sings a hymn to her Irish-speaking Grandmother's home place of Baile Bhuirne, site of the shrine of the Medieval St. Gobnait, and speculates by way of a counterfactual history as to what may have happened if her father-in-law's uncle had survived the Battle of Ypres during the Great War in 1915 and had later been posted to West Cork during the years of the War of Independence where he would have risked encountering the Irish Republican Army women and men in her Grandfather's family.

The book includes a contextualising overview by historian Andy Bielenberg (University College Cork) and reflections by Charles Duff and Neale Jagoe, the grandsons of two of the victims of April 1922.

Any author royalties that 'Resting Places' earns will be donated to the organisation Relatives for Justice, Belfast, for its work with victims and survivors.

The book can be purchased from www.beyondthepalebooks.com.

Extract from 'Resting Places: On Wounds, War and the Irish Revolution'

Chapter 12

In Memoriam: A Parable and a Broken Prayer

So. Here is a parable for Ireland in the grief-stricken 1920s, for revolution, civil war and for decolonisation, that may be of interest to anyone who cares about such subjects and stories. There is a place in West Cork where three men were murdered just fields apart, in the same square mile, within 14 days of each other in February 1921.

I know those fields well, their intimacy of ditches, stone walls, thistle and furze, because I spent long hours and days searching them for blackberries and flowers and horse chestnuts when I was a child. How anyone comes out the other side of such a story always is a mystery to me. I have always had the mirror shards of this history in my possession, but have only recently pieced the mirror back together, something that must be done at the right time and with due care because slice the flesh and you bleed.

On 1 February 1921, Thomas Bradfield, a Methodist farmer who was 56 years old was, or so the eyewitness reports tell us, tricked by the Irish Republican Army in his own sitting room into revealing his loyalist sympathies and into revealing too much of what he knew, was taken and shot for being an informer and left with a sign that read 'Convicted Spy' around his neck. In Ireland the word 'informer' will always carry a deadly charge worthy of a dictionary of its own as does the word 'sympathiser', which can be turned back on its natural meaning so it forfeits love for betrayal. These are words that attempt to escape hard truths and offer absolution from guilt, but for all of their power they sometimes fail to convince, most of all when the story ends, as this one does, with the murder of innocent men at the end of the lane. I have often been struck by how families in West Cork who have intimate ties to the story of the Revolution are quiet spoken on the subject and refuse any easy veneration of the history, however much we might honour the courage of our ancestors, what they survived and sacrificed in the name of the future. We are reluctant to say too much about it or speak too freely – it is almost as if we know too much about the cost of the history and so, however much time passes, we continue to choose our words with the greatest of care.

There was a time in West Cork, during the exquisitely painful years of the War of Independence and Civil War and the broken time in between, when people would leave their homes at night because it was safer to sleep in the fields, under trees and next to ditches, than risk being taken hostage or having your home torched by soldiers. The burning of the homes of suspected republicans was official British policy at the time as match after match was dropped across County Cork to set flame to the story of a home and the memories stored within its walls.

In 'Resting Places: On Wounds, War and the Irish Revolution' Ellen McWilliams reflects on her Catholic upbringing in West Cork in the 1980s and 1990s, and on relations with her Protestant neighbours. She is haunted by the killings in the period of Ireland's War of Independence and Civil War, and in particular by the Dunmanway Massacre of April 1922, which marked the area where she grew up. Her great grandmother was active in Cumann na mBan and her granduncle fought for independence as well as in the anti-Treaty IRA. The book reveals why the events of those days remain deeply personal and how they shape her adult life as she moves to England, marries an expert on Cromwell and the English Civil War, teaches Irish literature at an



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The prominent role of cats in folklore: Part 2

Following on from last month, **Eugene Daly** continues sharing some of the legends and sayings around cats in Ireland and other countries.

There are many legends of cats in other countries. In Brittany a silver or 'money' cat (chat d'argent) could serve nine masters and make them all rich. In the Isle of Man a traditional story explains how the Manx cat lost its tail. According to the story, invaders of the island cut the tails off all the island's cats to decorate their helmets. Manx mother cats became anxious to protect their kittens from harm, and so bit off their tails at birth until eventually the kittens were born tailless. In Scotland it was believed that a storm could be averted by throwing the cat out of the house. This was because it would attract any bolts of lightning present, due to the evil spirits it contained. A widely held belief throughout Europe was that witches were able to turn into cats nine times in their lives, hence the saying that cats have nine lives.

In Gaelic Ireland cats were considered useful for keeping their owner's house and grain store free of vermin and were



FACT & FOLKLORE

Eugene Daly

A retired primary teacher, West Cork native Eugene Daly has a lifelong interest in the Irish language and the islands (both his parents were islanders). He has published a number of local history books and is a regular contributor on folklore to Ireland's Own magazine. Eugene's fields of interest span local history, folklore, Irish mythology, traditions and placenames.

also valued as pets. In fact, in the Old Irish Brehon Laws a cat was considered to be worth no less than three cows if it could purr and guard the barn and corn mill against mice. Cats were

noted for their love of milk, and a favourite Old Irish proverb declared 'cuirm lemm, lemlacht la cat' – 'I like beer, as the cat likes milk'. Just like today, cats were noted for their skill at stealing food from kitchens, but the Brehon Laws made allowance for their nature. If food had been carelessly left out without proper supervision the cat was not considered liable. However, if the cat had been devious enough to take food from a secure place of storage or a vessel, then the cat's owner had to replace the food.

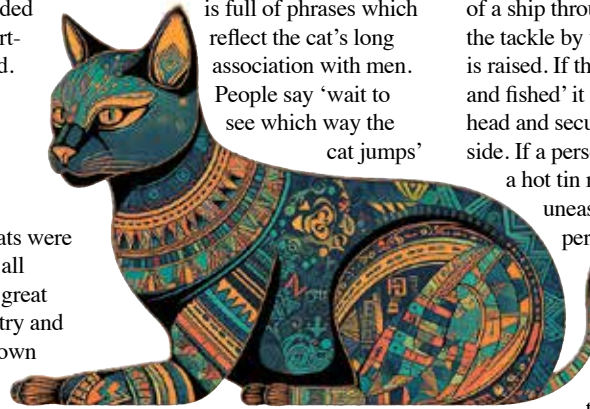
The ordinary domestic cat, relation of the big wild cats – lion, leopard, and so on – is a favourite pet with many people. The cat, usually, is a solitary animal and does not accept a master as completely as a dog. Unlike dogs, all domestic cats have much the same sort of size or shape, but can be divided into two groups – short-haired and long-haired. Short-haired breeds include two unusual cats, the Siamese and the Manx, which has practically no tail.

In ancient Egypt, cats were the most respected of all animals. Egypt was a great grain-producing country and they helped to keep down the numbers of rats and other pests

which attacked the grain stored in granaries. The Egyptians even had a cat goddess called Baset or Bubestis; they kept cats in their temples and offered sacrifices to them. When they died cats were often preserved as mummies just as kings and nobles were.

The word 'cat' is used in various ways. The 'cat-o-nine-tails' used to be a fearsome weapon of punishment, particularly in the British navy and usually had nine cords or leather thongs. Catgut, which is used for the strings of musical instruments and for sewing up wounds, does not come from the inside of a cat at all but usually from a sheep. The name cats' eyes is given to the small glass reflection set in rubber in the middle of the road to show up the headlights of a car at night.

Ordinary speech, too, is full of phrases which reflect the cat's long association with men. People say 'wait to see which way the cat jumps'



meaning they will not take action themselves until they know what someone else is going to do; or they may accuse somebody of 'letting the cat out of the bag', that is giving away a secret. When Alice, in Alice in Wonderland, said that 'a cat may look at a king', she was talking about the independent nature of the cat. If people live 'a cat and dog life' they are constantly quarrelling, for as we know cats and dogs are rarely friendly. To play 'cat and mouse' refers to waiting and watching for the right moment to attack and dispose of one's enemy, like a cat stalking a mouse.

In nautical terms, 'a cat's paw' refers to a very light breeze. A 'cat-walk' is a footway where models display fashion. A 'cat-head' is one of two strong beams projecting from the bow of a ship through which passes the tackle by which the anchor is raised. If the anchor is 'catted and fished' it is raised to the cat-head and secured to the ship's side. If a person is like 'a cat on a hot tin roof', he is very

uneasy and nervous. If a person is described as 'like something the cat brought in', he is bedraggled or slovenly dressed. 'To put the cat among the

pigeons' is to stir up trouble deliberately. If it's 'raining cats and dogs', there is very heavy rain falling. If a person 'hasn't room to swing a cat', he has very confined space. If something is the 'cat's pyjamas' or the 'cat's whiskers', it is the very thing that is wanted, something very good.

The saying 'a cat has nine lives' refers to the fact that a cat is more tenacious of life than other animals because it lands upon its feet without injury. 'To live under the cat's foot' is to be under petticoat government, to be henpecked. 'A cat's sleep' is a sham sleep, like that of a cat watching a mouse. 'Kilkenny cats', proverbially, are cats who fight till each destroys the other. To grin like a 'Cheshire cat' is to be very pleased with oneself, like the cat in Lewis Carroll's 'Alice in Wonderland'.

Who will 'bell the cat'? – Who will risk his own life to save somebody else? Anybody who faces great personal danger for the sake of others undertakes to 'bell the cat'. Proverbially the allusion is to the fable in which a cunning old mouse, who suggested to his friends that they should hang a bell on the cat's neck to give notice of his approach, 'Excellent' said a wise young mouse, "but who will undertake the job?"

Storm reveals ash dieback in fallen trees

Storm Isha's destructive trail has exposed hundreds of ash trees infected with the harmful ash dieback disease, says Fine Gael Senator Tim Lombard. Senator Lombard says Minister Darragh O'Brien needs to put in a place a fund to allow local authorities across the country to carry out surveys to identify ash dieback in roadside trees and have them removed to prevent the problem spreading.

Ash dieback is a serious fungal disease in ash trees which causes them to die. It first came to Ireland in 2012 on imported European plants. The disease is prevalent across the country and is predicted to cause the death of the majority of the ash trees over the next 20 years.

"On Monday morning, I was contacted by a number of landowners who told me that many of the roadside ash trees that fell in the wake of Storm Isha appeared perfectly healthy but were found to be infected with this serious disease.

"Ash trees are most common in our hedgerows and often found along our roads. This



realisation shows the need for more regular inspection of roadside ash trees.

"It's important to remember that this isn't just an issue for landowners. Many homeowners may have an ash tree in their roadside garden. There is a potential liability here for both landowners and homeowners. While there is an ash dieback scheme in place for plantations, there is nothing for roadside trees," Senator Lombard said. He said the Minister for

Housing, Local Government and Heritage needs to intervene.

"Minister O'Brien should put in place a special fund to allow local authorities to carry out surveys to identify Ash dieback in roadside trees. Additional financial supports should be allocated for the safe removal of trees which are weakened from the disease.

"Met Eireann recorded hurricane-strength gusts at weather stations during Sunday's storm. Wind speeds reached 124 km p/h in areas under status red warning.

"Local authorities, and emergency services reported fallen trees all over the country. In many areas fallen trees accounted for road closures.

"By minimising the risk of trees falling, we can remove a major health and safety hazard from our roads particularly during the severe weather conditions like those brought on by Storm Isha and those predicted for Storm Jocelyn and future extreme weather events," Senator Lombard said.

Roisin Murphy awarded Bantry Credit Union Scholarship

Roisin Murphy from Ballylickey, Bantry, has been awarded the Bantry Credit Union Third-Level Education Scholarship for 2023. Daughter of Patrick and Marie Murphy, Roisin is the 21st annual winner of the scholarship, which is now worth €10,000 over four years, compared to €6,000 previously.

At an informal ceremony at the credit union office in January, the Chairperson of Bantry Credit Union, Anna Fitzgerald, presented Roisin with her award.

Roisin sat her Leaving Cert last June at Coláiste Pobail Bheanntaí (CPB). She is now studying Law (Pathways) at University College Cork.

Anna referred to Roisin's many talents and achievements. She is an accomplished football player for St. Colum's Ladies Football and Camogie Club, winning both U14 and U16 West Cork Football titles. Roisin also played with the Bantry Basketball Club and is a member of the Bantry Bay Ladies RFC U18s who won the Munster Plate competition last



year.

Turning to the credit union's annual scholarship scheme, Ms Fitzgerald explained that this is the 21st consecutive year of the scheme. The scholarship is awarded following a rigorous process, involving a detailed application form, a written submission and an interview. Anna said, "Whoever wins the

scholarship will have earned it!"

The assessment and decision-making process is conducted entirely by a panel of independent adjudicators, whose decision is binding on the credit union. Anna thanked these adjudicators, each of whom has given almost unbroken service to the scholarship scheme since the beginning in 2003: James Kilduff (Munster Technological University), Olive McCarthy (University College Cork) and Denis O'Sullivan (retired Deputy Principal of Maria Immaculata Community College, Dunmanway).

The Principal of Coláiste Pobail Bheanntaí, Marian Carey, also attended and paid tribute to Roisin, saying: "Roisin is a credit to herself and her family and we are all very proud of what she has achieved at CPB". She discussed her personal attributes, values, accomplishments, and academic prowess. The principal extended congratulations to Roisin for securing this prestigious scholarship and wished her success in both studies and future endeavours."

Ministers launch public consultation on drones

Minister for Transport Eamon Ryan and Minister of State with responsibility for civil aviation Jack Chambers TD, have launched a public consultation on the development of a policy framework for Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS), commonly known as drones.

Drones are bringing innovation to several industries already with the development of a wide range of new applications and services. Drones are delivering benefits to the public in the medical field with the transportation of medical samples between hospitals and laboratories or the delivery of prescriptions to remote areas, for example. They are also being used to enhance public safety with the introduction of drones into search and rescue capabilities of the coast guard.

The Government wants to hear from the public on key issues including how to respond to concerns about the increase in the use of drones, how to position Ireland as a potential front runner in this emerging sector, and how to future-proof responsible development of the industry.

Minister Ryan said: “The



policy framework is coming at a time when Ireland needs to set out the vision, strategy and priorities for the development of the UAS sector which is growing rapidly, and which has many positive and potentially life-saving benefits. It will aim to foster the industry’s growth and innovation while managing safety, security, environmental and other concerns.”

Launching the public consultation, Minister of State Chambers said: “UAS present exciting opportunities for business and the public sector to boost productivity, improve service provision, support emergency response and infrastructure safety inspections, assist search and rescue operations, create high-tech jobs and boost the economy across Ireland.

“UAS operations will expand in the coming years and the

nation should be ready to take advantage of the economic and societal benefits from this emerging industry in a safe and secure manner.

“The policy framework will help foster the development of a sustainable UAS industry in Ireland while responding to societal concerns. Public opinion on measures to address privacy, environment, safety and security concerns is crucial to developing this framework. I encourage the public to respond to this request for submissions.”

The closing date for taking part in the public consultation is 5pm on Friday March 8. Ideally submissions can be completed quickly and easily online at www.gov.ie. However, if this is not possible, submissions can also be made by email at: dronesUAS.consultation@transport.gov.ie

O’Sullivan appointed Fianna Fáil spokesperson for coastal communities

Fianna Fáil leader and Tánaiste Micheál Martin has appointed Cork South West TD Christopher O’Sullivan as the party spokesperson on Coastal Communities. The position will see Deputy O’Sullivan covering areas such as coastal tourism, coastal infrastructure and fishing.

The Tánaiste said: “This appointment makes sense: Christopher, since his election to the Dáil has been one of the most vocal promoters of all things coastal and it’s clear that he has a passion for tourism as well as the fishing sector. This will complement his role as spokesperson on Climate Action and Biodiversity.”

In accepting the role Deputy O’Sullivan said: “This is a huge honour for me, even during my years as a Councillor, coastal infrastructure was something that was always on the agenda. We have some of the most terrific harbours and inlets as well as coastal villages and towns in west Cork, and we need to protect our marine infrastructure.

“I see this role as an opportunity to highlight the fact that our coastal communities need investment. They need more investment on improving piers,



slipways and pontoons which I feel would greatly benefit coastal tourism, marine tourism activities, as well as facilities for both the inshore sector and larger fishing boats.

“We need to build on the incredible work already being done, particularly with the BALAMI projects which have secured funding recently. I see my new role as away of supporting this work.”

Fianna Fáil Councillor, Cillian Murphy, has been spearheading a campaign for Fianna Fáil to appoint a coastal

communities spokesperson. The Clare-based Councillor said: “Having approached my Fianna Fáil party colleagues Deputy Christopher O’Sullivan and Deputy Cathal Crowe with the concept, the first step in our view was the need for a government spokesperson to cover coastal communities and their sustainability.

“Many of the issues, opportunities and challenges those of us who live and work in coastal communities face are similar, but we have struggled sometimes to have these addressed in a meaningful way, due to the lack of a specific forum or a representative body drawn specifically from those communities with a population of almost 1.3 million people.”

Deputy O’Sullivan concluded by saying: “I am looking forward to working with colleagues to further highlight the opportunities in coastal locations. Ireland has an opportunity to become a world super power in terms of renewable energy for example, and much of that will be offshore. It’s important when we have large companies investing millions in Ireland that coastal communities see the benefits.”



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Páirc Uí Chaoimh: The history behind the name

Before there was Páirc Uí Chaoimh there was The Athletic Grounds, and before that there was Cork Park. In light of the current controversy around the re-naming of Páirc Uí Chaoimh, **Pauline Murphy** looks back on the history of the stadium, its namesake and some memorable games that took place there.

Cork's first GAA stadium was constructed on a plot of land at the Marina in Cork city, leased from Munster Agricultural Society, in the summer of 1898. The builder was William Flemming of Anne Street, Cork city.

Cork Park opened on July 31, 1898 to host Munster Hurling and Football Semi-Finals, for which Cork faced Tipperary in both games. Although work was not yet finished on the stadium the Cork County Board insisted on holding the two big matches there. Right up until noon on the day work was still being carried out and just as the builders packed up their tools, a large crowd arrived outside the venue for the 2pm start.

As the number of spectators increased so too did the temperature on that hot Sunday afternoon but demands for the turnstiles to open were ignored by the ground stewards. The stewards were delaying because the Tipperary teams had yet to arrive, their train having broken down just outside Limerick Junction.

The crowd grew restless and the decision was made to open; unfortunately four turnstiles were now no match for thousands of people! Some broke through a fence, while others scaled the hoarding. More saw an unguarded door and kicked



Pádraig O'Caomh

it in, discovering it led directly onto the pitch behind a goal!

It was 4pm by the time the Tipperary teams finally arrived in Cork and were, without a scrap of food to eat, hastily escorted from the train station to the Marina.

The Cork hurlers dished out an unmerciful beating on the premier county, clocking up

4-16 to 0-02. Next up was the Football Semi-Final, which proved to be a bad tempered affair. Midway through the match Cork were awarded a free kick to which Tipperary players objected and walked off the pitch. The referee declared Cork the winners because they had been leading by 5 points and thus ended a chaotic opening day for Cork's new home of GAA.

When the large crowd dispersed the damage was assessed and many repair jobs were needed. Unfortunately similar scenes played out the following year when hoarding was broken down by supporters who refused to pay at the turnstiles. After that the Cork County Board decided they needed a better enclosure and until then all GAA games were played at Turners Cross.

At the turn of the 20th century the Cork Country Board established The Cork Athletics Grounds Committee Ltd, with James Crosbie as Chairman. Using £30 from the County Board and further funds raised through subscriptions, work began on The Athletic Grounds in 1903.

On September 11, 1904 the newly constructed Athletic Grounds was officially opened by Cork Lord Mayor Augustine Roche in front of 20,000 spectators who were there to watch the All Ireland Hurling and Football Finals. The opening had been advertised for weeks in advance and there was a great buzz in Cork leading up to the big day.

However, this opening did not go smoothly either. Too many turned up and there were not

enough turnstiles to accommodate them. Some disgruntled punters climbed the fence into the ground, and damaged it in the process. Others went further and climbed up on to the roof of one of the refreshment rooms in the Athletic Grounds. The roof could not take their weight and collapsed, though fortunately nobody was badly injured.

Despite the trouble the games went ahead. Cork, represented by Dungourney, defeated a London side in hurling, while Dublin, represented by Bray Emmets, beat London Irish in the football.

To help with the cost of running the Athletic Grounds, the Cork County Board rented it out during the winter months for rugby and hockey. There were plans to hold international rugby matches there too but that never came to fruition. A weighing machine and even a shooting gallery were also set up in the Grounds for those with an interest.

Besides sport, the Athletic Grounds hosted a number of other notable events such as the first aeroplane flight in Cork, which took off from there in 1912.

The Athletic Grounds hosted another All Ireland Final in 1909 when Kilkenny took on Tipperary for the 23rd All Ireland hurling crown. It was just a few weeks before Christmas and a heavy spell of snow had fallen across Ireland. The bad weather did not deter hurling diehards so, as snow was brushed off the pitch, over 11,000 spectators made their way to the Grounds to watch a very fancied Tipperary side take on the under dogs from Kilkenny. The match did not go the way of the premier county and the cats claimed victory on a scoreline of 4-06 to 0-12, making it the first time Tipperary had lost an All Ireland hurling final.

In 1914 the Athletics Ground fell victim to WWI when it was commandeered by the British Army for the training and stabling of their war horses. After much protest by Cork GAA and the sport loving Cork public the grounds were given back in 1915 but they were in bad shape. A year of trampling by horse's hoofs had caused severe damage and it took a lot of work to repair the Athletic Grounds back to what it was.

During the War of Independence the British Army returned; in August 1920 Limerick and Tipperary were due to play the Munster Final but when GAA officials arrived to prepare they were met by British soldiers who had occupied the turnstiles with machine guns.

The soldiers fired over the heads of the officials, who retreated back to the County Board offices where they decided to

go ahead with the match at a different venue, Riverstown, near Kinsale.

After the Civil War the Athletic Grounds went back to being the prime location for GAA games. In 1926 it played host to the Munster Hurling Final between Cork and Tipperary. The game was a chaotic affair, even before the sliotar was thrown in at 3pm there were thousands of spectators flooding through the turnstiles. The Cork Examiner reported that the event was 'a fiasco' and put most of the blame on the lack of stewardship in the sports ground. Though blame was also apportioned to the fans who roughly pushed their way through the turnstiles, while others climbed over the fence.

Just 15 minutes into the game the referee called a halt due to trouble in the stands. Spectators spilled onto the pitch and it was decided to call off the match. For Cork it came as a blessing because they were trailing Tipp 1-02!

A fiery Munster Hurling Final took place at the Athletic Grounds in August 1933 when Waterford met Limerick. Under a hot August sun thousands thronged the venue; the number reached beyond capacity and tensions rose on and off the pitch!

Midway through the second half, with Limerick leading Waterford, the legendary Limerick centre back Mick Mackey was sent off for unsportsmanlike behaviour. With eight minutes to the full-time whistle Limerick player Chris O'Brien was given a belt of a hurley by a Waterford player. O'Brien's teammate Dave Clohessey took on the offending Waterford player before a free-for-all fight broke out.

The Irish Press reported the following day on how the Munster Hurling Final 'had turned into a pitched battle with upraised hurleys swinging dangerously at one another. A big portion of the spectators, obviously Waterford to judge by a flag they carried, invaded the playing area. Rowdiness and general fighting followed.'

Because Limerick were winning before all hell broke loose, the GAA Central Council awarded them the Munster title.

In 1935 a major reconstruction took place at the Athletic Grounds. A covered stand was erected, a new entrance was built and 18 extra turnstiles were added.

Another redevelopment, along with a re-naming, occurred in the 1970s. The Athletic Grounds were demolished and on June 6, 1976 a newly built stadium named Páirc Uí Chaoimh was unveiled.

Pádraig O'Caomh was considered the architect of the modern GAA. Born in

Roscommon, the son of an RIC constable, O'Caomh grew up in Cork when his father retired from the police and went into the garment trade, which was a booming business on Leeside in the late 19th century. O'Caomh attended South Presentation School and later returned there as a teacher.

Along with his brother William and friend Pat O'Donoghue, Pádraig O'Caomh set up Nemo Hurling Club. It later joined with Rangers Football Club to become Nemo Rangers.

During the War of Independence O'Caomh was an active member of the Cork City IRA. He also took on the role of secretary of the Cork GAA County Board. In 1921 O'Caomh was stopped by police on a street in Cork city and searched. They found a hand grenade in his pocket and O'Caomh was sentenced to 15 years penal servitude in Parkhurst prison on the Isle of Wight, from which he was released following the Truce.

When the Civil War broke out O'Caomh took the Anti-Treaty side. He maintained his position as County Board Secretary during those turbulent years and, at the end of the Civil War, was appointed General Secretary of the GAA. O'Caomh remained in the position for 35 years and oversaw the modernisation of the ancient game. Under O'Caomh the GAA redeveloped Croke Park, including building the Hogan stand. He also saw that a GAA pitch was created in every parish across the country.

Pádraig O'Caomh died in 1964, ten years before the redeveloped Athletics Ground was renamed in his honour. After further redevelopment in the 2010s a newer, larger Páirc Uí Chaoimh stadium opened in 2017 to continue the long tradition of Corkonians sporting by the banks of our own lovely Lee.

Statement from Cork GAA

January 31, 2024: Páirc Uí Chaoimh is to be renamed SuperValu Páirc Uí Chaoimh as part of a new 10-year partnership. The matter of naming rights will be finalised at a special meeting of delegates to the Cork County Board on Thursday Feb 1.

The historic grounds underwent an extensive renovation before reopening in 2017. Naming rights for the stadium are part of a broader commercial strategy by Cork GAA which is supported by One Cork. This aims to put Cork GAA on a stable financial footing to help develop the game at both local and county level.

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Independent Candidate for Cork County Council

Bonaparte movie fails to capture the true Napoleon



HISTORY & POLITICS

Kieran Doyle

The opening line in Charles Dickens' much-loved novel, 'A Tale of Two Cities' is the often quoted one – 'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times'. Has it ever been any other way? The narrative of the book spanned the run-up to the French Revolution, an event that would become a turning point for humanity and governance. The cries of the revolution, 'liberté, égalité, fraternité', ushered in the dawn of modern society before it descended into the darkness of the bloody aftermath. Twenty thousand people were massacred and executed under the rule of one of the architects of the revolution, Robespierre. It had such a profound effect on a young Daniel O'Connell, who was studying in Paris, that he vowed never to condone physical force, or try to use it as a means for change. His numerous monster marches in the 1840s around the country, attended by a quarter of the population, could have swept away any British resistance had the great man given the word. He wanted the 'Act of Union' repealed, politically, and not through force. This philosophy of non-violence, copied by Martin Luther King and Gandhi, were inspired by O'Connell and forged from the horrors of the French Revolution. A revolution that sought to break from the bonds of the dominant aristocratic ruling classes. It was the best of times it was the worst of times.

It heralded in the rise of Napoleon, who benefitted from the meritocratic pathways that French Revolution opened up, giving the young capable commander the opportunity to rise up the ranks that would otherwise have been closed due to his birth. Napoleon is back in the spotlight, after the dramatic but misleading historic movie 'Bonaparte', hit the big screen this year. It has prompted me to write about him this month, in fear of the Hollywood portrayal becoming ingrained as the truth. I have written before about my concern with historical movies

because it can be hard to sift the Hollywood narrative from reality.

The director, Ridley Scott, has produced some of the great movies over the last thirty years. His science fiction films in particular have been groundbreaking, from his stellar 'Alien' to the 'The Martian' which was not only strong on story and drama, but on science too. Perhaps he should have paid more attention in history class! Yes, he produced the brilliant 'Gladiator' movie, but that was based on a fictitious gladiator,



Napoleon Bonaparte in 1806. Pic:Wikimedia Commons

Instead, we are treated to a man, portrayed by an aging Joaquin Phoenix, as an imbecilic, pompous brat, who slouches and mopes throughout the movie, like he's been told to sit on the naughty chair once too often. And then there's the blatant historical errors. Poetic license, I hear you say? More like a license to kill!

Maximus, placed loosely in a certain Roman era. Scott didn't let us down with Bonaparte's world either. He captures the period superbly, and there is some great cinematography and, no doubt, buckets of CGI, poured into resurrecting early 19th century Europe. Yet the movie lost an opportunity to really explore this most complex of characters. Instead, we are treated to a man, portrayed by an aging Joaquin Phoenix, as an imbecilic, pompous brat, who slouches and mopes throughout the movie, like he's been told

to sit on the naughty chair once too often. And then there's the blatant historical errors. Poetic license, I hear you say? More like a license to kill!

Finding a dramatic hook is an essential tool of good storytelling, so Scott didn't have to look too far, with all the upheaval the French Revolution brought with it. Yet he overcooked that too. How theatrical was it, when Ridley Scott placed Napoleon in the crowd that witnesses the beheading of Marie Antoinette? If only it were true. The fact was that he was actually commanding troops in Toulon against an occupying British force. There are more ludicrous insertions, such as his decision to abandon his army in Egypt to deal with a marital spat with Josephine or his encounter with the Duke of Wellington on a British ship (they never met). For a man who, to this day, has commanded more field battle victories than any other general before or since, the partial reenactment of just three battles, in a long movie, was baffling. But what of the real man?

Napoleon certainly wasn't the buffoon that Scott portrays him as. Like Winston Churchill, Tom Barry and Dan Breen, he was clever enough to understand that writing your own version of history was a way of preserving the truth – your truth. With nothing but time on his hands, when exiled on the inhospitable island of Saint Helen for six years, until his death, he wrote his memories. They would become bestsellers and ingrain the heroic portrait that has endured, particularly in France. Yet on balance, he presents the very best attributes of the French revolution. He is the embodiment of the rise of the ordinary man. No, he was not a Corsican peasant, but born into a petty noble Corsican family. Indeed, his father tried to resist the French invasion of Corsica, a year before Napoleon was born. Pre-revolution, those lowly credentials would have stifled any promise of an elevated career in the military at the highest level.

He also represents the face of many who despised the power of the church and bishops, whose wealth and corruption were a blight upon France. When he took the crown from the Pope and coronated himself the French Emperor, he was telling the world, 'It is I, not God, who put me here'. There is also a lot to be said of his stance against the great royalist powers of the times, Britain, Austria, Prussia, Russia. Bonaparte also appeals to the underdog, taking on the great European powers and undermining the concept of divine monarchy, that

kings and queens were God's representatives on earth. He had an eye for a good general and was quick to promote men who proved their worth on the battlefield rather than by their birth. Jeanne Lannes was the son of a farmer, yet one of Napoleon's bravest and most trusted campaigners who fought with him across the continent. It was in Italy, at the Battle of the Bridge of Arcole, that Lannes saved Napoleon's life, despite being fatally wounded himself. He promoted Michel Ney to the head of the 'Grande Armée' and was rewarded time and time again, with brilliant leadership; declaring Ney, the 'Bravest man in France'. Napoleon certainly was a leader who inspired his soldiers, so much so that when he returned from his first exile, he was rejoined by former generals and soldiers who supported his comeback. In 1800, he consulted and gathered the best minds in France, whatever their political background, to formulate new laws and rules in France, which would be called firstly the 'Civil Code' and later re-dubbed the 'Napoleonic Code'. Based on the ideals of the French Revolution, they replaced the feudal laws, includ-

ing those on property, family, the judiciary, and provided the base for law in France for the next century. Even the restored Royal Bourbons, did not attempt to remove the code after Napoleon's demise. There were 2,281 articles in total, though women's family rights in marriage was one of its failures.

But there is the other side. An unyielding, autocratic, megalomaniac, narcissist. Only a decade after the revolution removed the monarchy from political life, Napoleon, with the aid of a few cunning politicians, started a coup d'état over the governing and democratic body that had ruled France, since the revolution. He goes one further by removing his co-conspirators and became an autocratic ruler, with all the powers of a king, matched by all its abuses. Like a throwback to King Henry of England, he gets an annulment from his wife Josephine, because she can't produce an heir who can rule when he dies. He was by then, declared France's de facto ruler for life. So much for equality? In 1802, he reinstates slavery, which had been abolished at the start of the French Revolution. So much for liberty? His growing megalomania and desire to increase his empire, meant he needed slaves to build his overseas kingdom in the Louisiana territory, a land-mass that ran from the Gulf of Mexico to the borders of Canada. He sold it for a mere fifteen million dollars to the Americans when his war chest was running low for more important ventures in Europe. His battles were bloody and brutal. He has a deserved and respected reputation as an ingenious general. He mastered the art of artillery in battle which stood him well. Up to Waterloo, he had, for the most part, been strategically sound and mainly victorious. But he sacrificed 800,000 to a million French soldiers in his career as a general. So much for fraternity? Add another three million deaths, including enemy soldiers and civilians, and you get a shocking picture of the times.

You won't get a fully-formed picture on the man from the movie, but oftentimes, these movies can be a motivational tool to find out and learn more about the topic. Many are still divided by this character. He brought change and destruction. 'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times'.



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Looking to the past, **Michael Crowley** reminds us of the important role that the teachers of today play in the future.

Once the National School system had been set up in Ireland in 1831, the question of finding teachers very quickly became an issue. Many teachers were untrained in the 19th century though some were former hedge schoolmasters or famous poets in the Bardic tradition like Eoghan Rua Ó'Súilleabháin, Brian Merriman or Sean Ó'Tuama. Before the Famine, as many as 5,000 hedge school masters operated across the country, but, content and standards varied. As a first step, the 1831 initiative, in addressing this organisational deficit set up a District Model School system of training for teachers (the Dunmanway Model School is a relic of that era and still operates today). However, this did not sit well with the Catholic Hierarchy, and, following a successful lobbying campaign, two training



EDUCATION

Dr Michael Crowley

Michael Crowley, Ed.D is a retired educationalist. In his career he has worked in primary education as a teacher/principal, in teacher training, in teacher professional development, in school evaluation and in adult education. His particular areas of interest are the history of education, school leadership and change management. He still works, from time to time, in an advisory/consultancy capacity with schools.

Volunteers, the Citizens' Army, and so on, alongside a political reconfiguration that brought Arthur Griffith's Sinn Féin party to the fore and a trade union movement that was increasingly politicised. Following Independence, Irish primary teachers began to assume a much greater role in society as the guardians of tradition and culture. They were both victims and agents of that post-colonial educational philosophy, as programmes were re-designed in line with more traditional and nationalist ideals. Irish became compulsory and Gaeltacht students, as well as those with ambitions to become civil servants, were naturally attracted to teaching. These were the children of middle-class Ireland, predominantly, and had a measure of social capital, which suited the emerging socio-religious narrative.

From a teacher training perspective, the new State inherited five teacher Training Colleges in St. Patrick's Dublin (St Pat's), Carysfort Dublin, the Church of Ireland College, Rathmines, Dublin, Mary Immaculate College in Limerick (Mary I) and the De La Salle College in Waterford. When Waterford closed soon after independence, to that list was added Marino College Dublin which had been, up to that time, run by the Christian Brothers. Teachers were, predominantly, male and the 'Master' eulogised so brilliantly by Goldsmith who, in the Village Schoolmaster said, '...and still they gazed and still the wonder grew, how one small head could carry all he knew', became a conspicuous figure in society. That's all changed of course and the gender make up of primary teachers today is 87 per cent female, 13 per cent male.

From 1960s onwards teacher Training Colleges became co-educational and additional post-graduate courses were offered, which infused them with a more academic approach and culture. Today, all teachers complete a four year degree programme and their qualifications must be accredited by the Teaching Council of Ireland. Generally, they work in a tight regulatory framework (different to the time when attendance at a political meeting was a crime but, arguably, no less repressive) and still serve too many masters. The Church these days are minor partners, ostensibly managing schools, but, increasingly, unable to do so very effectively. The great Church-State experiment has, the facts would suggest, run its course and the monopoly that the local priest once had on the schools in his parish is no longer evident.

When Cardinal Cullen, in the late 19th century, turned the educational arena into a major political and religious battleground,

he knew what he was doing and at that time the Church Hierarchy was the undisputed moral authority of the nation. The 'quid pro quo' was, of course, that both Church and State expected schools and teachers to serve their very obvious agendas in post-Independence Ireland and serve as the gatekeepers of the extremely conservative and very inward looking new Ireland that followed independence.

Teachers today are well educated and amongst the brightest and best of their tribe. The points system, with all of its faults, has improved equality of access into the profession making it a broader church than it once was. Many teachers now have post-graduate level qualifications. They belong to a generation who have, in their personal lives, turned away from institutional religion and are, increasingly, secular in their worldview – you don't find many of them collecting at Mass these days! With some notable exceptions, their attitude to cultural nationalism and the Irish language is entirely different to their predecessors. Their political perspective is often as global, as much as it local. They are no longer just reservoirs of facts passing on canonically-approved and absolute truths. Since 1831, they have experienced change on a grand scale, endured an era of payment by results (1972-1900), experienced curriculum change that reflected changing political ideologies of pre and post-Independence Ireland, were caught up in denominational managerial structures and expected to serve societal expectations. But they have endured and professionalised and still play an important role in society through schools, which remain parochially organised and locally managed by voluntary Boards who act on behalf of Patronage bodies. This is a model that is, probably, not fit for purpose any longer, and, though change is inevitable, it should be planned for now in an open and democratic manner – not when the wheels come off the managerial wagon!

We should never forget that, in education, children should always come first and schools are for them. But education cannot be individualised, as it too big and consensus must be the basis for any future reconfiguration plans – common sense must prevail. Teachers' voices matter in these emerging realities – they are, after all, the experts! On a daily basis, they deal with a complex set of clients and stakeholders in a reshaping society where change has become the norm. But they remain critical agents in the reshaping of that new and, hopefully, socially just society. Many will leave a lasting impression on the young minds they help to shape. And they need your support!



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colleges were established for Catholics in Drumcondra (1875) and in Carysfort a couple of years later. By the start of the 20th century, Training Colleges were also in operation in Waterford, Belfast, and in Limerick for Catholics, with a Church of Ireland Training College in Dublin also. Bit by bit, the number of trained teachers in Irish schools increased and a measure of control was applied. For example, the code of conduct for teachers in post-Famine Ireland advised them to, 'avoid fairs, markets and political meetings, to promote cleanliness, neatness and decency and to avoid all forms of vice'. For a time too, teachers were paid by results, which meant that the regurgitation of facts and rote learning using harsh methods became recognisable features of school life in the second half of the 19th century – teachers' pay depended on it. It would be difficult to imagine the young professional teachers of this generation working under such conditions or accepting those societal expectations with respect to their personal lifestyles.

By the first decades of the 20th century, primary education in Ireland was, effectively denominational. Teachers were trained in denominational institutions run and worked in a complex world with many intruding factors. These included, a cultural revival movement, a rise in political activity around the prospect of Home Rule in the run up to WWI, a proliferation of quasi-military alliances such as the IRB, The Irish

Simple Study set to experience growth explosion in coming months

The West Cork founders of Simple Study, an exam prep platform for the Leaving Cert and Junior Cert exams, have experienced big wins in the last six months of 2023, including new tech developments, a fruitful round of pre-seed funding and a tripling of their user base; developments that position the company to grow rapidly over the next few months.

“We’ve reached over 60,000 students, which is a testament to our growing popularity with students taking Leaving and Junior Cert exams in Ireland,” confirms Simple Study founders Phillip McKenna and Oisín Devoy.

“We launched native IOS and Android Apps so students can study wherever they are, making learning more accessible for a lot of students that can’t afford expensive tutors or exam-prep schools.”

Simple Study is set for a lot of new product development in 2024 and with this in mind has been consistently hiring full-time team members; two key hires to the engineering team



(l-r) Phillip McKenna and Oisín Devoy.

in December were Helmar De Oliveira and Bruno Gomez.

The company also closed an extremely successful pre-seed

round of funding, securing north of €700,000 from some word class angel investors. This has fuelled its rapid expansion and

internationalisation plans.

“We have invested heavily in research and development to ensure our product is maximally effective to help students with exams; using AI, gamification and adaptive learning to help students stay focused on the topics that matter,” Oisín explains.

“We saw incredible results with that,” Phillip adds, “Students reported improving their grades by over 24 per cent.

“All going well we will help over 1 million students pass exams in 2024, launching in multiple markets and growing our team in Ireland and abroad to be a huge success story for the Irish start-up ecosystem.”

Built with study features and revision content that matches the exams and curriculum for each subject, the Simple Study platform prepares students with the right resources so they can ultimately perform at their best in exams. There is a big demand for tools like this as exams and CAO points become more and more competitive.

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Local Election Candidate for Skibbereen - West Cork

Economic impact of international festivals felt in Bantry

West Cork Music has announced that its three summer festivals delivered an economic impact of more than €3.8 million to the Bantry area’s local economy in 2023.

More than 4,600 people attended the West Cork Chamber Music Festival, West Cork Literary Festival, and Masters of Tradition in 2023 and ticket sales increased by 25 per cent on the previous year’s figures. Audiences spent more than €2.1 million on accommoda-

tion, catering, and local services in the area – twice as much as in 2022.

The estimated impact on jobs in the local area was 42.6 full-time equivalent positions.

The festivals are generously supported by the Arts Council, Cork County Council, Fáilte Ireland, and the Crespo Foundation. For every euro of public money invested in these festivals, an additional €6.38 in economic impact was generated.

This Independent Economic

Impact Assessment was carried out by Professor Eleanor Doyle of the Global Competitiveness Institute, Cork University Business School at UCC and was based on box office data and audience research surveys.

The 2024 West Cork Chamber Music Festival runs from June 28 to July 7, West Cork Literary Festival takes place July 12-19 and Masters of Tradition runs August 21-25. For more details, go to www.westcorkmusic.ie



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ENVIRONMENT : Making a difference

Free trees from Deelish snapped up in two days

To celebrate 40 years in business, last month Deelish Garden Centre gave away 4000 native trees, grown in Cork, to over 130 people. It took a mere two days to find new homes for the trees with people getting anywhere from one to 50 trees for each property.

This season Deelish has been helping many farmers to source native trees, heritage apples and hedging for various government schemes as Noah Chase explains.

The ACRES scheme has funding of €1.5 billion euros and plans “to help address biodiversity decline while delivering an income support for up to 50,000 farm families in Ireland”. If you just look at the hedging section there is a payment of €5.29 per meter of native hedging per year for five years, which equals €26.45 per metre of hedging. There is over 2000 kilometres being paid for, which is €26,450 per kilometre equal to €52,900,000 funding for hedging! The maximum amount of hedging per farm is

750 metres, which is €19,837.50 paid over five years per farm. As you can see from these figures, the demand for hedging plants has been huge this season. The Department of Agriculture decided to change the regulations and allow non Irish-grown Whitethorn (the most common variety of hedging) to be used in the scheme, as there was not enough Irish-grown plants to meet the huge demand. This change of plan is very concerning with regards to local biodiversity and the risk of importing another plant disease



such as Ash dieback. Irish tree nurseries could have easily grown on ample stock to meet this demand if they had been advised three to four years ago but sadly they were not. It is worth pointing out that all other areas of the Scheme do require Irish-grown plants and, on the whole, it is a fantastic initiative

compared to years ago when there were grants for destroying hedgerows and reclaiming ‘waste ground’, which were wildlife sanctuaries and will take generations to restore.

Driving around West Cork over the last few years, I have been really impressed at the number of small woodlands

starting to pop up all over the countryside. It got my wife and I thinking about how different West Cork’s countryside will be in a few generations or even in our own children’s lifetimes. We thought it would be lovely to encourage anyone who has an area of ground, no matter how small or large, to plant native trees. The 4000 trees were given away with no strings or conditions (other than the requirement of an eircode for our map). Seeing the reaction of everyone who received the trees and who heard about the giveaway was such a joy! Unfortunately we ran out of trees after just two days, as we were paying for them ourselves and had to put a cap on the amount we could giveaway. Many people were very surprised at just how cheap our bare root trees are (between €1- €2 for a 3ft tree) which makes planting at this time of year very affordable.

I was also very encouraged by the reaction of the community and, after some lovely conversations with people, the idea was hatched to encourage other small businesses or local groups to make similar giveaways. This in turn will encourage biodiversity and wildlife; help restore natural ecosystems, sequester carbon back from the atmosphere and increase our growing woodlands. I would be happy to discuss the logistics involved to anyone interested in such an event, just get in touch with me, Noah, at Deelish Garden Centre in Skibbereen, as there is still time during this bare root season. I am really excited about our growing woodlands and people’s attitude to planting native trees here in West Cork and feel the results of these plantings will have a positive impact on our countryside for many generations to come.

UCC research at Fota leads to new conservation toolkit

A team of researchers, primarily based in UCC, has compiled a new toolkit for conservation projects, based in part on research conducted at Fota Wildlife Park, that they hope will provide a blueprint to follow for others who wish to engage in conservation work.

The project, recently published in ‘Biological Conservation’ is led by PhD candidate Daniel Moloney of UCC’s School of Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences: “The goal of making this toolkit was

to provide an easy-to-follow guide for anyone looking to get involved in conservation projects. It’s essentially a checklist put together by examining the experience of hundreds of conservation participants worldwide and trying to boil their experiences down to the most important questions.”

The toolkit was created by compiling information collected from 100 examined research projects, and the framework is based on three pillars posed in questions that the users of the toolkit can ask themselves:



A young toadlet is released back into the area from which it was collected after being raised through its metamorphosis in captivity. This is another example of Fota’s contribution to an active conservation project. Pic: Daniel Moloney.

- What knowledge is required of the species/local habitat do I need?
- What tools do I require for the collection and analysis of the data I need?
- Who must I collaborate with to reach the best possible results?

The team, which also includes Professor Ruth Ramsay, Dr Paul Holloway, and Dr Courtney Collins identified a range of techniques conservationists can employ both in captive and wild settings.

Included in these are ex-

amples such as head-starting projects, where juveniles of an endangered species are collected soon after they hatch/are born and are raised for a brief period of time in captivity.

This enables the animals time to grow and develop and aims to increase their likelihood of survival and reaching adulthood when they are returned to the wild. Currently, part of Daniel Moloney’s PhD includes assessing an ongoing head-starting project for Natterjack Toads which has been a joint effort between Fota Wildlife Park, Dingle Aquarium and the National Park and Wildlife Service.

The toolkit also highlights the important role that the public have in supporting conservation. “The local community provides an essential asset in conservation projects” stated Dr Paul Holloway. “Successful conservation is

not possible without the public, whether that is through access to land for animals and researchers, local rewilding of gardens and public spaces to provide habitat, donating to conservation activities, or supporting new and ongoing initiatives. Many wildlife parks have information on local and international conservation projects and are a great place for people to engage with nature and educate themselves about how best to support conservation efforts”.

The paper examines the pit falls and issues that can reduce the success of conservation projects and provide a guide to aid others in avoiding those pit falls. In this way, the research paper combined with the toolkit can increase the potential for success in projects which make use of it.

Clochán Uisce: The value of our rivers

The millions of miles of rivers and streams that flow across our planet might appear to be a near-infinite source of freshwater but rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds together make up less than one per cent of the freshwater on Earth (the rest is in ice caps, glaciers, and groundwater), and only 37 per cent of rivers that are more than 1,000 kilometres long remain free flowing over their entire length. Although they account for only a fraction of the Earth’s rivers they support a disproportionately large amount of biodiversity. For example, freshwater habitats are home to almost 10 per cent of all animal

species, including one-third of all invertebrates. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature, 140,000 described species — including 55 per cent of all fish — rely on freshwater habitats for their survival.

The benefits to humanity are also quite remarkable. Rivers provide us with drinking water, transportation, hydro electricity and water extraction for numerous industries. Nutrient deposits and biodiversity all help agriculture, from soil health to pollinators, along with carbon sequestration. So what value do we place on the rivers of the world? Should they be

seen more than a commodity to benefit humanity at any cost to the rivers’ overall health and wellbeing?

Over the past decade, a remarkable movement has been gaining momentum in various parts of the world — the granting of legal personhood to rivers. This groundbreaking concept elevates rivers to the status of legal persons, affording them the same rights and protections as human beings.

The movement, which began with the Whanganui River in New Zealand in 2017, has since spread to other countries.

The concept of granting legal personhood to natural entities is

rooted in the idea that ecosystems, like rivers, have intrinsic value and deserve protection against environmental degradation and exploitation. The river is represented and cared for by custodians, which is community led; this innovative approach challenges the conventional view of nature as mere property and instead recognises the inherent rights of these natural entities to exist, flourish, and regenerate.

While granting legal personhood to rivers represents a significant step forward in environmental protection, it also brings with it complex legal and practical challenges. Balancing the rights of the river with hu-

man activities and developments along its course is a complex issue, however the impact of this paradigm shift is already evident, as these rivers are receiving greater attention and resources for restoration and conservation. The recognition of rivers as legal persons reflects a growing global consciousness about the need to protect our natural resources and embrace a more sustainable approach to development.

The granting of legal personhood to rivers marks a profound shift in how societies perceive and value their natural resources. As rivers gain legal personhood, they become living entities with a voice, advocating for their

wellbeing and conservation. This transformation instills a renewed sense of responsibility among communities and governments to protect and cherish these vital lifelines.

Many countries have now granted legal personhood to rivers and the EU is now considering the same.

This forgotten way of thinking is slowly being reimagined in our collective subconscious.

Maybe it’s time to give legal personhood to the Shannon, the Bandon, the Ilen, the Argideen and the Feagle and treat our rivers with the respect they deserve.

ENVIRONMENT : Making a difference

Community-wide initiative aims to tackle food waste

by Allison Roberts,
VOICE

This month marks the start of a new, year-long, project to tackle food waste in Clonakilty, from farm to fork. ‘Waste Not, Want Not’ is a community-driven project led by Clonakilty Tidy Towns, the Community Resource Centre and supported by VOICE Ireland, an Irish environmental charity whose mission is to ‘empower individuals and local communities to take positive action to conserve our natural resources’.

While many food waste interventions have been undertaken in the past, they have concentrated on a single sector, be that households, supermarkets and so on, there has been little attempt to connect these approaches into a comprehensive community-wide strategy to reduce food waste. By placing the issue in the context of the whole food chain and by providing tools for a whole community approach we hope to foster greater engagement throughout. Clonakilty’s community is wide and varied and we hope that everyone will get involved; from farmers, producers, restaurants, hotels, and supermarkets to community groups, local shops, cafes, schools, charities and individuals!

Did you know the EPA estimates that Ireland generated 753,000 tonnes of food waste in 2021?

One of ‘Waste Not, Want Not’s’ main strengths will be in creating an environment for a mindset shift; from ‘What difference can just one person make?’ to ‘I am part of a community taking action on food waste! I know the shop where I buy my veg is doing X, the schools are doing Y and I am contributing by doing Z, together we will reduce food waste and loss!’

To begin, this month we will be contacting groups, businesses and institutions to seek business owners, group representatives and individuals to attend local focus groups. If you are interested in being part of the conversation, we would love to

hear from you.

Step one is the listening phase
During February and March this year we will hold a series of focus groups in which we listen to community perspectives on food waste, solutions you can see, and barriers that you face. These focus groups will be held for each sector, for example, one each for farmers, food businesses, community groups, schools and groups representing marginalised peoples. Mid to late March, following on from these focus group discussions, we will hold a gathering for those interested in taking this project to the next level with us, by adopting a food waste reduction strategy for your business/group/home.

Step two is the active phase
Following on from the focus groups, organisations, individuals and businesses will be supported while putting food waste reduction principles and strategies into practice, tailored to their needs and based on best practice case studies. These actions will run throughout 2024 and VOICE, Tidy Towns and the Community Resource Center will offer support in getting started as well as ongoing support, adapting as needed to create a solid strategy that other communities can emulate. With our community’s input, we will also run public workshops, talks and training to support this transition. We can also facilitate links between sectors when appropriate, for example if overproduction or unsold goods can be re-routed to a local community group or charity.

In early 2025 we will hold a series of conversations with those who have implemented strategies to learn from their experiences and create the findings of this project. These findings will then be outlined in a toolkit for use by other communities to develop a whole of community food waste reduction strategy for their town and will be shared further within our own community to encourage further development and application of successful food waste reduction strategies going forward.



Waste Not, Want Not Steering Group (left to right) Kathryn Kingston, Community Resource Centre; John Hennessy and Diarmuid Cregan, Tidy Towns); Allison Roberts and Abi O’Callaghan-Platt, VOICE Ireland

HOW TO GET INVOLVED
Dates for community conversations:

- Householder and community groups (all welcome) – Thursday February 22, 7pm O’Donovan’s Hotel.
 - Food Businesses (Processors, Retailers, Hotels, Cafes and Restaurants etc) - Thursday February 29, 7pm O’Donovan’s Hotel.
 - Farming Community – Thursday, March 7, 8pm O’Donovan’s Hotel.
- Register your interest at www.voiceireland.org/wastenot-wantnot or just come along on the night! Contact: allison@voiceireland.org

The Community Climate Action Programme: Climate Education, Capacity Building and Learning by Doing (Strand 2) is funded by the Government of Ireland through the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications.

The project is delivered by the environmental NGO, VOICE, with support from locally based informal and formal partners.

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New wastewater treatment plant for Castletownshend

Castletownshend has a brand-new sewerage scheme, including a new wastewater treatment plant and pumping station that has eliminated the discharge of raw sewage to Castlehaven Harbour, which will see enhanced water quality in the harbour.

The project included the construction of a new wastewater treatment plant for a population of approximately 530; a new pumping station; upgrading and installation of new sewer pipelines, including pipes to transfer wastewater from the new pumping station to the new treatment plant; and a new outfall pipe to safely discharge

treated wastewater to Castlehaven Harbour in compliance with regulatory standards. The project also used specialist construction techniques to safeguard two mature sycamore trees which are much loved, distinct features within this picturesque village.

Uisce Éireann’s Darran O’Leary said “We would like to take this opportunity to thank the local community of Castletownshend for their ongoing support and patience throughout the delivery of this vital project.”

ENVIRONMENT : Making a difference

Cockroaches: Pests, pets or dinner?



THE ANIMAL WORLD

Dr. Jeremy A. Dorman

Dr Dorman is a zoologist and teacher living in West Cork.

For the first eleven years of my life, home was a small farm in England, where we kept pigs and chickens, goats and geese. There have always been dogs and cats, and in Ireland in the 1970s, we had guinea pigs and donkeys as well. But my adult life has been very unsettled, so I never thought it fair to have a pet. I did, temporarily, look after a hooded crow fledgling that fell out of its nest in Dublin, some guinea pigs and budgerigars in Saudi Arabia (rescued from my pupils) and an abandoned baby fruit bat in Kenya, but apart from a few vagrant cats, I never had the menagerie of which I always dreamed. Now, back in West Cork, as well as my sister's dog, cats and hens to talk to, I also have some unusual, and to most people, disagreeable, animal companions of my own.

Last winter, I spent a month with my adopted family in Zambia. They live in what the modern Irish person would consider a shed. Most cars and many chickens in Ireland have more comfortable dwellings, though by African standards, my family is not doing too badly. But, being the tropics, they share their little home with several creatures that few in Ireland would tolerate. Termites build tubes of chestnut-coloured earth up the walls, on their way to munching

through the bare rafters. A huge cricket stridulates loudly all night from a hole in the kitchen floor. Large flat spiders canter sideways across the walls and vanish behind doorways. Geckoes walk upside down on the ceiling, feasting on the mosquitoes that would be feasting on us if we didn't sleep under nets. And living inside the hollow and broken bedroom door in the daytime, and emerging by the dozen at night, are two different types of cockroach.

The larger species is the American cockroach, *Periplaneta americana*, which is a shiny reddish-brown colour, has spiky legs and very long antennae, and can grow to around four centimetres. When I was an undergrad in Dublin many years ago, I acquired one of these impressive insects and tried to keep it alive in a small box, but the bedroom in my lodgings was so cold (my landlady was a thrifty old Scot), the poor thing died after one week. Despite the name, these cockroaches are native to Africa but are now found all over the tropical and sub-tropical world.

These are the insects which I now keep as pets. I didn't want them, but they stowed away in my suitcase. Back in Ireland, they quickly escaped from the case and vanished into the darkest corners of my cottage. The change in temperature must have slowed them down considerably – cockroaches are notoriously fast movers – for I had no trouble catching four, which I put into in an old pickle jar, in a nest of scrunched up tissues.

The other species is the smaller and equally misnamed German cockroach, *Blattella germanica*. This is a paler brown colour, with two distinctive dark stripes on its prothorax, and usually grows to little over a centimetre. It is probably a native of Asia, but has also spread throughout the world, even into cold countries, and it is the cockroach most

often found in the kitchens of hotels and restaurants here. These are the insects which I now keep as pets. I didn't want them, but they stowed away in my suitcase. Back in Ireland, they quickly escaped from the case and vanished into the darkest corners of my cottage. The change in temperature must have slowed them down considerably – cockroaches are notoriously fast movers – for I had no trouble catching four, which I put into in an old pickle jar, in a nest of scrunched up tissues. If there were more, they probably got eaten by the many vibrating spiders whose webs are slowly turning my home into something resembling Miss Haversham's dining room.

The average person would simply have squashed these cockroaches, or thrown them out of the door. But nowadays I won't even swat a fly, unless it is especially annoying and I am in a particularly bad mood. They can't have much of a life in their jar; I should release them. But they would almost certainly get eaten in the garden. And although they probably

so they can eat wood. There are more than 4,000 species of cockroaches, found all over the world. They are among the most primitive of winged insects, having mouthparts and legs that are quite unspecialised. The adults can fly, but prefer to run. They are found in a variety of habitats such as caves, trees and leaf litter. The largest is probably *Blaberus giganteus*, which lives in the rain forests of South America. We used to breed them in college too – they can grow to nearly 10 cm.

Cockroaches are very hardy insects – the Japanese cockroach has been shown, in experimental conditions, to recover after being frozen at minus-eight degrees Celsius for twelve hours. They can live for months without food, and for 45 minutes without air; they can function briefly after decapitation. One female can produce a great many offspring – up to 400 in a lifetime – and some species are parthenogenetic, meaning they don't even need a male partner to reproduce.

The American and German varieties, among others, have become household pests. Like rats, they are not fussy about where they walk, so they carry bacteria on their feet, which they then spread over our food. They can eat almost anything, from bread and fruit to leather and glue, and they leave an unpleasant smell, as anyone will know who has lived in the tropics and been careless about sealing food containers. So a cockroach infestation can be a serious problem – there was a recent story in the newspapers about a man in Japan who blew his apartment up, accidentally, by spraying insecticide everywhere, even over electrical connections, in his efforts to eradicate them.

Most cockroaches, however, live blameless lives in the wild where they have important, though sometimes disgusting, roles in various food chains, e.g. many cave-dwelling species feed on the mountains of guano produced by bats. Others are attractive, such as the gregarious cockroach *Cartoblatta pulchra* from southern Africa, which

is black with orange spots and aggregates on tree trunks in the day time. Some large species, including the Madagascan hissing cockroach, the orange-headed cockroach and the giant porcelain ghost roach, are popular pets, and rather more interesting company than my German species.

Cockroaches are also bred as food for other pets, such as snakes and lizards, and in universities, for teaching purposes – at Trinity, we used the American ones for a second-year experiment to demonstrate oxygen consumption. They frequently escaped, causing pandemonium among the students (which is how I acquired my *Periplaneta*).

Long ago, I used to try everything once – grasshoppers and termites in Uganda, cicadas and silk worm pupae in China – but I never ate cockroaches. According to a recent article in the Taiwan English News, when cooked in an omelette, they taste like mushrooms.

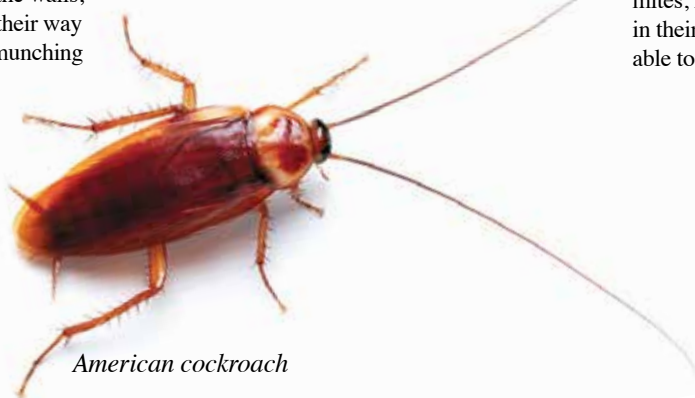
Cockroaches, even the American species, are eaten by humans in some countries, especially Mexico, Brazil and much of Asia, though they are, unsurprisingly, not as popular among insect gastronomes as beetles, grasshoppers and caterpillars. Long ago, I used to try everything once – grasshoppers and termites in Uganda, cicadas and silk worm pupae in China – but I never ate cockroaches.

According to a recent article in the Taiwan English News, when cooked in an omelette, they taste like mushrooms.

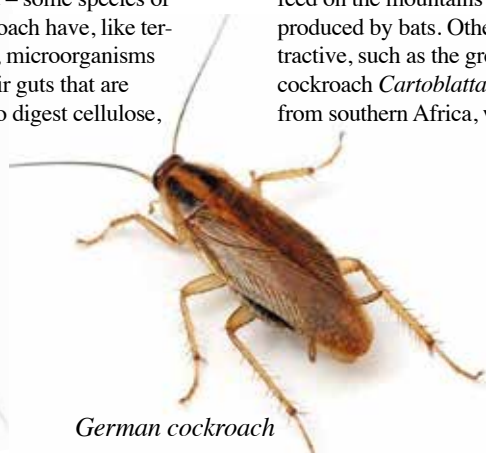
One species, *Diploptera punctata*, which gives birth not to egg cases like most cockroaches, but to live babies, produces a type of nutrient for its young, nicknamed cockroach milk. It is actually a fluid of highly nutritious pure protein crystals. Pounded for pound, it contains more protein than buffalo milk and, as it provides all nine essential amino acids, it has been talked about as a possible food source for humans. Harvesting it would be difficult – one can't exactly milk a cockroach – and it has been estimated that 1,000 of them would need to be killed to produce 100 grams of cockroach milk. But researchers in India have sequenced the relevant genes, and by injecting them into yeast cells, production might be feasible.

Stories that cockroaches can withstand radiation, and so will take over the world after a nuclear war, are exaggerated, though they are able to survive up to fifteen times the lethal dose that humans can tolerate. But with their high rate of reproduction and their tremendous resilience, it is quite likely that cockroaches will be among the animals flourishing when the nastiness or stupidity of world leaders and the indifference of the average person has left the planet uninhabitable for most vertebrates.

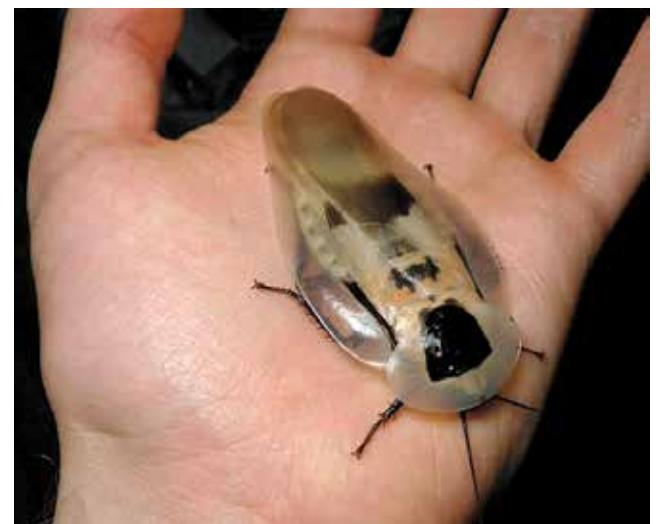
As for my own cockroaches, one died after a few days; another passed away just before Christmas. With the lifespan of the German cockroach being less than a year, and my cottage rather cold at the moment (in winter, I believe in wearing more clothes, not burning more fuel), I don't suppose the two survivors will last much longer.



American cockroach



German cockroach



Blaberus giganteus

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ENVIRONMENT : Making a difference

The elegant Greenshank



This month Birdwatch West Cork committee member **Damaris Lysaght** shares one of her favourite birds, the Greenshank.

The Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*) is on my short list of favourite birds. How could anyone not be impressed by this sleek, elegant and clean-cut bird, with its dark grey wings and back, and strongly contrasting bright white underparts. Its common English name is descriptive, as it has green shanks (legs). Similarly in Irish, 'Laidhrín Glas' means green legs. It is a mid to large-sized wader (wingspan 55-62 cm, length 30-34cm) with impressive long greenish grey legs and a long olive coloured slightly upturned bill, darker towards the tip. In flight there is no wing bar, but it shows a

long wedge-shaped white rump extending up its back. Males and females look alike though the females are larger in size.

The Greenshank is a migratory bird and flies south in the autumn to spend the winter in southern Europe and west Africa as conditions in its breeding grounds in Russia, Siberia, Scandinavia and Scotland become too harsh and food is scarce. A proportion of them stop to rest and refuel in Ireland, numbers peaking in late summer and autumn, before travelling south again. These birds use the migration route known as the East Atlantic Flyway. But some remain here to spend the winter months.

There are only a couple of historic records of Greenshank nesting in Ireland. Our over-wintering Greenshank have most likely bred (hatched in the case of the juveniles) in rock-strewn boggy areas in the highlands and islands of Scotland. Three or four eggs are laid in a rough scrape, often beside a boulder or tree stump which is used as a singing post and vantage point. The eggs are brooded mostly by the female for about three-and-a-half weeks and shortly after hatching she departs, leaving the rearing of the chicks to the male. The

chicks are precocial, meaning that they are relatively mature when they hatch, being covered in downy feathers and quite mobile, as opposed to naked and helpless like songbird chicks.

The winter habitats of the Greenshank are estuaries, coastal marshland and rocky shores and sometimes they can be found on the margins of freshwater lakes and wetlands. They are not very common, occurring singly or in small groups. They are predominantly visual feeders that hunt in channels and pools looking for invertebrates such as shrimps, crabs and small fish, probing the mud and vegetation with their bills or feet before grabbing their prey. They do not have webbed feet. Instead, their long thin legs and widely splayed long agile toes enable them to wade through their watery habitats easily without raising the sediment. Because they ingest so much salt in their diet, they have salt glands in their heads, which enable them to excrete excess salt through their nostrils. They choose safe high-tide roosts and spend a lot of time preening to keep their feathers waterproof. Their feather moult is gradual so there is never a time when they cannot fly. Having to be constantly wary of predators,

different parts of their brains are adapted to sleep at different times so one eye will probably always be open! They can often be seen standing on one leg with the other tucked under their body and their head tucked under their wing. This is to preserve warmth because their beaks and legs lose heat.

The call of the Greenshank is 'tieu tieu tieu' and it is usually heard as an alarm call in flight. They know their call by instinct and therefore have no regional accents, unlike songbirds which learn their calls from their parents.

The Redshank (*Tringa tetanus*), a close relative of the Greenshank, is much more numerous on our estuaries. As its common name implies both in English and Irish (*Cosdeargán*), it has red legs. It is smaller than its relative, has brownish grey plumage with a partially red bill. A much rarer visitor to our shores is the Spotted Redshank. They are passage migrants moving between their breeding and wintering grounds in autumn and spring.

I-WeBS (Irish Wetland Bird Survey), Birdtrack and other surveys accumulate records of Greenshank and other waterbirds from which trends can be deduced. It seems that the



Greenshank and Redshank. Pic: Jez Simms

Greenshank is doing relatively well compared to other waders. It is thought there are about 1,700 greenshanks distributed around the estuaries and wetlands of Ireland and the sites on the southwest Cork coast are particularly important.

BirdWatch Ireland West Cork Branch News

Upcoming events being held by the Branch are:
Sunday, February 11
 Bantry – Gulls & Divers
Sunday, March 3

Timoleague and Courtmacsherry Visit our website www.birdwatchirelandwestcork.ie for more information about these events. To receive news and reminders about our events join our mailing list by sending an email to mailinglist@birdwatchirelandwestcork.ie. For more information about the Branch, contact Fiona O'Neill at secretary@birdwatchirelandwestcork.ie.
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GROUNDLED MEP Grace O'Sullivan

In 2019, the people of Skibbereen won an important victory that all of Ireland should be proud of. Joining together as a community they stopped the construction of a plastic pellets factory that threatened our local environment and the natural heritage that is our Atlantic Ocean.

It is estimated that 230,000 tonnes of these plastic pellets, known as 'nurdles', are now washed into the sea every year, either from land-based sources and factories or from container ships with unsecured loads. It is an environmental catastrophe that continues day after day with little news coverage. Most recently this disaster hit the Galician coast when a Maersk container ship spilled millions of these 'nurdles' into the

Spain's coast destroyed by plastic and West Cork could be next

Atlantic.

Earlier this month, I travelled to Galicia, known for its fishing capital Vigo and its famous pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella. I went to aid in the clean up of Galicia's beach and show support from the European Parliament, as we try to tackle this plague of plastic. It was a scene reminiscent of the infamous Prestige oil tanker spill in 2002 when millions of litres of crude oil clogged the coast and destroyed habitats in one fell swoop.

There the community of Galicia joined together and put in the work to save their coastline. We don't know where the plastic pellets were manufactured, but had it not been for the active community of Skibbereen, the plastic pellets could have smeared 'Made in Ireland' all over the marine ecosystems of northwest Spain with its plastic toxin.

When these plastic pellets, which are made from petroleum, spill into the ocean it is in my opinion nothing but an oil

spill by another name. In fact in many ways it is much more difficult to clean up these disasters, with millions of nurdles washing up on shores across Europe and ending up in the digestive tracts of turtles, whales and the fish that are landed in Castletownbere every day.

We need better regulation of plastics transport and we need to tackle our society's deadly addiction to cheap plastic. Unlike the transport of materials like crude oil, which is classified as 'hazardous to transport', there are no such regulations for the transport of crude plastics. Yet the issue of plastics in the ocean is so severe that it is estimated by 2050 there will be more plastic in the sea than fish, in terms of weight.

Last October, the European Commission proposed new legislation to cut down on plastic pellet waste, and this is now being examined by the European Parliament's Environment Committee. It is a step in the right direction but the legislation doesn't go far enough. I am

fighting in that committee with my Green colleagues to include more restrictions on the maritime transport of plastic pellets.

The current situation must change. The petrochemical plastic industries that make a profit out of the destruction of the marine environment cannot be defended. Our society's addiction to plastic has become so severe that plastic packaging and waste has overwhelmed us to the point that we cannot recycle or reuse most of the plastic that is put on our shelves. Much of it will be incinerated or will make its way back into our environment and ultimately in our food or our local communities. This too is an area that needs legislating, which I am currently negotiating under the new EU Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation.

The EU should take a lesson from the people of Skibbereen who said loud and clear "we will not be complicit in this plague of plastic."



MEP Grace O'Sullivan with the plastic pellets that have washed up on Spain's shores

Spotlight GREEN HOMES

Renewed interest in renovating some of West Cork's most humble homes



Vacant properties are all around us. In the midst of a housing shortage, returning these properties to occupied dwellings has become a huge issue politically. This has led to the introduction of a number of grants to incentivise people to take on such projects and a renewed interest from buyers says Estate Agent **Con O'Neill** of Sherry Fitzgerald O'Neill.

(11.75 per cent) in Skibbereen, 51 (8.57 per cent) in Schull and 171 (11.23 per cent) in Bantry. This number excludes buildings where the enumerator was able to establish that the building owners were temporarily absent or that it was an unoccupied holiday home.

The Census vacancy figure does not equate to long term derelict buildings. These figures include buildings which are temporarily vacant where the

house is going through a sale process or is in-between tenants. A common cause of vacancy is where the owner has moved to a nursing home with the dwelling used as part of the Fair Deal Scheme. Another is where the last owner has died. It will take at least 4 to 6 months for Grant of Probate and properties in this situation often lie vacant for years until the estate of the deceased is finalised. Regarding long term derelict properties



A derelict cottage on Cape Clear

in West Cork, each property tends to have its own individual story. Reasons include, financial position of the owner, structural issues, family disputes or buildings inherited by individuals with no connection to an area. The location of dwellings is also problematic with some older cottages/farmhouses built beside what are now busy roads or where a farmhouse is no longer occupied on a commercial farm.

Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant

Introduced on 14 July 2022, the Vacant Property Refur-

bishment Grant aims to return vacant houses or buildings to principal private residences or rented property. A grant of up to a maximum of €50,000 is available with upper limits for the individual types of work (For example, there is a limit of €3,500 towards skirting and €7,700 towards kitchen units). To qualify, a house must be vacant for two years or more at the time of grant application and have been built up to and including 2007.

There is a further top up of €20,000 where the property is deemed to be 'derelict'. For the

purpose of this grant, 'derelict' is for buildings either deemed structurally unsound and dangerous or appear on Cork County Council's Derelict Sites Register. As of October 2023, there were no buildings in the West Cork Municipal District on the register. To qualify for the top up, an independent report by an appropriately qualified professional must be submitted confirming structural issues.

The grant is managed by Cork County Council. If purchasing a vacant property, it

Continued on next page...

Vacancy levels in West Cork

The 2022 Census recorded 223 (9.92 per cent of total buildings stock) vacant properties in Clonakilty, 95 (10.7 per cent) in Dunmanway, 34 (12.98 per cent) in Drimoleague, 177



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Spotlight GREEN HOMES

Humble homes... cont'd from previous page.

is possible to get pre-approved before completion of the sale. There will be a clawback of the grant if the property is either occupied as your principal private residence or rented full time for less than 10 years. Prior to the grant being paid, Cork County Council will require invoices for completed works and an inspection requiring applicants

to pay for the work upfront.

See 'Vacant Property Refurbishing Grant' on citizensinformation.ie for more information.

Other grants available

In combination with the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant, a Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) Better Energy Home Scheme grant may be

available for works. These could include attic insulation up to €1,700, Cavity Wall Insulation up to €1,700, Internal Insulation up to €4,500, External Wall Insulation up to €8,000, Heat Pump Systems up to €6,500 and Solar PV up to €2,400.



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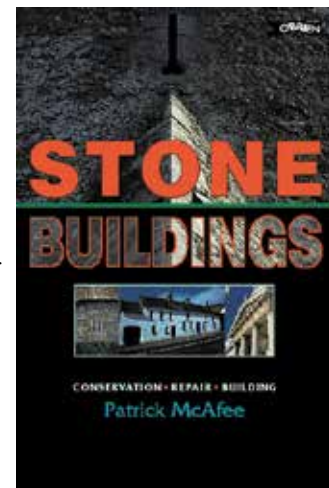
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Dealing with heat loss

There is a tendency for those refurbishing a house to go all in on the grants available with deep retrofits, costing multiples of the grant available, without ever understanding the problem they are trying to fix. The most common cause of heat loss is air leakage which the Building Energy Rating does not measure. Wrapping a house, dry lining internally or pumping walls is costly, and the improvements are incremental. A heat loss survey with an Air Tightness Test and Thermal Imaging will identify your problem areas. Mick Kiernan of Rebel Energy (www.rebelenergy.ie) is based in Clonakilty and services all West Cork.

Appropriate materials

When renovating an old traditional stone built property, using the wrong materials can cause long term issues. There has been a trend in modern times to use cement render on stone walls which is impervious and prevents the wall from breathing, trapping water in the walls and leading



to dampness. These buildings were typically built using lime which allows them to breathe and dry out naturally. Pointing and rendering with lime based products or other equivalent breathable products will prevent dampness. Roundtower Lime based in Innishannon specialise in providing suitable products while also running both free and paid courses on renovating traditional buildings (www.roundtowerlime.com/).

An old building, without its sash windows, will never sit quite right. Sash windows

weren't just for aesthetic purposes, they naturally ventilate a room. By opening the top and bottom sash together, where the temperature inside is warmer than outside, the lighter warm air will exit via the top opening and cool air enter via the bottom opening. Thereby cooling the house naturally and also ventilating the room.

'Stone Buildings' by Pat McAfee is a fantastic introduction to anyone looking to work on traditional buildings.

Planning permission

Just because there is a derelict ruin on a site, planning permission may still be required to re-establish its use as a habitable dwelling. Where planning permission is required, issues such as septic tanks, percolation areas, drinking water, electricity and sight lines may need to be considered. Speak to a suitably qualified professional to advise on planning matters before getting started.

Evie Nevin criticises government funding for rural vacancy and dereliction

The recent Government announcement of €4.5 million in funding for 24 projects to address rural vacancy and dereliction has been described as "woefully inadequate" by Labour's Local Area Rep for Skibbereen LEA, Evie Nevin. She believes the funding falls short of addressing the large-scale vacancy and dereliction problem affecting many areas.

"In the face of the housing crisis, this funding is insufficient to make a meaningful impact on the widespread issue of vacancy and dereliction," Nevin emphasised. "Given the current construction costs, the allocated €4.5 million is unlikely to cover the expenses of renovating these properties."

"The Government is missing the bigger picture here. With 57,206 properties vacant according to Local Property Tax returns and census estimates reaching 166,752, along with 66,135 seasonal holiday homes, these are homes that could be used to house people, create jobs, support local services, and revitalise communities. We need



to turn the lights back on in our towns and villages, but the Government is not doing enough to incentivise or compel owners to bring them back into use.

"In Labour's Alternative Budget, the party proposed a more ambitious and effective Vacant Homes Tax, setting the rate at a minimum of €2,000 per year and levying it at one per cent of value, with the rate escalating further every year. This approach aims to encourage owners to sell, rent, or occupy their vacant properties or face a substantial tax bill."

"The Government's token rise in the rate of Vacant Homes Tax is utterly ineffective in driving the change needed to get homes back into supply.

Labour's Vacant Homes Tax would be a much stronger deterrent and a fairer way of redistributing wealth and resources in our society," Nevin asserted.

Regarding the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant, Nevin highlighted several limitations, including the grant amount, upper limits for different types of work, strict eligibility criteria, and bureaucratic processes. Despite these limitations, Nevin acknowledged that the grant could potentially contribute to addressing the housing shortage and homelessness crisis, preserving heritage buildings, and boosting the local economy.

"But the Government's funding for rural dereliction and vacancy is just too little, too late. It is a drop in the ocean compared to the scale of the problem and the cost of construction. It is a missed opportunity to tackle one of the biggest challenges facing rural Ireland today. Labour has a better vision and a better plan for rural regeneration and development, and we will continue to fight for it," Nevin concluded.

Spotlight GREEN HOMES

Environmentally responsible flooring and decking

You might not have realised you could be making greener choices when it comes to choosing floors for your home but it's an industry where you can get high-quality products without a high-cost to the environment. O'Donovan Timber Flooring in Leap only stocks products that come with the highest certification in sustainability, from engineered hardwood flooring to laminate flooring to composite decking and cladding.

Illegal logging is a global problem, particularly in Romania, which has most of Europe's last remaining old-growth forests, home to protected species such as bears, wolves, owls, bats and beetles and an invaluable absorber of carbon from the atmosphere. Traceability rules are proven to help combat this problem by increasing the demand for responsibly grown and harvested wood and therefore lessening the demand for illegally harvested wood.

"The term 'chain of custody' refers to the traceability of a product from your shop floor

back to a legal, responsibly harvested source," explains Ted O'Donovan, who guarantees that all his timber products, including laminate – which contains 90 per cent wood – are completely compliant with these regulations."

"All our laminate floors are also Blue Angel certified for low emissions and sustainability. It's a mark given to products that are safe for the environment and humans, both in production and in use," Ted adds.

Longevity is another factor to consider in reducing waste. The laminate is manufactured in Germany and has a 30 year do-



mestic guarantee. It is durable, easy to clean and when the time comes, completely recyclable, adding to its green credentials.

"Laminate design has improved massively over the last 10 years and an inexpert eye might now mistake it for a hardwood floor," Ted says. "We have a vast collection of styles

and colours to browse."

As well as laminates O'Donovan's also stock bespoke handcrafted herringbones and engineered hardwood boards, varying in size from 150mm to 280mm wide, that are at the higher end of the price range. These boards are composed of real wood with an oak top layer

and a birch ply backing.


"We were one of the first companies in County Cork to introduce composite decking, about five years ago, and last year we added a composite cladding range, with the same make up as the decking," Ted explains.

"It looks and feels like natu-


ral wood, without the worry of being exposed to the West Cork elements. The cladding and decking are made from a mix of 60 per cent recycled wood, 30 per cent recycled high-density polythene and 10 per cent additives and pigments. The outer polymer shell completely encapsulates the board in an impermeable layer of protection that is scratch, stain and fade resistant.

"It's a super alternative to wood or plastic because it won't splinter, rot or crack," says Ted, "it will look like new for years and it's easy to install. We've supplied many projects in West Cork now and customers are thrilled with it, particularly because there is no need for annual oiling or painting, it's slip resistant and it's easy to keep clean."

Visit O'Donovan Timber Flooring in Leap village to see the full range and to get advice on the right product for your home or check out their new website www.odonovantimberflooring.ie. Trade, domestic and commercial enquiries are all welcome on 028 33144.




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Spotlight GREEN HOMES



RETROFIT

Xavier Dubuisson

Xavier Dubuisson is an engineer with 25 years experience in the field of sustainable energy in Ireland and internationally. The founder and CEO at RetroKit, a start-up dedicated to upscaling home energy upgrades with innovative digital solutions and one of the partners in the CHERIS project. Xavier has many years of experience helping homeowners make the right decisions when upgrading or building low energy homes.

Funding home energy upgrades

I hope that you are all able to keep warm with the cold spell we have been having recently. Last month, we looked at some simple tips and tricks you can make at home to save energy and tried to keep these to small practical things that were easy to do and needed no or very little money.

However when you are upgrading your home, it's not possible to get there without a big investment. So for most people, unless they have savings, they will need to have access to some extra money. Access to finance is one of the biggest barriers to people taking on a home energy upgrade.

This month, I wanted to look at a number of options for getting different support through providing a summary of some of the grants and loans available.

The grants

Over the last few months, we have taken a look at the different grants available through the Sustainable Energy Association of Ireland when we looked

at the different measures you could complete whether we were talking about insulation, heating or ventilation.

Here I'd like to summarise the different options available from SEAI but would encourage you to check their website for all the details and grant amounts: www.seai.ie/grants/home-energy-grants.

In short, there are three main options of grants available:

Individual Energy Upgrade Grants are for homeowners or landlords who want to upgrade their homes on a step-by-step basis. They will manage their own project but will need to select a contractor from the SEAI register to be eligible.

This is a step-by-step approach so there's no need to reach a particular BER rating after your upgrade.

The One Stop Shop Service is for homeowners and private landlords who want to do multiple energy upgrades at the same time, and will upgrade to a minimum of a B2 BER rating. They are looking for a fully managed solution where the grants and



project is managed by the One Stop Shop and they will only have to pay for the works net of the eligible grant.

Fully Funded Energy Upgrade (comprising Warmer Homes) for qualifying homeowners This programme is managed by SEAI and is available for people in receipt of certain welfare benefits: Fuel Allowance, Job Seekers Allowance for over six months with a child under seven, Working Family Payment, One-Parent Family Payment, Domiciliary Care Allowance, Carers Allowance, Disability Allowance for over six months with a child under seven. All the surveys and works are organised by SEAI. There is a long waiting list (approx 2 years) but all the more reason to register sooner rather than later on the SEAI's website if you are eligible.

Lower interest loans for deep retrofit coming soon

We are waiting on the announcement and the exact details about new loans to support retrofitting in housing. We have been told that these state-guaranteed loans will be at a lower-interest than normal at a rate of between 3-4 per cent APR. The maximum loan amount will be €75,000, repayable over 10 years. It is expected that the loans are only going to be valid for homeowners who want to do a deep retrofit (to bring their energy rating to a B2 or higher).

As you know there are two different approaches to upgrading your home; it can be done all in one go (deep retrofit) or you take a step-by-step approach. So for people who want to take a step-by-step approach, we thought it was also useful to look into other loans that are available:

Green Loans or renovation loans are available from the majority of banks and your local

credit union and are approximately 6.5 per cent APR.

Green Mortgages: If you have already completed some upgrades there is another option to save some money by changing to a green mortgage: In order to qualify in most cases you need to have a B3 energy rating on your house. If you have achieved this, you can switch your mortgage to a green mortgage and get a lower rate of interest.

We have prepared a handy table of the different options available through the CHERIS on the project website: ludgate.ie/cheris-west-cork.

Details are also available to compare options on bonkers.ie

News from the CHERIS project

The homeowners who took part in the home energy upgrade clinics in December are hopefully now able to get started on some of their first steps in their home energy upgrades, whether that's getting a couple of quotes or contacting some contractors. We'll be catching up with them in February to see how they are getting on.

You will see an article from one of our mentors Pat in this edition of West Cork People. Pat has been helping one of the people he met with providing advice for her own renovation project. We are looking forward to organising some future events with the mentors where they will be able to try out their new skills, we'll keep you posted. We would love to feature other real stories of people in West Cork who have completed a home energy upgrade; if you'd like to share your story, please get in touch with us at info@ludgate.ie.

As a reminder, the CHERIS project has been funded under the Community Climate Action Fund (Strand 2). This

fund facilitates organisations and their partners to collaboratively develop supports, tools, know-how and good practice approaches to assist communities to take meaningful action on climate change.

Strand 1 of the Community Climate Action Fund is now open for applications

Community and voluntary groups can apply for capital funding to carry out a project in one or multiple themes.

- Home(Community)/energy
- Travel
- Food and waste
- Shopping and recycling
- Local climate and environmental action

The Community Climate Action Programme (CCAP) aims to support and empower communities, in partnership with their local authority (Cork County Council), to shape and build low carbon, sustainable communities in a coherent way to contribute to national climate and energy targets. The CCAP aims to support small and large, rural and urban communities to take climate action and supports direct engagement with communities to both promote and assist in the scale up of community climate action from the respective starting points of the communities.

There are levels of funding with smaller projects receiving up to €20,000 and the larger projects can receive up to €100,000. For more information and details on the application form please contact Cork County Council. Scan QR code below for the website page.



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Interested in Home Energy Upgrades?

If you are interested in upgrading an element or all of your home, increasing comfort levels while reducing your running costs and CO₂ footprint, you could be eligible for Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland's (SEAI) Single or Multiple measure schemes!

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Spotlight GREEN HOMES

CHERIS case study: Renovating on Sherkin Island

Sherkin Island, just a short hop on the ferry across from Baltimore, is aiming to achieve 'complete energy independence' in the coming years under a new initiative for selected islands across 10 EU countries called '30 renewable islands for 2030'.

Pat Rodgers is a member of the Sherkin Island Sustainable Energy Community and recently participated in the CHERIS project as a mentor. In the project's energy clinics in December, Pat was able to use his own experience of renovating an old farmhouse on Sherkin to provide practical advice to a participant who wanted to do something similar; he really enjoys sharing his knowledge to help others along a similar fulfilling journey.

Pat and his wife Tina Reed have lived on Sherkin Island for three years now. Pat runs H2O Sea Kayaking, offering trips around the island, and Tina is an artist. They both

love the outdoors and have been on many adventures over the years.

The couple bought their house, which sits along a small road winding towards the North

shore of the island, in 2020. The original house was built with stone and pre-dates 1850, Pat was able to find it on old maps of the island. The previous owners added a modern cavity wall extension in the 1980s.

Although Pat and Tina could live in it from day one, the house was draughty, cold and damp so they decided to undertake an ambitious nine month long, mostly DIY, renovation job. Their motivation was to increase the comfort level of their home, to make it more airtight and to reduce their carbon emissions.

The first step involved ripping out the old floors and dividing walls and then chipping away at the old render of the walls to bring it back to the original stone.

Pat has always been good at DIY and had worked on another renovation job in Killarney before this so the couple chose to do the majority of the work themselves, with some help from contractors to do the roof tiling, windows and electricity. Luckily for them the original timbers of the roof were intact so they did not need to be redone.



In the oldest part of the house, which has stone walls, Pat and Tina chose to use natural materials, to allow the walls to breathe and help avoid mould and damp, opting for a lime insulating plaster made from a mix of lime and cork particles. They applied this plaster by hand to both the inside and outside walls, in several layers to reach a thickness of 16mm; the walls were then finished off with a finer skim coat also made from lime. The technique they used to apply the plaster leaves rounded corners and a slightly curvy finish.

"It's an old stone house and it doesn't need to be perfectly flat and smooth," says Pat. "It kind of doesn't suit the character of old houses anyway and everyone really likes the rounded

corners."

For the newer parts of the house, they used Kingspan insulation, with 100mm on the inside and 50mm in the cavity. The attic and ceilings were insulated with 50mm as well.

As Pat and Tina did the majority of plastering and insulation work themselves it was quite time consuming but it did reduce the overall cost. On the downside, because they didn't use SEAI registered contractors, they were not able to claim grants for the insulation from SEAI.

Pat quickly adds that, "if you don't have the time (or the will!) to apply the lime plaster by hand there are machines available that you can use to spray the plaster on to the walls, which would be a big time

saver."

The natural materials they used are available through Ecological Building Systems and the Round Tower Products in Innishannon.

Pat emphasises that the work they did was just one step that has made a huge difference as the house had been very draughty before. They were meticulous in sealing every joint and corner, using a special breathable tape to seal around the windows and doors that they were then able to plaster over.

For heating, they installed an air to water heat pump to the side of the house and also have a heat recovery ventilation system.

Pat acknowledges that there were challenges to renovating a house on an island, including the additional costs for builders due to ferry expenses and logistical difficulties in transporting materials. He also mentions the scarcity of skilled contractors willing to work on the island.

There are still a few more jobs to be done to the house, including pumping the cavity wall and installing solar panels for electricity, but they are on the next phase's plan for this hardworking couple.



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Spotlight GREEN HOMES

Ballydehob community project granted €54,860 through SEAI's Sustainable Energy Community Funds

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) has granted Ballydehob Bank House community project €54,860 in Government funds to help carry out an extensive energy upgrade; transforming the community building from a cold, costly place to a warm self-sufficient community hub.



The Ballydehob project is one of 84 community or not-for-profit projects supported by SEAI in 2022 and 2023.

The works at Ballydehob Bank House were completed with Government support through SEAI's community grants and additional funding through SE Systems community fund. The building, a former AIB bank, which now serves as a tourism office, community centre and art museum, had

a low BER rating with poor comfort levels for staff and community members. Due to poor insulation and energy efficiency, the community council found it difficult to achieve a warm, comfortable building at an affordable cost.

Speaking about the Ballydehob Bank House energy upgrade project, William Walsh, CEO at SEAI said: "The Ballydehob Bank House energy upgrade is a testament

to the Ballydehob Community Council and SE Systems who have helped deliver such a fantastic project. These energy upgrades will help them reduce their carbon footprint and heating costs. With over 750 Sustainable Energy Communities across Ireland driving the energy revolution, SEAI's community network are taking control of their energy future by establishing a path to lowering their energy use and climate

impact. SEAI is delighted to support their collective journey through advice, mentoring and capital grants."

The Ballydehob Bank House required a significant number of energy upgrades. The building was upgraded with new windows and doors, the cavity walls were pumped, and the attic was insulated. There were three flat roof sections at the back of the building which were fitted with warm roof

insulation. After the insulation was complete, solar panels were installed to run the new heat pump upgrade and four EV chargers.

William Swanton, Ballydehob Committee Member explained, "The ambition of the Ballydehob Bank House was for the local community to have a place where they can meet and develop. The full energy upgrade project took the building from a cold, costly place, to a warm, self-sufficient, low cost, low carbon success story. The solar panels are producing more electricity than we are using, and we'll be selling it back to the grid. There's an app on my phone that allows me monitor how much electricity is produced and see how much energy we have saved. It's amazing."

Finbarr O'Sullivan, Project Manager, SE Systems said: "SE Systems offer a complete solution for applying and delivering the SEAI Community Energy Grants. What was required here

for the Ballydehob Bank House was a complete energy retrofit. The Ballydehob community upgraded their building fabric and main electrical and mechanical infrastructure. Ballydehob Community Council's next step is to begin fitting out the internal space to expand their services. This energy upgrade is a flagship project for Ballydehob and the wider community, bringing vibrancy back into an old, unused building in the town."

Over 750 communities across Ireland are benefitting from SEAI's support. SEAI invites even more communities to join the Sustainable Energy Communities (SEC) network and encourages existing community groups to avail of SEAI's community energy grants for their future projects. Further information on the network and how to get involved is available on the SEAI Sustainable Energy Community webpage seai.ie.



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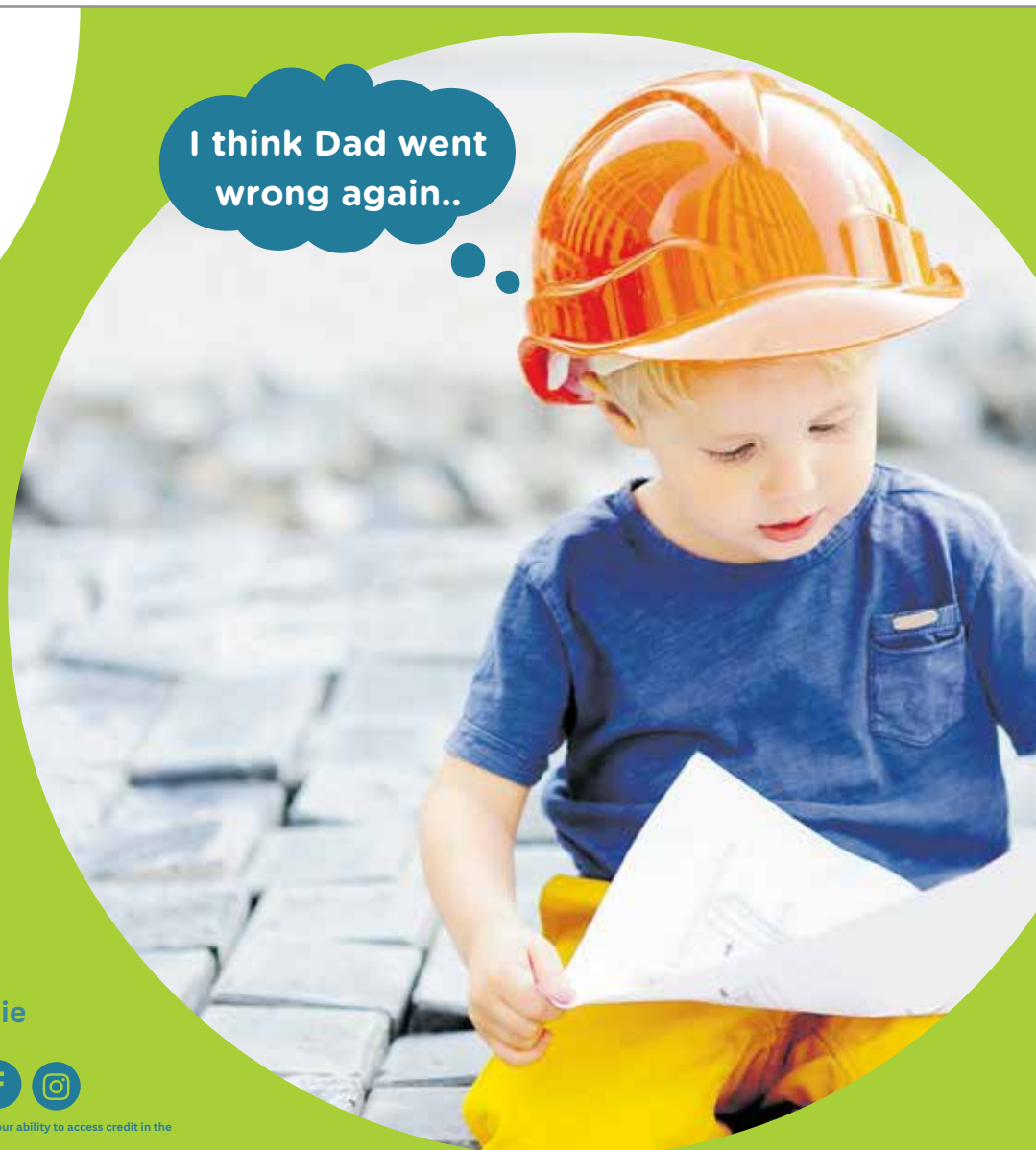
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The word is out that Lorna O'Regan's fun and enthusiastic approach to helping people get on the road to a healthier lifestyle is getting results. The dynamo behind FeelGood Health and Fitness is sharing her passion for health and fitness by delivering sociable food demonstrations and fitness classes and retreats to groups all over West Cork and people are hungry for more!

“People are crying out for connection and many don't have any cooking knowledge or simply lack confidence in the kitchen,” shares Lorna, whose FeelGood energy is hard to resist. “I really enjoy teaching people how to cook and helping them to understand the importance of nutrition on their health and how easy it is to whip up a nutritious meal.”

Healthy eating was part and parcel of Lorna's childhood: She can remember learning from her mother in the kitchen from the time she was knee-high to a grasshopper. A confident chef by the age of 11, she talked her way into her first part-time job as a baker at a coffee shop in Bandon. While she went on to study and earn a degree in nutritional science, Lorna never lost her passion for creating in the kitchen, drawing on her nutritional learnings to encompass a healthier approach to cooking and baking.



After a number of years working in the nutrition sales market, in 2021, after completing a diploma in Nutrition and Lifestyle Coaching, Lorna decided to focus her passion on starting up her own business, FeelGood Health and Fitness, delivering one-on-one nutrition and fitness coaching to clients in West Cork.

“People tend to book a visit with me for nutrition coaching when they want to lose weight or are extremely tired and fed up,” she shares. “The pattern for most clients is the same in terms of insufficient protein consumption, poor magnesium in the diet and overconsumption of over-processed foods.”

Today, as well as providing nutrition and fitness coaching to individual clients and groups, Lorna runs cookery workshops, working with a range of community groups like Clonakilty Men's Shed, Senior Citizens

groups and local schools, demonstrating how easy and fun it can be for anyone to create nutritional and tasty meals. She also regularly runs retreats combining activities like yoga, fitness classes and meditation, catering to the retreats herself with healthy and delicious vegetarian recipes.

“People aren't cooking regularly and this is impacting their health,” says Lorna. “I want to help people to fall in love with cooking and help them improve their health in the process.”

Lorna has a number of cookery workshops, open to adults of all ages and gender, coming up in different locations in West Cork. For more information see the advert on this page.

To book go to www.feelgood-healthandfitness.ie or [feelgood-healthandfitness1](https://www.instagram.com/feelgood-healthandfitness1) on Instagram.

Alternatively text Lorna on 089 4058836 and she will send you a booking link.

‘Dodging Dementia’ aims to shed light on the condition

In the face of a growing dementia epidemic affecting over 64,000 people in the Republic of Ireland, Mary Jordan's latest work, ‘Dodging Dementia: Understanding MCI and other risk factors’, offers reader insights in an easy-to-understand format. Collaborating with Dr. Jerry Thompson, Jordan presents an insightful exploration of the risk factors associated with dementia, offering practical strategies to mitigate these risks.

‘Dodging Dementia’ aims to be a resource for people worried about their own or their loved ones' susceptibility to dementia. The second edition, includes the latest scientific insights, delves into various aspects, including diet, exercise, trauma, pharmaceuticals, genetics, social isolation, sleep, and neurological deficits. Divided into three

key parts, the book provides a comprehensive roadmap for readers:

Part I: What we know about the risk factors: age, personality, and social factors

Jordan outlines risks including age, personality, and social factors that can contribute to dementia. Exploring the impact of trauma, both physical and mental, the book sheds light on miscellaneous factors, drug use (especially statins), and nutritional considerations.

Part II: Assessing personal risk factors: Past history and current status

The second part guides readers through self-assessment, encouraging introspection into past history, physical wellbeing, lifestyle choices, and current status. This critical analysis

lays the foundation for readers to understand their unique risk profile.

Part III: What you can do: Nutrition, exercise, and planning ahead

Jordan provides readers with evidence-based strategies to combat dementia risk. From nutritional insights to the crucial role of exercise, the book offers a holistic approach. Part III addresses confounding factors to avoid, the importance of sleep, stress management, and social engagement, concluding with practical resources for planning ahead.

A growing concern: Mild cognitive impairment (mci) and economic implications

The economic burden of dementia on health and social care systems cannot be overstated.

With approximately six per cent of individuals over 50 experiencing Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI), the need for early intervention and risk reduction strategies is evident. Jordan's work emphasises the importance of proactive measures to alleviate the impending strain on healthcare resources.

Genetics, trauma, and lifestyle choices

‘Dodging Dementia’ addresses the complex interplay between genetics, personal history of trauma, and lifestyle choices. The APOE4 gene, associated with an increased risk of Alzheimer's disease, becomes a focal point, with Jordan highlighting the possibility of identification through a simple blood test. The book advocates for coming to terms with past traumas and managing chronic health prob-

lems linked to dementia risk.

Lifestyle choices and dementia risk

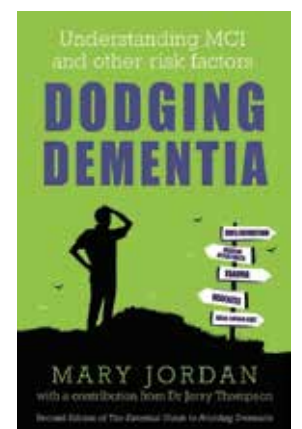
Jordan emphasises that while increased risk does not guarantee certainty, reducing risk is a worthwhile endeavour. The book discusses lifestyle choices, including the impact of physical exercise and social engagement on dementia risk. The recent experience of social isolation during the Covid lockdowns, raising concerns about the potential link between isolation and dementia, is explored.

Trauma, physical, and mental illness

Illnesses and traumatic events are acknowledged as potential precursors to dementia in ‘Dodging Dementia’. The book sheds light on diseases related to dementia, the correlation

between Type 2 diabetes and cognitive dysfunction, and the role of cardiac and vascular diseases in vascular dementia. Intriguingly, the possibility of an infectious cause for Alzheimer's disease is also discussed, emphasising the need to protect individuals with dementia from infections.

Ask in your local bookshop.



FOOD, HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

Enhancing home accessibility: Up to €6000 grant available with Cork Stairlifts

As we age or face other mobility challenges, simple tasks like navigating stairs can become daunting. Cork Stairlifts understands the importance of maintaining your independence and safe access to your entire home. Offering a range of solutions, this reputable company provides valuable support through grant assistance, custom designs, and various service options.

Cork Stairlifts supply only the highest quality stairlifts, designed for easy, reliable operation. Even during a power outage, users can have peace of mind as their stairlifts continue to operate seamlessly.

Regardless of your stair layout, straight or curved, your stairlift will be custom-designed to ensure a perfect fit and its discreet design ensures that, when not in use, the seat, arms, and footrest can all be neatly folded away. Technicians at Cork Stairlifts are fully certified and trained by manufacturers, adhering to stringent safety standards to guarantee your safety and a clean and fast installation process causes minimal disruption to the household.

Cork Stairlifts' commitment to quality is reinforced by their ISO certification and positive testimonials from satisfied customers such as these:

Valerie in Passage West – “Cork Stairlifts were excellent, arrived early. Got a very competitive price and got the stairlift a week earlier than expected.”

John in Listowel – “Very happy with Cork Stairlifts, from our initial meeting to the pro-



fessionalism of the installation team. Very pleased with the service.”

Liz in Ballinlough – “Very professional team, installed our curved stairlift without any trouble to household and I hardly knew there were in the house.”

Joe in New Ross – “Arrived on time as agreed. Very reliable. Explained everything. Were very personable and did a great job.”

Offering a free no-obligation quote, the company will guide you through the grants process that can provide up to €6,000



for your stairlift. Did you know that various options are available to suit your budget, including new, rental, and reconditioned stairlifts?

Cork Stairlifts is committed to enhancing the quality of life for individuals facing mobility

challenges. It stands out as a reliable partner in ensuring you continue to live safely in your home, providing not only top-notch products but also comprehensive aftercare support and maintenance.

Contact them today at (021) 432 0052 or visit www.Corkstairlifts.ie to take the first step towards a safer and more accessible home. For a €250 voucher off your purchase see page 7 of this issue.

Get ‘Funky’ in your kitchen

For renowned West Cork chef Caitlin Ruth, pickling is an exploration of taste, a way to play around with a contrast of textures and, ultimately, a way to make a delicious ‘Funky’ dish.

Already lauded by food goddess Nigella Lawson, Caitlin Ruth’s new book ‘Funky’ – the first

title in this year’s Blasta Book Series – delves into the many layered flavour profiles found in pickled foods, showing how this type of preserving is not just for jarring gluts but can elevate your favourite meals too.

From the frugal to the fancy, crunchy to the zingy, Caitlin shares how to make ‘Pickled Chard Stems’ or ‘Pickled Pumpkin Chunks’, a ‘Carrot & Chilli Escabeche’ with a kick or ‘Chow Chow’ for those end-of-season green tomatoes. And once you’ve mastered these brine-based recipes, you

can take it up a notch with powerful pickle powders for dips and garnishes, even to rim a glass for cocktails, as well as some great fizzy ideas to turn your ginger bug starter into sparkling concoctions, including ‘Watermelon Ginger Fizz’ or a replenishing ‘Chamomile Fennel Soda’.

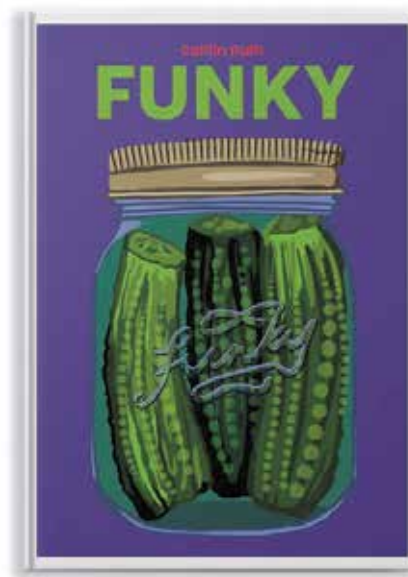
From 10-minute pickle projects and shortcuts for mass pickling to tips on how to keep the crunch and what you need to start your pickle pantry, ‘Funky’ shares inspiring and surprising ways to use fruit and vegetables

for all flavour enthusiasts or glut busters to enjoy.

Caitlin Ruth has been working in restaurant kitchens since she was 12-years-old. Formerly head chef of Deasy’s Restaurant near Clonakilty, West Cork, she hails from Dublin, New Hampshire in the US and has called Ireland her home since 1992. Listed in McKennas’ 100 Best, awarded a Michelin Bib Gourmand and recently named a Munster Local Food Hero, she now has a food truck, Caitlin Ruth Food, that serves a menu driven by seasonal ingredients

from West Cork’s local growers and producers, with a hefty sprinkling of pickles.
@caitlinruthfood

Funky is available to purchase from blastabooks.com or at bookshops.



FOOD, HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

The profound effect of Aronia on our health

Dr Steve Collins of Aronia Ireland chats to **West Cork People** about the positive impact of aronia berries on metabolic health due to this superfood's high levels of polyphenols, which have been proven to prevent disease. A medical doctor and scientist, Steve's life work has been dedicated to treating and preventing severe starvation and alleviating famine, during which time he has experienced firsthand the power of nutrition to heal or cause disease.

Metabolic syndrome is a group of risk factors, such as abdominal obesity, high blood pressure and impaired fasting glucose, that together, raise the risk of conditions like cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, stroke, cancer and dementia.

"Aronia improves core metabolic processes such as glucose metabolism, anti-oxidant protection mechanisms, inflammation and the composition of the microbiome, as well as being anti-bacterial and anti-viral," explains Steve.

"One of the few things that practically all nutritionists agree on, is that fruit, especially berries, are good for you. Aronia berry has three times the level of polyphenols that blueberries have. In fact, they have the highest level of polyphenol of any fruit or vegetable." Ideally, we should all be getting

between 1500 and 2000 mg of polyphenols per day.

A study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 2010 states that a low fruit intake is the third most important risk factor for all ill health.

"What's unusual about aronia berry is that the health benefits are well-documented in human trials," shares Steve.

"They have been shown to decrease the level of blood glucose in people and keep the levels from spiking, which is a really critical aspect of metabolic health and preventing metabolic syndrome and conditions such as diabetes, and one that often goes wrong in the modern diet, which is high in concentrated salts, sugars, emulsifiers and additives."

One epidemiological study showed that those with a high polyphenol intake had fewer heart attacks and strokes. It also

showed a significant reduction in all causes of mortality.

Aronia berry has also been shown to be an effective aid in weight loss, acting on the same receptors in the body that Ozempic, the so-called weight loss wonder drug does, except without any of the side effects or the high price tag.

Ever-increasing levels of inflammation, or so-called 'Inflammageing', is a strong risk factor for multiple diseases. Aronia berry can reduce inflammation. "Pro-inflammatory cytokines trigger or heighten inflammation and aronia has been shown to reduce these by 30 per cent, while increasing anti-inflammatory cytokines," explains Steve.

Aronia may also contribute to a decrease in the damage that occurs as a result of excessive physical activity during competitive sport.



Dr Steve Collins at his aronia berry farm in the hills of West Cork.



aronia berry was developed into a commercial fruit in Eastern Europe. Steve, who has 35 years experience in the field of nutrition, has in recent years turned his hand to farming and has been growing aronia berry successfully on a West Cork mountain between Bantry and Glengarriff since 2019. "I was looking for something nutritious that would grow well on marginal land," he explains. Aronia berry ticked all the right boxes and have been producing really good yields on the 54-hectare organic farm. But it's still early days and, as demand increases, until other Irish farmers start planting, they will have to be imported. "The demand has outgrown my capacity to produce so we import the berries from an organic family farm in Poland."

Hardy and easy on the environment, with a possible 20-year productive lifespan and a substantial return promised after the first three years, Aronia is an excellent option for West Cork farmers interested in diversifying. As the proven health benefits of this superfood become more widely known, it is inevitable that demand will increase.

Steve puts aronia concentrate in his yogurt and nuts every morning and takes 150 mls of the juice in the afternoon. "I'm over 60 and less creaky and wobbly now than I was five years ago when I started it. I wouldn't do it if I didn't believe in it," shares the doctor.

There are a range of products available under Aronia Ireland's PhyterBerry brand in the form of capsules, juice, concentrates and powders. All are stocked in local health food shops or available to purchase from aroniaireland.com.

aronia
IRELAND

PhyterBerry™ Aronia
natural health supplements,
packed full of polyphenols.

Stocked in leading health food stores in West Cork
and available online from www.aroniaireland.com



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High in antioxidants, incredibly aronia berries can also switch on the production of your body's own antioxidants.

In recent years, the impact of our gut microbiome on health, from boosting immunity to overcoming depression, has really come to light. Polyphenols, the active ingredients in

Aronia, together with increasing fibre intake, are essential for developing those good bugs that we need in our microbiome.

"As well as increasing those beneficial bugs, Aronia has also been shown to help in lining the gut to keep it from leaking," shares Steve.

Native to North America, the

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FOOD, HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

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Using the very latest in sliding track technology you will be amazed at how much storage space Slide Glide products provide, wall-to-wall and floor-to-ceiling, with a wide range of accessories such as trousers, shoe and tie racks, drawers and baskets, all of which help to keep your wardrobe organised and tidy. Available in a wide range of colours and designs in traditional, modern or contemporary styles, all come with a



10-year guarantee.

Check out the company's room dividing and pocket door systems to obtain space where you never thought it possible. Have you ever thought how much space hinged doors waste, especially in confined areas such as en-suites, bathrooms, utility rooms and hallways? Now think about a sliding pocket door that disappears into the wall, wasting zero space.

Call to any of the company's three showrooms, located in

Cork, Dublin and Limerick, with approximate dimensions of your space and a designer will create a 3D design and quote for you, or you can also visit the 'Buy On-Line' section of www.slideglide.ie for more information.

Be it wardrobe doors or complete wardrobes Slide Glide will supply and install or supply only.

Visit the Cork Showroom in Southside Industrial Estate, Togher. T12 YK83. Tel : 021 4975 444.

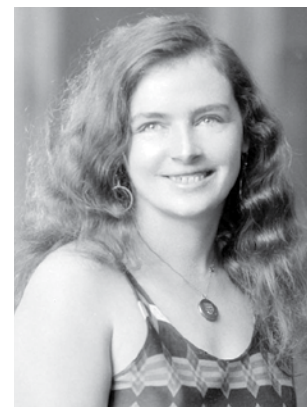
Pioneering swimmer returns to Cork almost a century after incredible endurance swim

In celebration of International Women's Day, the much-anticipated biopic 'Vindication Swim' is hitting cinemas across Ireland on March 8. The film dives into the extraordinary life of Mercedes Gleitze, who in 1927 became the first British woman to swim the English Channel.

Written and directed by award-winning filmmaker Elliott Hasler, 'Vindication Swim' stars British-Irish actress Kirsten Callaghan, who trained for months in the English Channel before filming began. The film also stars John Locke (Darkest Hour, Poor Things, The Favourite) alongside James Wilby (Maurice, Gosford Park, Howards End) and Douglas Hodge (Joker, The Great, Black Mirror).

The film depicts Gleitze's upstream struggle in overcoming both the cold waters of the English Channel and the oppressive society of 1920s England. Instead of resting on her laurels,

after a rival comes forward claiming to have accomplished the same feat, Gleitze is forced into battle to retain her record and her legacy.



Mercedes Gleitze, a name that has been largely lost to history, also became the first person to complete many other incredible swims around the world, including the Straits of Gibraltar, the Dardanelles and the distance between Robben Island and Cape Town in South Africa. Gleitze also achieved

the unthinkable in 1929 by swimming across the Irish Sea.

The swimmer made waves in Cork City the following year at the iconic Eglinton Street Baths, showcasing remarkable endurance in front of over 4,500 spectators who witnessed Gleitze defy societal norms and shatter records with her non-stop, 30 hour swim.

'Vindication Swim' serves as a poignant reminder of the indomitable spirit of a woman who dared to dream beyond the confines of her era. Whether you're a history enthusiast, a sports fan, or simply someone seeking inspiration, 'Vindication Swim' promises a cinematic experience that celebrates not only the achievements of Mercedes Gleitze, but also the collective strength and determination of women who have left an indelible mark.

Details for screenings can be found at www.vindicationswim-film.com or @vindicationswim-film on social media.

FOOD, HEALTH & LIFESTYLE



HERBAL HEALING

Dr. Rosari Kingston

Dr. Rosari Kingston PhD, M.Sc (Herbal medicine) is a medical herbalist practising in Dr. O'Reilly's integrative clinical practice in Clonakilty as well as Church Cross, Skibbereen. Dr. Kingston's area of research are the healing modalities present in Irish vernacular medicine and she incorporates them, where possible, into her clinical practice. In her clinical practise she specialises in infertility and digestive issues. www.rosarikingstonphd.com

Some traditional cures for a cough

Over the last few weeks, I have been surprised by the number of patients who have complained of a cough that will not go away and many of them had no idea that there are some very effective remedies that can be made at home. These remedies are effective for many different types of coughs but, obviously, if the cough persists more professional help is needed.

The Swede Turnip Cure
Peel a swede turnip and slice it fairly thinly. Layer the slices in a bowl and add sugar between each layer. Cover the bowl and leave for 12 hours. After this time, a sweet juice will have

gathered. Take a teaspoon of this every hour or more frequently at the start if needed. This is very good for a dry cough.

The Onion Cure
Get a glass that is wide at the top but that narrows towards the end.

Peel an onion and drop it into the glass so that it remains stuck halfway down. Add two tablespoons of sugar to the top of the onion and leave overnight. The juice that will have gathered in the bottom of the



glass in the morning is effective against colds and coughs.

The Garlic Cure

a) This cure is suitable for a small child who has a cold, cough, or chest infection. Crush some garlic cloves, one or two depending on the size. Put a thin pair of socks on the child and put a second pair over them. Place the garlic cloves between the two socks on the feet. Do not put garlic directly on the skin, as it is too strong. Leave socks on overnight.

b) Crush garlic cloves and infuse them in oil for a few hours. Strain and

keep the oil in the fridge to prevent it going rancid. Massage a few drops of this oil onto the chest at the onset of a cold. Keep warm.

Thyme and Honey

Infuse a good bunch of thyme in one pound of good local honey. Keep the heat very low and leave the infusion to do its work for about twelve hours. The back of an AGA or moderate radiator is ideal for this. After this time strain out the thyme and keep the honey in a cool dry press. Use this for a hot toddy or take in warm water at the onset of a cold. This honey is also a great addition to hot drinks such as elderberry, which

is most beneficial for alleviating the 'flu. It goes under the name 'Sambucol' in the shops but adding elderberry to your own thyme-infused honey is probably better.

Wishing all my readers a very happy Brigid's day. 'Creative Bandon' is putting on quite a lot of events for it and I noticed Shane Lehane is speaking on the lore of Brigid on Friday, February 2 at 3pm. This event is being held in the library and should be very interesting, as Shane has a great way of imparting his immense knowledge. This event is free.

You win some and you lose some (but everyone has a lot to gain)

Anyone who watches TV programmes such as 'Who Do You Think You Are' (BBC1), 'Long Lost Family' (ITV) or 'DNA Family Secrets' (BBC2) are there for the human-interest story. Very little of the science or how much analysis and work went on in the background to find answers is explained.

The following stories are real and based on my research completed in 2023 and are good examples of all the complications and intricacies of genetic genealogy and family life. For privacy reasons, all the names

have been changed.

Case 1:

Every now and again, I check branches of my family tree on Ancestry that traditionally do not have much information, to see if anyone new is researching that line. You can't always find close cousins through outreach, even on social media, so you just never know if one of them has started looking into our family too!

I came across one of my cousins named in an unfamiliar tree and messaged that researcher. Not expecting any

reply, I was very surprised to hear back. Apparently, 'Jane', the daughter of my cousin, was a match to the researcher's wife and daughter on another testing database. Jane was a third cousin to me on paper, so should have been a match to me on that database. I did not know she had even tested, having declined many years ago. Having fifteen or more cousins on the same database as Jane, all of whom should have matched her, it became clear there was a mystery behind the reason I was unaware of her test. She was simply not of my family.

At around the same time and totally independently, 'Kate', the daughter of Jane approached me for help to find her father. Kate was estranged from her mother and had not been told who her biological father was. Immediately, there was a tricky issue of keeping related areas of research confidential to each of the parties.

Kate's case turned out to be very straightforward. I recommended she started by testing with Ancestry, the world's largest DNA database, to see if we could produce any relatives to help identify her father. It was worth the two to three month waiting time for Kate's result, as we had an instant hit; a half-brother. The result confirmed that she was not of my family, just like her mother.

The half-brother was delighted that his DNA had helped someone find his family and the two sides were put in touch. Within a few days, Kate (who already had a number of siblings and half-siblings on her mother's side) found

that their number had tripled, as there were another eight on her biological father's side. She was able to meet her biological father the following weekend. Case solved!

Having Kate's DNA on Ancestry meant that it became quite clear early on that there were several close cousins on her mother's side pointing to another biological family other than my own, and one person in particular 'X', now deceased. It helped that this biological family had a very unusual name, so it was not a difficult task to isolate that family or find researchers. Fortunately, several genetic cousins on that side were also very helpful in confirming the family tree and were equally keen to reconnect with new family. All this supported the initial findings for Jane's DNA on the smaller database where she had tested and why everyone was matching each other in relation to X.

At the time, Jane's father 'Ben' had not DNA tested, but his younger half-brother 'Bill' had. Bill's result showed him to be of my family, so we knew his result provided a legitimate line back along this branch of my family for the first time.

As Ben had been born just four months after his parent's marriage in the 1930s, it became clear Ben's mother had been carrying another man's child up the aisle; belonging to 'X'. After Ben's mother died when he was young, his father remarried and had Bill.

When Jane's family were briefed on the findings, it emerged that Ben (now nearly 90) always thought that the

manner of his upbringing meant he never felt he was his father's child. So even at this late stage in his life he was delighted to have an explanation and know who his biological father was.

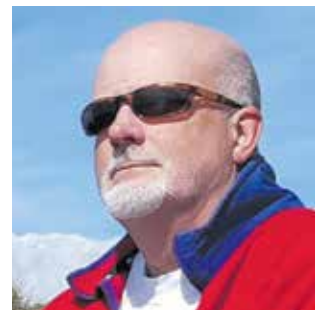
As a result of this, several of Jane's siblings and her father, Ben, also tested to add their DNA to the mix to prove beyond all doubt that my once on paper cousins now had their biological origins with X. With that case solved, it has been left to the genetic cousins within X's wider family to finalise matters and rewrite their family trees. For Ben, it also meant the unexpected discovery of a half-sister who was still alive.

Case 2:

'Pat' was a distant cousin on paper down another branch of my family tree. Her nearest tested cousin on that branch 'Dave' did not match her. Both were so far down the branch (beyond fourth cousins) that genetic distance was a big factor in trying to prove where the problem lay. The issue remained unresolved for more than five years simply due to the lack of data.

During 2023, new testers in my family provided DNA matches to Dave, so we could finally include him as a DNA-proven cousin. Therefore, it was highly likely there was a genetic break down Pat's side branch. But where?

Focussing on Pat's ancestry and what was missing genetically, the solution was provided by two new close DNA matches within family 'Y' (again with an unusual name) in Pat's great grandmother's hometown. The amount of DNA shared indi-



THE DNA OF WEST CORK PEOPLE

Mark Grace

Mark Grace is a genetic genealogist and family historian at Ballynoe House, Ardfield, Co. Cork

cated that Pat's grandfather, an only child, was not of my family line and it became extinct, for me, at that point.

Summary:

Even though both branches are now removed from my family tree (losing about 20 on paper relatives), they do go to show how much can be done with a few simple DNA tests. Certainly, it proves the maxim that "DNA never lies" and you should not take the paper trail at face value. Sometimes the answer waits for you to find it and at other times you have to wait for the right results to appear. There were really only winners since everyone had an answer thanks to DNA.

Questions for future articles or private client services can be emailed to DNAmatching-projects@gmail.com. Follow the West Cork DNA projects on Facebook 'My Irish Genealogy and DNA'.

LETTERCOLLUM

COOKING CLASSES APRIL 2024

SATURDAY 6TH APRIL INDIAN VEGETARIAN

We are taking a wander around southern India this spring and I will be collecting up lots of easy recipes for every day dinners or to make a feast. One of my favourite vegetarian cuisines - so many possibilities!

SATURDAY 13TH APRIL GREEK

The food in Greece is simple and seasonal. This class will be about creative ways with aubergine, peppers and tomatoes, delicious vegetable mezze and the secret to making filo pie.

SATURDAY 20TH APRIL MEXICAN

Plenty of fresh and vibrant recipes; tacos, elotes, tostadas, re-fried beans, quesadillas, pico de gallo, guacamole.....

SATURDAY 27TH APRIL NEW SEASON VEGETARIAN

Lots of fresh ideas and recipes, using seasonal ingredients to make delicious and nutritious salads, salad dressings and spring meals.

☎ 023 8846251 ✉ karen@lettercollum.ie

The classes are held at Lettercollum in Timoleague.

They begin at 10.30am and finish around 3pm. The cost is €120 and includes all recipes, tastings and a large lunch.



FOOD, HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

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Flip up your pancake day with cabbage dressed in batter



A FLAVOUR OF WEST CORK RECIPE

Karen Austin

Okonomiyaki are a savoury pancake from Japan. The wonderful name which rolls along the tongue and bounces off at the end originated in Osaka. Now I've never been to Osaka, let alone Japan, it remains on the wish list, but I did encounter okonomiyaki in Berlin, which is renowned for its diverse food culture, and was smitten, partly because they look so funky that you just have to try them.

Okonomiyaki, which translates as 'grilled as you like it', is essentially a cabbage pancake with serious over-the-top embellishments, which I guess makes up the 'as you like it' component. It's like a cross between a fat pancake and a Spanish tortilla.

I have trawled the internet looking for recipes and variations. It seems like there are two main protagonists, one from Osaka, which is the version that I tried or one from Hiroshima. The Hiroshima recipe also con-

tains noodles and a fried egg, which I haven't tried, and looks more complicated (and messy)

The basic ingredients to make okonomiyaki are flour, eggs, cabbage, spring onions and grated yamaimo, which is some kind of starchy Japanese yam. Now, we don't live in yam land but we do have a garden full of parsnips, which seems to make a great substitute if it is very finely grated. A little dashi, which is Japanese seaweed and katsuobushi stock, is used to thin the batter, but I substituted vegetable stock.

Protein add-ins can be very thin slices of belly pork – I was thinking skinny streaky rashers, prawns, or octopus. Prawns are no problem but octopus is in short supply around here; also anyone who has seen the movie 'My Octopus Teacher' is probably off octopus for life.

These extra ingredients can be cooked in the bottom of the pancake. I made mine with just cabbage and parsnip and was very satisfied, so I didn't bother to upgrade. I'd say the streaky rashers would create a sort of Japanese bacon and cabbage affair. If you fancy trying it, lay the rashers in a single layer in the bottom of the pan, then pour the batter over it and continue as explained below.

There are two toppings which are essential. One is mayonnaise, which is squiggled over the top; this is easy to achieve with a squeeze bottle of mayo, and the other is okonomi sauce. I have never seen okonomi sauce here but it's easy to create by mixing oyster sauce or Worcestershire sauce with ketch-



up, soya sauce and honey.

Crumbled seaweed flakes, katsuobushi (bonito flakes) pickled ginger, spring onions and tempura rubble are popular as a final sprinkle. It's unlikely that anyone has any tempura rubble – the leftover crispy bits from making tempura – hanging around. I did toy with the idea of substituting panko bread-crumbs but that would be a bit of a faff and it's delicious as it is, so that detail can wait until I go to Japan to try the real deal. I can give you an update then.

I topped my pancake with toasted crumbled nori seaweed and pickled ginger, which are both available locally.

If you're looking for an alternative pancake for shrove Tuesday give these a try. They

are fun to make and despite being essentially cabbage in a batter, very tasty.

Okonomiyaki

Ingredients:

- 50g white flour
- 10g cornflour
- 30g finely grated parsnip
- 2 eggs
- quarter tsp salt
- quarter tsp sugar
- 2tbs stock or water
- quarter sweetheart cabbage – about 150g
- 4 spring onions
- Oil to fry
- Pickled ginger
- 1 sheet nori seaweed or some crumbled seaweed flakes
- Mayonnaise
- Okonomi sauce (recipe below)

Method:

Sift the flours into a bowl then stir in the grated parsnip, salt and sugar.

Lightly whisk the eggs then add to the flour mix and whisk everything together.

Put the batter aside to rest for at least half an hour.

Finely shred the sweetheart cabbage and chop three spring onions.

Stir the cabbage and onion into the rested batter and mix well. This is not a thick batter, more a cabbage dressed in batter, so the mixing is important.

Heat a non-stick frying pan, a 24cm pan is perfect, add a little neutral oil to the bottom of the pan then tip in the mix. Level out but don't press down too

hard. I used the back of a fork to gently encourage the pancake into a good shape. Reduce the heat to low, cover with a lid and gently fry the pancake for 4-6 minutes.

To flip the pancake make sure it is mobile by shaking the pan, then put a plate on top of the pancake, then carefully flip the pan over so that the pancake lands on the plate. Gently slip the pancake back into the pan then cook the other side.

While the pancake is cooking make the sauce.

Okonomi Sauce

Ingredients:

- 1tbs ketchup
- 1tbs oyster sauce or Worcestershire sauce
- 1tsp soya sauce or tamari
- 1 tsp honey.

Whisk all the ingredients together.

To serve

To serve the okonomiyaki, slip the cooked pancake onto a plate.

Smear the okonomiyaki sauce over the top then squiggle the mayonnaise backwards and forwards over the top.

Finally make the crumbled nori, take a sheet of nori and wave it backwards and forwards gently over some heat – gas flame, hot spot – and it will shrivel a little and change colour. Allow to cool then crumble and sprinkle over the pancake. Chop the last spring onion and strew over the top.

Serve with pickled ginger on the side.

Happy Pancake day!

FOOD, HEALTH & LIFESTYLE



MENTAL HEALTH

Leo Muckley

Leo Muckley, MSc in Counselling and Psychotherapy, offers psychotherapy and counselling sessions in person in Glengarriff and Skibbereen, online and also by walk and talk. He is a member of the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP).

In an online survey of 1,200 Irish adults conducted between April 28 and May 4, 2023, Aware, a national Irish organisation supporting people with depression, found that three in five people had experienced what they believed to be depression. It also found that one in four had an official medical diagnosis of depression. Stark statistics, highlighting how commonplace the impact of depression is on Irish society.

The word depression is an interesting one, as some people might recognise what it refers

Coping with depression

to immediately, and others may not have a full idea of what it means. The word itself originates from the Latin 'de-primere' 'to press down, depress' and can be also be described as a sense of the 'act of pressing down' or the 'state of being pressed down'. When reading these descriptions it makes much more sense to me. Anyone who has experienced depression, or knows someone with experience of it, might say it is a heavy or low feeling. In West Cork we might hear people talking about depression in different terms. I am thinking specifically of times I have heard someone saying a person "took to the bed" or that a person is "very down in themselves". I am sure there might be other terms that come to mind when reading this that make sense to you.

So what does depression look like in reality, apart from the descriptions and understanding of the word? It can take many forms, as each person is so unique and can have varying experiences. This is because each person has different ways they learned during life to cope with their challenges. However, there are some things in common for everyone. The feeling of being pressed down and heavy is one that most

people encounter when depression enters their life; this can show up as low mood and no energy. It is a sense of not being able to get out of bed in the morning or feeling like getting dressed is harder than having to climb Mount Everest: With no immediate explanation for why or understanding of when it will end. It is noteworthy to point out that depression comes in many forms, from mild to severe. This is why it is such a common experience in Ireland. In 2022, researchers in UCD found that of 250 farmers interviewed across the country over half have experienced moderate to extremely severe depression.

Mild depression can result in feeling unhappy and low for a short time, whereas severe depression can look like "taking to the bed" and never getting out of it again. In the very extreme cases it can lead to suicide. Usually, if a person feels depressed for longer than two weeks, then that is a good time to look into finding support. The earlier it is addressed the less impact it can have on a person. At its worst, a person experiencing depression can lose touch with their self-esteem or sense of worth. There can be a lack of hope and no vision of the future, be it 24 hours or a year away. Reduced energy, interrupted sleep and

loss of appetite can also be symptoms. Along with this can come a sense of shame or guilt, embarrassment and maybe a fear of judgement, which can lead to people not wanting to reach out for support. A good general guide to depression is it is often caused by the past, as opposed to anxiety, which is often about the future. Reading this information can be a bit shocking, if even frightening. It would be normal to think how do I avoid depression? What can I do to stop it?

It is as important to know what depression looks like in action, as it is to know what might lead to feeling that way. There is no single cause of depression, it can happen to anyone, at any time in life and for any reason/s. However, it is usually brought on by stressful or traumatic life events. For example, the abrupt end of a romantic relationship, losing a job, experiencing a bereavement, divorce or being diagnosed with a medical illness could all open the door for depression to visit. Ironically, even reading this article could be a bit depressing in itself, all doom and gloom as we might say! Each person is different, yet it has been found that people who have low self-esteem or are very self-critical can be more

susceptible to depression. There can be a higher risk of depression to someone if their family has a history of it. Some women specifically after giving birth can be at risk of post-natal depression due to changes in their body and chemistry, with the added changes to their life and stress of responsibility. Lastly, specific times of the year can bring about depression, such as after Christmas, the New Year, or when anniversaries of people who have passed away come around.

The key with depression is addressing it as soon as possible. For mild cases, physical activity is a great remedy, even more so if it is outdoors, once there are no storms blowing across the country! Exercise and being outdoors can lead to increased hormones that improve mood, increased positive feelings and enhanced sense of wellbeing. Even a regular walk up and down the stairs or around the garden for 20 minutes a day can help. For more moderate to severe cases, usually lasting more than two weeks, support can be in the form of medication, prescribed by a GP, and most often counselling and psychotherapy. It has been proven that medication combined with therapy can be an extremely effective way to

address and relieve depression. Developing a mindfulness practice has been found to be effective in managing depression also, as it can teach people tools and ways to manage the symptoms and triggers. In the most severe cases, a combination of all of the above will be the best way to address the challenges. The approach is usually unique and tailored to the person in need of support as no one thing works for each person all of the time.

I hope this article has brought some clarity to you and a sense of how commonplace depression is in Ireland. If you are experiencing depression then my wish for you is that you know you are not alone and support is readily available to help you. It can be a low and dark place to be in but there are ways to pull yourself out of it with support. If you are in need of support please do reach out to your GP, a helpline or a mental health professional such as a psychotherapist and counsellor.

For more information on Leo's services,
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Social Media:
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Specsavers Bandon volunteers embark on a significant journey to Kolkata

Specsavers volunteers recently played a crucial role in supporting 2,414 individuals living in Kolkata's Street and slum communities in India. Among those volunteers was Marie Burke, an optician and Director at Specsavers Bandon and Ballincollig and Deirdre Moore, Retail Director at Specsavers Ballincollig, Bandon and Wilton.

As Marie and Deirdre navigated the harsh reality while volunteering at The Hope Hospital Eye Clinic, they visited local street and slum communities where they provided eye health care to those living on the streets.

During their week-long trip, the team of expert opticians visited 11 different locations and gave eye checks to 2,414 patients, dispensed over 1,904 glasses, and in more severe cases, referred patients to Hope Hospital for surgery.

Despite the seemingly routine nature of the eye care provided, many individuals treated by Specsavers colleagues had never accessed such services before. Dr. Samran, CEO of The Hope

Hospital, emphasised the significance of the visit, noting that 90 per cent of cases of blindness could have been prevented if timely treatment was available. This highlights the critical impact of the Specsavers team's efforts in bringing essential eye care to those who had previously lacked access.

Eight-year-old Amaira Gulzar was brought to the Specsavers eye clinic where she spoke of sore eyes and headaches. On testing, it was clear that she needed glasses and of a very high prescription so the symptoms she complained of were not surprising. Amaira had never realised that she couldn't see clearly, assuming her vision was how all people saw things. On trying on glasses, she was overwhelmed and surprised, not quite believing the clarity she had been missing out on. Amaira was excited to get to school the next day to see how the blackboard would appear with her new glasses and was so thankful to Specsavers and Hope for giving her clear sight.

For the people seen by Specsavers on this trip to

Kolkata, having glasses can be a life changing tool, be it to help in their education or help them to obtain work to support their families. This was the case for 57-year-old Dannu Prasad Ladar. A long-haul driver, Dannu is the sole provider for his family of a wife and three children. Struggling with cataracts in both eyes, Danny's job was becoming increasingly challenging and stressful, not to mention dangerous. He had refrained from seeking medical intervention in fear that he would lose his job and his family's source of income and also not be able to afford the healthcare.

He speaks of the night he stumbled upon the Specsavers Night Clinic as a "blessing I will be eternally grateful for". Head of Optometry at TUD, Declan Hovenden, tested Dannu and referred him to Hope Hospital for surgery where he would avail of double cataract surgery at no cost. Dannu was also prescribed glasses which would alleviate some of his vision issues in the meantime, allowing him to continue working until his surgery.

The prescription would then be updated post-surgery at the Hope Hospital to better suit his needs. This support and care will ensure Dannu continues in his employment for many years to come, ensuring the ongoing support of his family.

Following her visit, Marie said: "This trip has been inspiring. It really showed me that a little goes a long way and it doesn't take much to change a lot for people. The graduation of the students was also incredible. It's fantastic to think that the work will continue after we have left."

Deirdre added: "I am so grateful that we got the opportunity to visit Kolkata with The Hope Foundation again this year. What seems like little work to us, makes such a big difference to these communities.

"What's really wonderful about The Hope Foundation is that they are working alongside the street communities in Kolkata, and they are changing the lives of everyone in this community. It was a privilege to be there to help them on their journey and to see the benefit of



(l-r) Whilst volunteering in Kolkata Marie Burke and Deirdre Moore presented a cheque of €135,000 to The Hope Foundation.

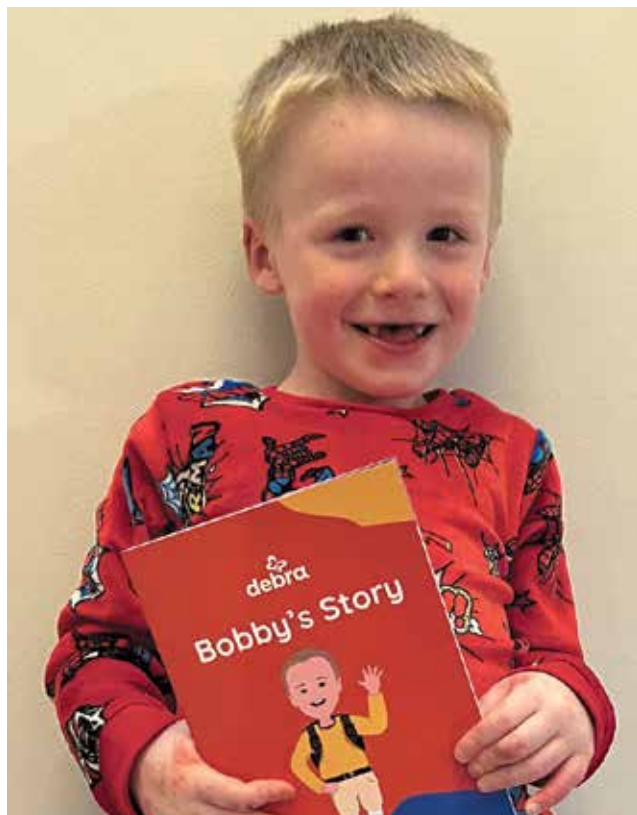
our supports to the hundreds of people we treated.

"I'd like to take a moment to thank all of those who helped make the journey possible – you have all contributed to giving something special - the gift of sight."

At the end of their week-long volunteering trip, Specsavers presented a cheque of €135,000 to founder of The Hope Foundation, Maureen Forrest. This significant donation will play a vital role in sustaining the eye care clinic in Kolkata.

FOOD, HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

Bantry boy with rare skin disease shares his story



Butterfly Skin, just months after his birth.

The genetic illness causes extremely painful blisters to erupt at the slightest touch – and, in the worst cases such as Bobby’s, multiple bandage changes are needed every week to prevent infection.

Although the Manchester United-supporting youngster faces an exhausting battle against pain every day, he has started pre-school at Coomhola Highscope near Bantry.

To help him explain his EB and why he needs to wear bandages, national charity Debra produced a brightly coloured booklet titled ‘Bobby’s Story’, which he has shared with his classmates.

His pals are also told that while Bobby is just like every other little boy who loves football, they must be careful at playtime in case he hurts his fragile skin.

“The book has helped Bobby tell his story of life with EB through the eyes of a child,” said mum Grace Clifford, 36.

“His classmates now know why he wears bandages at

school and why he has to be extra careful in the classroom and the yard.

“He gave one to everybody in his class and the parents and children were amazed, some admitting they didn’t know about EB.”

Bobby is supported at home by parents Grace and Darren and sister and brother Mia and Charlie.

Shortly after Bobby’s birth in January 2019, medics spotted patches of skin were missing from the tot’s fingers and ankles.

Three days later, blisters were found inside his mouth.

“After a few months of hospital and GP visits, Bobby was diagnosed with recessive dystrophic epidermolysis bullosa,” said Grace.

“He now undergoes long, excruciating bandage changes several times a week.”

Although his life revolves around hospital visits and bandage changes, she said her son is always smiling.

“He’s slowly learning the things he can and cannot do, and battles on like a warrior.

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“Bobby is a soccer fanatic and needs double bandaging of the whole body when playing to protect his fragile skin, but the smile on his face is worth it.”

Grace said she is desperate for a cure to be found and said the public can help fund medical research by donating via debra.ie.

“Debra have been an extraordinary support to us as a

family,” she said.

“My hope is that a cure for EB is found.

“It is the most heartbreaking thing in the world to watch someone you love go through so much and not be able to fix it for them.”

To find out more about EB, visit debra.ie.

A book about a soccer-mad schoolboy who lives with a distressing skin disease, is helping to raise awareness about the condition

among his classmates. Four-year-old Bobby Clifford from Gurteenroe in Bantry, was diagnosed with epidermolysis bullosa (EB), also known as

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PRICES MEMBERS: €6 per class, 10 class pass €54 **NON-MEMBERS:** €9 per class, 10 class pass €81. Teen classes €5.
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SAT **AERIAL YOGA**
(Barbara 083 0733060)*
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FOOD, HEALTH & LIFESTYLE



Amanda Roe

Acupuncture and
Clinical Hypnotherapist

Fertility Series: Poor thyroid function could be affecting your fertility

The thyroid, a small butterfly-shaped gland in the neck, produces hormones that are responsible for fertility and controls the feedback loops between progesterone receptors and the pituitary release of hormones such as LH and FSH.

As a fetus does not have its own thyroid, it is fully dependant on its mother's thyroid function during the first 20 weeks of gestation to control energy production, metabolism, growth and development.

Unfortunately thyroid disease is prevalent in women of repro-

ductive age and, as one of the main reasons for unexplained infertility is undiagnosed thyroid conditions, it is important for women trying to conceive to be informed and know what signs to look out for.

When the thyroid is under-functioning, it is said to be under-active and known as hypothyroidism. Symptoms include tiredness, sensitivity to the cold and/or cold hands and feet, constipation and weight gain. Low thyroid function can interfere with the proper balance of fertility hormones

leading to irregular ovulation or anovulation, which happens when an egg does not ovulate during the cycle making conception impossible. It can also cause a shorter luteal phase making it difficult for a fertilised egg to implant securely, leading to very early miscarriage.

Hyperthyroidism, when the thyroid is overactive, can cause symptoms such as increased energy levels, concentration issues, mood swings, anxiety and irritability. It can also cause the heart to race, eyes to bulge, swelling in the throat, difficulty sleeping, sensitivity to heat, tiredness, loss of libido, a feeling of being hungry all the time and weight loss, no matter how much is eaten.

Thyroid function is routinely monitored using blood tests to look at how much thyroid-stimulating hormone TSH is present in the blood and how much thyroid hormone T4 is in the blood. If the TSH is high but the T4 is low, this indicates that the gland is under-active (hypothyroid); if the TSH is below range and the T4 is high this indicates (hyperthyroidism).

However, a situation which is often overlooked, is thyroid autoimmunity. Autoimmunity is when your own immune system

produces antibodies to your own tissue; and thyroid autoimmunity causes the immune system to attack your own thyroid gland. As the majority of hypo and hyperthyroid conditions are autoimmune-related, this has a significant impact on fertility.

The most common cause of autoimmune hypothyroidism is Hashimoto's Thyroiditis where your body is producing antibodies to TPO (Thyroid Peroxidase) and/or Tg (Thyroglobulin).

What is important to know is that you can also have a situation when your thyroid gland looks like it is functioning normally with standard TSH and T4 levels within a normal range but still have elevations in Tg and TPO antibodies. Elevations of these antibodies, particularly TPO abs, is related to unexplained infertility.

With these links between an overactive immune system and reproductive issues including infertility, miscarriage and poor egg production within an IVF cycle, is it important to know if a thyroid condition is also autoimmune. As medication alone will effectively manage thyroid TSH and T4 levels, autoimmune antibodies are often not checked until a woman has

had two or more miscarriages. Emotionally this is devastating, especially when it is possible to check thyroid antibodies with an inexpensive at home test.

If you are trying to conceive and have thyroid symptoms or have a personal or family history of an autoimmune disease, it is important to get your thyroid and thyroid antibodies checked early to rule this out. If you do not have symptoms but have experienced a miscarriage, it is also important to have them checked, as pregnancy itself can have a significant impact on the immune system.

If autoimmunity is detected, it can be managed naturally using diet, stress management, acupuncture and chinese herbal medicines to support conception and pregnancy.

Amanda Roe is a clinical hypnotherapist and acupuncturist who uses a range of holistic therapies including dietary guidance to improve fertility, emotional and mental health. Supporting natural recovery from trauma, eating disorders and other mind/body illness. For more information or to book a consultation visit www.roehealth.ie or call/text Amanda on: 087 6331898

Many women do not know that good thyroid function is essential for women trying to conceive and maintain a pregnancy.

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MINDFULNESS

Susan O'Regan

Susan O'Regan, Msc Mindfulness Studies teaches compassion-based mindfulness. She is a teacher member of the Mindfulness Teachers Association of Ireland (MTAI) and The Mindfulness Association.

“Acknowledging the good that you already have in your life is the foundation for all abundance,” says Eckhart Tolle.

Our weather system is so noticeably changing, as is the

world around us. In January alone we had multiple weather warnings, heavy rains, icy conditions, storms, and there are Saharan winds due, causing a rare occurrence described ominously as ‘blood rain’. I’m curious about my attitude to these extremes of weather, and to aspects of daily life that don’t always go to plan – is my attitude one of acceptance, gratitude, complaint, or compassion? We can use inopportune external weather to pay attention to our ‘inner weather’. It is perfectly normal to feel a level of immediate concern, anxiety, even fear, about the unsettled weather, but for me there is another deeper layer of concern for the longer term. A concern that motivates me to want to change.

We have a choice either to complain and give out when things go wrong, or we can use the challenging days or moments to grow in gratitude for all the days that are beautiful and all the moments that go well for us. We may not be able

to control things like weather events in the outer world, but we can attend to our inner environment, our thoughts, attitudes, and actions. And ironically perhaps, by accepting the unpleasant alongside the pleasant, we can cultivate an embodied feeling of gratitude within us, and turn simple, everyday moments into pure joy and abundance.

Our weather extremes can remind us to notice how much of daily life we take for granted, and, conversely, how we can foster thoughts and deep feelings of gratitude for the abundance all around us, for example, the sheer beauty of nature, or, if we are fortunate enough, an abundance of warm food, hot drinks, a fire to keep warm, a roof overhead and a car to travel in. I was, like many others around here, so thankful that the electricity remained on through-out recent storms. Sometimes we do not truly appreciate what we have until it's under threat or gone completely, whether that's the everyday

things in life or our larger global concern, our beautiful planet.

When we learn to accept and feel the discomfort of things not always going the way we want them to, we make space for the bigger picture and might even begin to feel more part of it. Rather than complaining about something that we are unhappy about we may even be inspired to action! Even a tiny action is a step in the right direction. There are so many things outside of our control, but when we have done everything that we can do to attend to our own challenges, we might spend time focusing on what is already good in our lives and look to where we can make small changes. This can really swing the thought pendulum in our minds, to a place of balance and even abundance.

Is there an issue you find yourself complaining about or unhappy about? Is there something you love and wish to protect? This year can you choose a little action that would help? There are many ways we can get involved in

a worthy cause, for example, climate action and sustainability. I would encourage you to have a look at the wonderful community efforts being made at CECAS.ie. This is where I base a lot of my work. I see an incredibly strong link between compassion-based mindfulness, self-awareness, community and sustainable living. When we are well and happy ourselves, we have ample opportunity to reach out and connect with others but remember that sometimes it is enough to take a breath, in the words of poet, Danna Faulds, “It is enough right now to taste one moment of peace...Ease of being has to start somewhere. This breath is my first step”.

Based on my book/journal, ‘Mindhaven: A space to reflect’, I plan to run monthly workshops at CECAS, Myross Wood in Leap. I love to journal and write daily as another way of being present and a journey to knowing ourselves deeply and reflecting on what is meaningful in our lives. Each two-hour mindful journaling workshop

will combine mindfulness meditation practices, reflective questions, and embodied writing techniques. Join me on Saturday February 28, 4 – 6pm. €35 includes printable worksheets and audio recordings.

Do consider beginning to practice mindfulness meditation this year. These compassion-based practices help us to grow in compassion for ourselves and others. Weekly drop-in mindfulness sessions continue at CECAS, Myross Wood, Leap on Tuesday mornings through-out the year (February 6, 13, 20 and 27) from 10am – 11am. €10. All are welcome to join this wonderful community of practice.

*For more information, phone: 087 2700572 or email: susanoreganmindfulness@gmail.com
FB: [susanoreganmindfulness](https://www.facebook.com/susanoreganmindfulness)
www.mindhaven.ie*

FOOD, HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

Treating arthritis through herbal medicine and nutrition

Medical Herbalist Geri McGann and Nutritional Therapist Gwen Bastian-Enright share how nutritional therapy and herbal medicine, both individually and combined, provide the opportunity for individuals to not only address health problems holistically but support the systems in the body to function as effectively as possible daily, with conditions like osteoarthritis (OA) and rheumatoid arthritis (RA).

Arthritis, an inflammation of the joints, is not just a disease associated with 'ageing'. There are over 100 different types of arthritis with more than 50 million adults and 300,000 children with some type of the condition but it is most common among women and occurs more frequently as people get older.

Osteoarthritis (OA), which involves the wearing away of the cartilage that caps the bones in your joints and Rheumatoid arthritis (RA), where the immune system mistakenly attacks the joints, more specifically the Synovium, are two of the most common types of arthritis. This Inflammation can also damage internal organs, eyes and other parts of the body.

Signs and symptoms

While the onset of OA can be months or even years, with RA, onset can be acute, involving morning stiffness with the pain wearing off later in the day. OA can be variable or intermittent over time whereas with RA the frequency can be relapsing and remitting, with acute episodes. With OA, pain starts in a few joints but with RA there will be pain, swelling and stiffness in small joints of hands, feet and wrists. With OA there is swelling around joint margins and with RA the swelling is symmetrical. Pain is palpable, sometimes audible with OA and with RA there is tenderness on pressure, stress pain on passive movement and with heat.

Treatment

Herbal medicine and nutrition treats osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis through reducing inflammation; improving joint function; preventing further joint damage; relieving pain; supporting immunity; and improve digestion function (for proper nutrient absorption and metabolism and the removal of toxins). Additional/other different considerations will vary according to individual needs. Targeting treatment through herbs, diet and lifestyle:

Herbs: When looking to treat arthritis through herbs we are looking for herbs that work primarily on the musculoskeletal and immune systems (especially with RA), but also include the digestive and nervous systems (in some cases).

- Herbal actions include:
- Detoxify: to help clear the body of toxins that may be making the immune system react and to improve digestive and liver function.
 - Anti-inflammatory: to support inflammation reduction.
 - Antioxidant: help destroy free radicals, which protects the structural integrity of cells and tissues, helping to improve immune responses.
 - Analgesic: to relieve pain.
 - Immune modulators: to assist/modify immune function.

Diet:

- Eating a well-balanced and varied healthy diet, which includes oily fish and immune-supporting foods such



Gwen Bastian-Enright



Geri McGann

as, garlic, turmeric, cinnamon, coriander, clove and black pepper (these can also promote a good digestive system which in turn contributes to a healthy immune system).

- Avoid sugary foods and refined carbohydrates (white bread, cakes, biscuits, sweets, chocolate etc.)
- Avoid acidic fruits such as lemons
- Low salt
- Avoid/Limit alcohol intake
- In older people, two teaspoons of apple cider vinegar, taken before or during meals, can help replace declining hydrochloric acid in the stomach; essential for calcium metabolism. Small calcium crystals have been observed to form in cartilage and synovial fluids and so can help prevent this.
- Staying hydrated, which can be in the form of tea, for example Ginger tea daily will act as an anti-inflammatory and antioxidant to reduce pain and swelling.
- Supplements of omega-3 oils and Selenium protect and promote repair of cartilage, and vitamin D levels should be at an optimum level (between 100 and 150nmol)
- For rheumatoid arthritis a mainly plant based diet with some fasting has been shown to help some people with symptoms – reintroduction of some fermented dairy and eggs is possible afterwards. Eliminating gluten can also be

helpful with autoimmune conditions. The final supplement to consider are specific probiotics, which have been shown to work well in RA, as well as in conjunction with medication like methotrexate.

- The overarching dietary approach would be plant centred mediterranean diet with extra anti-inflammatory support

Lifestyle:

- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Staying active and healthy; regular moderate to low impact exercises e.g. walking, swimming and yoga place less repetitive stress on joints
- Weight bearing exercises particularly from 30 onwards as bone density starts to decrease (and accelerates in some after menopause)

Osteoarthritis case study: treating OA through herbal medicine and nutrition

Maebh*, age 57, has osteoarthritis in both hips. It started five years previously in the right hip initially. She couldn't put weight on it when she got out of bed in the mornings, and she noticed loud clicking when walking, especially on the right hip. She wanted to be able to manage it without having to take strong orthodox medication.

Treatment protocol: Maebh's prescription consisted of both a herbal tincture that specially focused on the OA and a herbal tea, to help support her nervous system, as she was feeling very anxious and stressed. Her prescription included herbs such as: Turmeric; a potent antioxidant which helps reduce pain and inflammation and has an affinity with muscles and bones; devil's claw an anti-inflammatory specially for osteoarthritis which also reduces pain and stiffness; nettle; relives the pain of arthritis and also has diuretic and cleansing properties to remove toxins

Other measures included supplements of omega 3 oils and the addition of cinnamon, which helps relieve arthritic pain and muscle stiffness.

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Within three weeks of starting her treatment, Maebh's symptoms improved considerably; inflammation and pain was considerably, and she felt less anxious. She continues to manage her condition with a herbal maintenance mix alongside diet and lifestyle changes.

**Not the patient's real name*

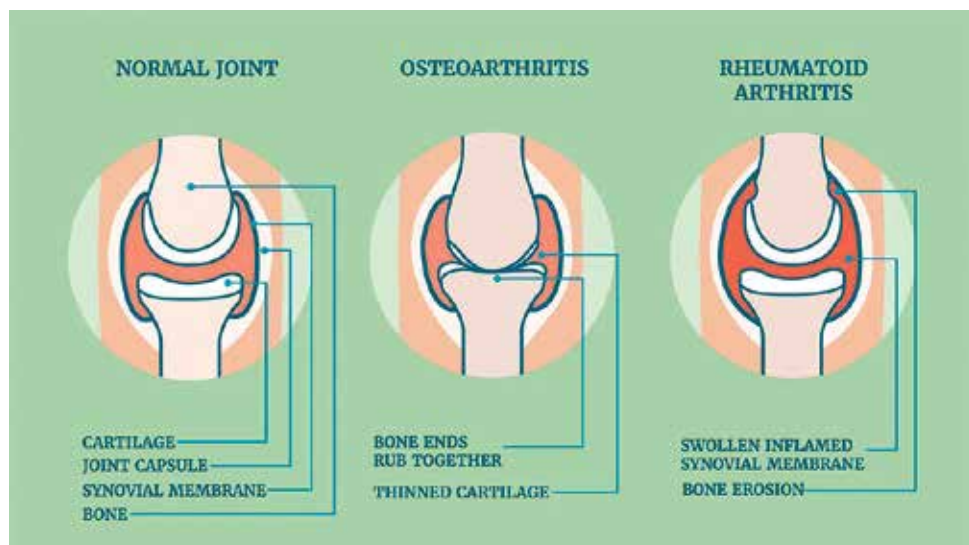
The Beara Holistic Clinic, located in the Bantry Bay area of West Cork, specialises in herbal medicine and nutritional therapy. The clinic provides the opportunity for individuals to address health problems holistically, in a safe, supportive, and professional environment. Both Geri and Gwen are professionally trained and fully qualified healthcare

practitioners. To find out more visit their website www.thebearaclinic.ie or their Instagram page [thebearaholisticclinic](https://www.instagram.com/thebearaholisticclinic).

Herbal medicine and nutritional therapy is a safe and highly effective form of treatment for many health problems, including circulatory, dermatological, digestive, neurological, urinary, hormonal, immunological and respiratory.

To arrange an herbal consultation call or WhatsApp Geri on 083 812 8308 or email: thebearacinicherbs@gmail.com

To arrange a free discovery call with Gwen contact her on 087 657 8307 or email: thebearaclinicnutrition@gmail.com.



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FOOD, HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

The Cycle to Work Scheme

If you are planning to embrace a fitter lifestyle in 2024, you may wish to consider parking the car and cycling to work instead. The Cycle to Work Scheme is a tax incentive scheme to encourage employees to cycle to work.

Under the scheme, an employer can pay for a new bicycle (including bicycle accessories) and the employee then repays the cost in regular instalments from their gross salary. You are not liable for tax, PRSI or the Universal Social Charge on your repayments.

Your employer does not have to take part in the scheme. However, if they do, they must offer it to all their employees. If you are self-employed, you are not entitled to avail of the Cycle to Work Scheme unless you pay PRSI as an employee in addition to your self-employed work.

How do I buy a bike under the Cycle to Work Scheme?

You should ask your employer if they run the scheme and check their requirements. They may allow you to select the bicycle and equipment from any shop or only certain bicycles from specific shops. You can choose your bike by visiting a bike shop and selecting the bike and equipment that you want to buy. Next, tell your employer of this choice. The employer will then pay the bike shop or supplier for the bike and equipment directly. It's important to note that your employer cannot reimburse you if you make the

payment. The tax exemption does not apply if you pay for the bicycle and your employer reimburses you.

You must sign a written agreement stating that the bike is for your own use, and you will use it for what the Revenue Commissioners consider qualifying journeys: getting to and from work.

Your employer then sets up salary deductions over an agreed time frame of up to 12 months to recoup the costs. These deductions can be made weekly, fortnightly or monthly depending on your salary arrangements.

How do I save money on the Cycle to Work Scheme?

As an employee you save on the costs of cycling to work because your repayments come out of your salary before tax, USC and PRSI are deducted. This means that someone on the highest rate of tax will save almost half of the cost of a new bike and equipment.

How much can I spend on the Cycle to Work Scheme, and how often can I use it?

Currently, there are 3 limits depending on the type of bike you bought. The limit (including related safety equipment) is:

- €3,000 for cargo and e-cargo bikes.
- €1,500 for pedelecs and e-bikes.
- €1,250 for other bicycles.

How frequently can I avail of the scheme?

As an employee, you can use the scheme once every 4 years. The four-year span between tax breaks is counted by tax year. If you bought a bike in 2020, regardless of the month, you could buy a new bike and avail of the next tax relief in January 2024.

What equipment does the Cycle to Work Scheme cover?

The scheme covers the following items, which must be bought as new (not second-hand):

- New bikes and pedelecs (electrically assisted bikes that require some effort to propel)
- Cycle helmets
- Bells and bulb horns
- Lights (including dynamo packs)
- Mirrors
- Mudguards and skirt guards
- Cycle clips
- Panniers, luggage carriers and straps
- Locks and chains
- Pumps
- Puncture repair kits, cycle tool

kits and tyre sealant

- Reflective clothing
- Bike reflectors

The scheme does not include motorbikes, mopeds, scooters or second-hand bicycles or equipment or bicycle parts or associated equipment.

What if my employer buys me a bike and doesn't charge me for it?

That is acceptable and under the scheme, you will not be taxed for benefit in kind if you receive a bike from your employer as long as the cost of the bike and equipment does not exceed a total of €1,250, or €1,500 for pedelecs or an e-bike or €3,000 for a cargo or e-cargo bike.

If you need further information about this topic or you have other questions, you can drop-in to your local Citizens Information Service in Bantry or telephone them on 0818 07 8390. They will be happy to assist you

WEST CORK HELPLINE
0818 07 8390

The offices are staffed from 10am -5pm from Monday to Thursday and on Friday from 10am -4pm. Alternatively you can email on bantry@citinfo.ie or log on to www.citizensinformation.ie



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Extended Young Adult Card fare

The Minister for Transport Eamon Ryan recently announced that extended fare discounts for young adults are now live so that 24 and 25 year olds can also avail of 50 per cent fares on public transport.

This latest expansion means that those aged between 18 and 25 years and full-time third levels students aged 16 and above, can travel half price on all PSO and participating commercial bus operator services.

These transport initiatives appear to be having a significant impact on increased passenger numbers. Bus passenger numbers overall are up approximately 15 per cent on 2022 with passenger numbers on Connecting Ireland rural services surging to about 106 per cent over 2022 figures.

Four free mental health services

Turn2Me, a national mental health charity, has listed the four free mental health services available to people living in Cork in 2024. These services include up to six free one-to-one counselling sessions; unlimited free support groups on anxiety, depression, relationship issues and grief; a free 'Thought Catcher' online mood diary; and free helpful articles on how to deal with issues ranging from exam stress to the menopause.

The charity stated that Cork has the second-highest sign-up rates for its services, after Dublin, and it expects this demand to grow in 2024. Turn2Me operates 365 days a year. The charity is funded by NOSP (the National Office for Suicide Prevention) and operates in the early intervention mental health sector.

Anxiety was the highest reported issue on the Turn2Me platform for people living in Cork in 2023 followed by depression and then relationship issues. The charity helps around 10,000 adults with their mental health every year.

To sign up for any of these mental health services, go to Turn2Me.ie

A celebration of women cyclists on St. Brigid's Day

The Clonakilty Bike Circus is delighted to announce an open house event celebrating the remarkable contribution of women cyclists to the cause of liberty. This special event is scheduled for Bank Holiday Monday, February 5, on St. Brigid's Day, a day of cultural and historical significance.

Bridget Hannan, the event coordinator, and all the 'Yard Dogs' extend a warm public invitation to join in the festivities, which will commence at 12 noon. The open house promises an enriching experience with an array of music, delightful food, and engaging conversations, all in the spirit of community and empowerment.

This year's celebration acknowledging the contribution of women to the Circus, also marks the birthday of the remarkable Irish cyclist, Countess Constance Markievicz. A freedom-fighter remembered for

her iron courage, Markievicz famously bicycled around downtown Dublin with a price on her head. Her legacy is an inspiration to all.

The Clonakilty Bike Circus, a community tool-share and bike repair school, prides itself on its non-profit and inclusive ethos. Located next door to Spiller's Lane in downtown Clonakilty, The Circus is a hub for cyclists and enthusiasts to learn, share, and connect.

"We are delighted to host this open house in honour of the legacy of women who have played a pivotal role in our history," says Bridget. "Our event is more than a celebration; it's a testament to the strength and spirit of Clonakilty's cycling community. We welcome everyone to join us in this unique adventure."

For more information, drop in at the Clonakilty Bike Circus next to Spiller's Lane or contact the Circus on Facebook.



FOOD, HEALTH & LIFESTYLE



Noreen Coomey of Transition Coaching and Psychotherapy looks at why we may resist change and how we can navigate this challenge.

According to Irish playwright, George Bernard Shaw “Progress is impossible without change; and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.”

Change is inevitable and a constant force in life. However, many of us find ourselves grappling with discomfort and

Changing your tune

reluctance when confronted with it.

Change makes us feel uncertain and anxious. We are creatures of habit, feeling safe and comfortable in familiar routines and surroundings. Change, especially in our work, relationship, or daily habits, brings a fear of the unknown and makes us worry about losing control and stability.

Change also requires more thinking and effort. Our brain likes things to be easy and automatic. We have to put in extra mental work to understand and adjust to a new situation. This extra effort can be tiring and another reason why we resist change.

Emotions also play a big role. We form strong emotional connections to people, places and routines, which create a sense of identity and stability. This makes it harder to let go. Changing our attachment to the way things are feels like losing something important. We may have strong feelings connected to our current situation even if it is not a good situation for us.

The people around us also influence how we feel about change. We care about what

people think of us – we fear criticism and judgment from others. We don't want to stand out or be seen as not fitting in. Social pressure can make us slow to embrace any change that might make us look different or go against the expectations of others.

Bad experiences with change in the past can also make us afraid of it. If we've been through something difficult before it could make us resistant to any new changes, even if they are positive.

So what can we do?

- Recognise, understand and explore the factors mentioned above as a first step towards becoming more open and adaptive to changes that happen
- See challenges and changes as opportunities for growth to help shift our perspective. Know that learning and development can come from new experiences
- Identify potential advantages, whether personal or professional, to create a more optimistic view of an upcoming change or transition
- Break down a large transition

into manageable steps. Gradual, small-scale changes are less overwhelming and more acceptable

- Identify what degree of control we have over aspects of the change to help counteract our feeling of helplessness
- Acknowledge progress and celebrate milestones achieved during the transition to reinforce the positive aspects of change and encourage continued adaptation
- Training, mentorship and coaching resources can empower individuals to navigate the challenges associated with change and help reduce anxiety and resistance.

Reluctance to change should not be a barrier to personal or professional development. By understanding the psychological factors behind the resistance and implementing strategies to overcome it, we can all navigate changed successfully. Embracing change not only facilitates growth but also boosts resilience in the face of an ever-changing world. noreencoomey.com

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Leaping into February



A
WEST CORK
LIFE

Tina Pisco

Welcome February! It feels good to be finally rid of January, and to get the extra daylight after the months of darkness. True to form January 2024 dragged along, slow as treacle, as if it were two months instead of just the one. Somehow two days in January are longer than two weeks in July. In the summer the weekends roll into each other. June weekdays rush past in the blink of an eye and we're back at the weekend again. In January you wake up on a Friday and realise that

it's only Tuesday. A Sunday in January can last a week, while the same day in July whizzes by. Surely it should be the other way around as the average day in January (eight hours) is less than half as long as in July (16hours-plus). Go figure.

January can also be a weird month for weather. This year we got the full range of wind, rain, sunshine, and snow. Temperatures went from minus four degrees Celsius to 12 degrees Celsius, and we had three major storms. Henk hit on the first week of the New Year, thrashing the trees and throwing broken branches around. I had hoped that it might bring down two trees that had snapped during storms last year and are precariously resting against other trees. Gusty as Henk was, it did nothing for the leaning trunks. Henk was followed at the end of the month by Isha, with Joceyln crashing in a few days later. Though they both threw even more branches and debris around, neither managed to bring down the trunks.

In between the storms we got a taste of winter wonderland, with freezing cold, frosty fields, icy roads, and bright sunny

days. The house went into cold storage, and we burrowed into hibernation mode. I saw a photograph of an alligator frozen in a pond and felt a real sense of kinship. Thankfully the cold spell did not last long and vanished overnight, bringing us back to double digits. Many people missed the cold weather, expressing a dislike for the wet, grey weather that followed. It's true that lashing rain and gale force winds can be challenging, but I'd rather get slapped with a cold wet fish, than a frozen one. When the temperature drops below zero my house is Baltic. A trip to the pantry (in the north-facing back of the house with no heating) is not just cold – it's painful. We can keep the kitchen warm and our bedroom cosy, but everywhere else in the house is Alaska.

So, bring on February – the month of St Bridgid, Imbolc, and Valentine's Day. February means that Spring is on the way. The first daff has already bloomed in the garden and clues to the lush growth to come are popping up all over. The three-cornered leek and wild garlic are starting to carpet the woods with their lovely pale

green, while the darker stalks of daffs and snowdrops are bravely pushing up through the storm debris. This is the time to get ready. To check out my boxes of seeds, order more seeds, and buy some seed potatoes to chit. After lounging around in the dark trying to keep warm for the last few months, it feels pretty good to get a move on again. The next two months are a window of opportunity to get it right for the summer.

There's lots to do in February. Thankfully we get an extra day this month on February 29, as 2024 is a leap year. Fun fact: It's called a leap year because in normal years the calendar advances one day of the week from one year to another. For example, if Christmas is on a Monday, it will be on a Tuesday the next year. But on a leap year the calendar will 'leap' over Tuesday and Christmas will be on a Wednesday the following year. So, bring on February 2024. By the end of the month, we should be ready to leap into Spring.

Scoil na mBuachaillí
Clonakilty
is now enrolling for 2024/2025

There will be an **OPEN DAY** on
Wednesday 7th of February 2024 @ 1pm sharp,
where parents and children get a tour of the school.

In the meantime, if you wish to enrol:

- Please log on to www.snbclonakilty.com
- On the homepage you will see a link to a page where you can request an **Admission Form**.
- Just complete the short form and click **submit**.
- An Admission Form will be posted to you, which you then complete and return to the school.
- With the form you will be asked to enclose a copy of your child's Birth Certificate and Baptismal Certificate (if applicable).
- Then on the 21st of February, 2024, places will be offered to parents who have applied.



If you need to contact the school you can do so
by ringing 023 8834487
or email info@snbclonakilty.com

FOOD, HEALTH & LIFESTYLE



MOVEMENT MATTERS

Lorraine Dufficey

With 20 years of experience in the fitness industry, Lorraine Dufficey is trained in the classical True Pilates method, is a qualified Neuromuscular therapist and a Fascial trainer, and has a lifelong interest in health and wellbeing. As 'West Cork Pilates', she has been teaching mat classes in Clonakilty since 2005 and has a private studio in Rossmore where she teaches Reformer, Cadillac and Wunda chair for both fitness and for rehabilitation.

We all know we should exercise and eat well to ensure our health. It is as unquestioned in our minds as brushing our teeth daily. However, while we may be down with brushing our teeth, we can often put exercise and good nutrition on the back burner when life becomes too demanding. In an effort to

Why movement matters

remind us of the necessity of movement to ensure health; Lorraine Dufficey looks at some of the most recent research, regarding exercise, in the field of longevity and immunity.

I have been involved in the field of fitness and wellbeing for over 20 years now and have been interested in health and wellness from a very young age, largely due to the influence of my inspiring mother, who has always been ahead of the curve on nutrition and exercise. At a time when information was not at the tip of our fingers as it is today, she sourced recipes and healthy options to feed our family, even supporting me through my early vegetarian phase, which was no easy task in 1980s rural Ireland. Her daily walks for health were regularly interrupted by kind neighbours offering her a lift, only to be told she was out for a walk. She would chuckle at their consternation but she kept walking. It was at least another decade before we regularly began to see walkers up and down our road.

She will be 80 this year and she still walks our road daily; she is fit and well and free of all age-related disease and she remains curious about and interested in diet, nutrition and wellness. She is constantly active and engaged with her health and fitness. Is she just blessed with good genes? Lucky? Well may be to some extent, but it seems

that this 'ordinary' woman has been doing something very right all these years that science is now beginning to elucidate.

Current research into cell biology is shedding some very interesting light on our human design and why exercise and movement is not just good for us, but an essential component in the functioning of our design; and it turns out that it is all to do with how our body deals with inflammation.

This is how it works... we have small proteins in our cells which, as a group, are called cytokines – these are chemical messengers that inform our immune cells on how to fight threats and injuries. This is called the pro-inflammatory response which, in the short term, is a positive and necessary defence to an acute threat. However, when these messengers remain switched on continuously, we end up with chronic inflammation, which can lead to life-threatening conditions as we age. We are very familiar with these conditions: heart disease, stroke, diabetes, arthritis and dementia, to name but a few. Recently though, cell biologists have discovered a particular protein called a myokine, which is found in certain cells; it is responsible for switching off this pro-inflammatory response and guess where these myokines are located?...in the muscle cells. These myokine proteins are secreted through muscle contraction, which means that when we move our muscles, the effect is of a dampening down of the production of the inflammatory cytokines. They are essentially our 'off-switch' for inflammation. Movement therefore has a positive effect on our metabolism, our heart, our immune system and our mental health.



According to this research, the single most important factor in reducing chronic inflammation is exercise. But what exactly do we need to do in order to produce enough of these proteins to dampen down our inflammation? Well let's start simply.

And while we may have genetic tendencies towards some of these diseases, the outcome is only 20 per cent gene determined, so that gives us 80 per cent opportunity to make a change in our potential health outcome through our lifestyle choices. According to this research, the single most important factor in reducing chronic inflammation is exercise. But what exactly do we need to do in order to produce enough of these proteins to dampen down our inflammation? Well let's start simply.

Firstly, don't sit for too long. Ideally we should only sit for an hour at a time, though it does seem that so many of our time-consuming activities involve prolonged sitting, as we sit at desks, in our cars and in front of our TVs. If you have joint pain or any chronic pain, ask yourself how many hours a day you spend in prolonged sitting? A recent UK study carried out on adults in the 55-79 age range showed that those who maintained a minimum daily step total of 10,000 showed no age-related inflammation, whereas those participants who only reached a total of 3,000 steps per day had heightened age-related inflammation. And while this study was carried out on older adults it's worth considering how many hours our children spend sitting. There are strong links being seen between chronic inflammation and childhood obesity. So get up out of your chair at least every hour and move for five minutes, whether it's making a cup of tea or better yet getting outside into the fresh air and having a brief walk or taking some light exercise.

Next, pick an exercise activity you enjoy, whether you like to walk, cycle, dance, garden, swim or run, it doesn't matter, but do it daily. We're talking 10,000 steps daily though, and while for some of us that may be a goal to work towards, remember that by making this commitment to yourself to reach those 10,000 steps, you are dampening down the inflammatory response in the body to help prevent age-related disease.

Join a class, whether it's Pilates, yoga or any group fitness class, it will help your motivation to commit to movement and you will always feel better having done it. It really helps with forming good fitness habits and it provides a social outlet which is particularly important when we start out, as discipline takes time to cultivate.

And remember, the more we move, the better we will feel, as we bring our bodies into regulation by moving our muscles. It matters all the way down to your cells because they are designed to keep you in balance; and all they care about is you!



Mat class timetable

Spillers Lane Studio, Clonakilty

TUESDAYS

- 9:45am Strengthen & stretch
- 11:00am Pilates for seniors, mobility and strength
- 6:00pm Beginners Pilates

THURSDAYS

- 6:15pm Core deepen, intermediate
- 7:15pm Core, strengthen and stretch

FRIDAYS 9:45am Strengthen & stretch

Rossmore Hall

MONDAYS 7:30pm Deep Core, strengthen and stretch

Course
6 weeks
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Individual Pilates for rehabilitation and strengthening at The Pilates Room, Rossmore. 1hr session €65. Tailored individual programmes.

Booking essential, contact Lorraine Dufficey
086 3670478 or lorrainedufficey@gmail.com

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FOOD, HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

Treating viral infections with herbs



HEALTH

Hannah Dare
Organico Bantry

We've been seeing a lot of viral infections circulate in the community since Christmas. Some of them seem to be lingering and causing a lot of really miserable symptoms. Antibiotics won't help with these conditions, as they are only effective against bacterial infections, so we have to think differently about treating these viral infections. One of the most effective supports for treating viral conditions and generally supporting your immune system are herbal remedies. Sometimes we can forget that some of the most powerful drugs and medicines are derived from plants. For example – Aspirin was originally discovered in the bark of the willow tree, Codeine and Morphine were isolated from the poppy, Atropine was found in the deadly nightshade. Penicillin comes from medicinal mushrooms. Remember, herbal remedies are potent and can provide powerful support to your health.

I'm very excited about having Dr Clare Apothecary herbal remedy range in Organico, because they have been



formulated specifically for Irish conditions and climate, and the feedback from people who take them really is excellent.

Dr Clare is a leading authority in herbal medicines in Europe. She has been a GP for over 25 years and she is a practising Medical Herbalist with a BSc in Herbal Medicine. She is also an Honorary Clinical Fellow of the National University of Ireland Galway Medical School.

Her range of herbal products is very comprehensive – she has formulated products suitable from childhood right up to old age. We have 25 different products in – creams, tinctures, herbal infusions and oils, for coughs and colds, as well as

stress and anxiety, digestion and women's health.

Dr Clare has some helpful tips on staying well during the winter, which may help you avoid or combat some of the nasty infections that are going around:

Hydration

Ensuring you drink plenty of fluids to keep you hydrated can help soothe your throat and prevent excessive coughing. Water is best and will help reduce the build up of mucus, reduce dryness and can help keep you cool if you have a fever.

Clearing mucus

Mucotone is a Dr Clare Apothecary tincture blended

from ingredients that contribute to the health of the respiratory tract and can help alleviate the mucus build up caused by colds and coughs. Mucotone contains: Thyme Leaf, Echinacea Root, Chinese Ginseng, Mallow Root (syrup), Iceland Moss (syrup), Cat's Claw, Liquorice (syrup), Garlic, Ginger. So it is a really powerful mix! Take this at the first hint that you are feeling unwell with a possible virus, and carry on till you are confidently well again.

Relieving tickles in the throat

Kinderkind is a Dr Clare Apothecary antibacterial blend designed to help reduce inflammation, relieve tickle in the throat and pharynx and support the immune system. It is suitable for very young babies and children right up to adults and is ideal for soothing the symptoms of colds and coughs.

Kinderkind contains so many ingredients – here's the full list and what each one is for:

- Mallow Leaf: Known for its antibacterial properties, it can help relieve tickle in the throat and pharynx, providing soothing comfort.

- Elderberries: A powerful immune booster, elderberries help strengthen your body's natural defence mechanisms.

- Limeflower: Known for its calming properties, limeflower aids in relaxation and promotes a sense of well-being.

- Elderflowers: Along with elderberries, elderflowers contribute to immune system support, helping you stay strong.

- Rosehips: Packed with vitamin C and antioxidants, rosehips help maintain a healthy immune system and overall vitality.

- Chamomile: With its soothing and calming effects, chamomile promotes relaxation and supports overall well-being.

- Icelandic Moss: Known for its anti-inflammatory properties, Icelandic moss helps soothe respiratory discomfort.

- Hyssop Herb: Traditionally used for respiratory health, hyssop herb can provide relief for respiratory congestion.

Sometimes a herbal tea can hit the spot

Dr Clare also makes a really powerful Herbal Infusion called Congestion Tea, which contains Thyme, Elderflower, Peppermint, Plantain Leaves, Yarrow, Rosehips, and Cayenne Seeds. It's called a tea, but really this is a medicine in a sachet - each bag makes enough for a whole day. Thyme is antiseptic, Elderflowers are anti-viral and relaxing, Peppermint promotes

sweating, and Yarrow promotes toxin elimination through the skin and is anti-inflammatory. The advice is to make a flask or large teapot of this tea and drink throughout the day, every day for two weeks to clear congestion.

I hope you and your family are managing to stay well this winter.

Remember herbal remedies are powerful and may interact with other medications you

have been prescribed so always check with us and we can refer your query to Dr Clare and her team to ensure there are no interactions.

Organico Shop Deli & Bakery is open from 9 - 6.30 Monday - Saturday, on Glengarriff Road in Bantry. Call us on 027 51391; email us on info@organico.ie and buy online from us on www.organico.ie.

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SCAN ME

OUT & ABOUT IN WEST CORK



Darrara Community Centre Events Committee organised a gala fundraising concert before Christmas at their vibrant centre near Ring, Clonakilty, and decided to donate €1,000 to the Clonakilty Youth Centre from the proceeds. From left, members Aisling Riordan, Mary Wycherley and Mary Anglin presented the cheque to Youth Centre committee members Aga Zbik, (Treasurer), Anne Marie McSweeney, Ann O' Donovan, (Secretary) and Maureen Griffin.



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FOOD, HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

Combating dry skin through body care

INSIDE OUT
BEAUTY

Sherna Malone

Skincare and beauty expert Sherna Malone shares her knowledge and expertise of all things beauty – from skin care do's and don'ts to the latest products out there.

For some, it's genetic, but low moisture in the air and central heating are two of the biggest culprits for causing skin to become dehydrated and feel dry. The use of

harsh soaps and indulging in excessively hot showers or baths also plays a significant role in robbing the skin of its natural moisture, leaving it feeling dehydrated and tight. When it comes to the skin on our bodies, there are a number of things you can do to help with those dry skin days.

Dial down the temperature: Indulging in hot baths and showers might seem relaxing, but it can stress your skin. Opt for warmth over scalding heat and consider a nourishing oil body wash to pamper your skin. Remember to moisturise while your skin is still damp for optimal absorption.

Seek hydrating ingredients: Revamp your body care routine with products featuring hydrating ingredients. Sodium hyaluronate, a hyaluronic acid derivative, penetrates deeply into the skin, attracting water for thorough hydration.

When selecting body care products, look for formulations that combine a variety of these hydrating ingredients to provide

comprehensive moisture and nourishment for your skin.

Nourish from within: Incorporate good fats, like those found in oily fish, into your diet. For vegetarians or vegans, high-quality olive oil and nuts can be excellent choices. Counter inflammation with anti-inflammatory foods such as tomatoes, olive oil, and a rainbow of fruits and vegetables.

Keep hand and lip products handy:

Our hands, constantly exposed to the elements, are prone to dryness. Regular hand washing and antibacterial gel can exacerbate dehydration. Ensure you moisturise hands throughout the day with a replenishing hand cream and keep lips smooth, moisturised and protected with a lip balm, preferably one with an SPF to guard against the harmful effects of ultraviolet rays.

Embrace a humidifier: Combat the drying effects of central heating by introducing a humidifier into your living space. This simple addition pumps much-needed moisture back into the air, benefiting both houseplants and your skin.

Gently exfoliate: While exfoliation may seem counter-intuitive for dry skin, it can facilitate better absorption of moisturising products. Opt for a gentle exfoliator for softer and smoother skin.

Bánór The Skin's Shepherd Bánór's new body collection unlocks the benefits that sheep milk and wool have the skin. Made using Tipperary sheep milk, the collection includes a butter scrub, milk wash, wool



oil, and milk lotion, leaving your skin feeling hydrated and nourished. The mná behind Bánór are Nicola Lyons and Elaine Crosse, who have blended years of friendship, pharmacy, farming, and food to bring Banor to life. For those who might know, sheep milk has a naturally high fat content, so great for skin nourishment and it is also a readymade source of vitamins, minerals, proteins, and amino acids, that all work together to preserve and improve the skin's appearance. Check out their New Eve Full Body Collection or Hand & Body Milk Collection online at www.banor.ie prices from €30.

Aveeno Wash-Off Skin Renewal Gentle Body Scrub Touchably soft, smooth skin in just one week, say hello to Aveeno Skin Renewal Body Scrub. Part of the new Skin Renewal Body collection (there is also a Skin Renewal Soothing Cream), this transformative addition to your body care regime is for those with dry, rough, and bumpy sensitive skin or for those seeking exceptionally smooth skin. Harnessing the power of prebiotic oat, which helps to maintain the skin's healthy natural microbiome balance, moisturises the skin, as

well as helping prevent water loss from the skin. Naturally derived PHA gently resurfaces and renews skin to reveal improved skin tone and texture while niacinamide brightens dull-looking skin and reduces discoloration. A gentle wash off body scrub, suitable for sensitive skin that exfoliates and deeply hydrates for smoother, softer skin, €12.99 available online from www.boots.ie and from Aveeno stockists nationwide.

Uriage Xémose Cleansing Soothing Oil

The perfect solution for those who suffer from dry skin and itching sensations. This amazing product is designed to provide instant and long-lasting comfort to dry to very dry skin. With its extra-gentle lather, the formula works to melt away impurities while intensely soothing the look and feel of dry skin. Enriched with shea butter and glycerin, skin is left feeling nourished, hydrated, and comfortable. It also protects your skin from external aggressions leaving a non-greasy protective film that shields your skin from harmful environmental factors. Suitable for all skin types, including sensitive skin, €15.50 available online and from Uriage stockists nationwide.

Sculpted By Aimee HydraBody

An ultra-hydrating body moisturiser, designed to instantly hydrate and nourish the skin. HydraBody works to alleviate dryness, leaving skin feeling nourished, and super-soft. The non-greasy formula absorbs instantly and is infused with a divine sweet orchid scent. Formulated with nourishing Shea Butter to soften and smoothen skin, Niacinamide to help restore skin barrier function and Sodium Hyaluronate to deeply hydrate. Expect gorgeously scented moisturised skin from top-to-toe, €26 available online from www.sculptedbyaimee.com

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Holly Cairns calls for free HRT to help women manage the menopause

Holly Cairns TD has warned that the cost of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) is preventing many women from seeking treatment for debilitating menopause symptoms.

At present, women who require HRT face prescription charges of between €30 and €70 a month.

The Social Democrats leader is now calling for free HRT to help women manage the "major [menopausal] shifts that impact their daily lives".

Ms Cairns made the call at the launch of the Menopause Hub in Ballincollig in January.

The new clinic is the third Menopause Hub to open in the country, with the others located in Santry, north Dublin, and Mount Merrion, South Co Dublin.

"Free HRT is an essential part of removing those barriers of cost for women taking up treatment during menopause," Ms Cairns said at the official opening. "And so many women stop their treatment, or never access

it in the first place, because they cannot afford it.

"The symptoms of menopause are not minor inconveniences, and it is essential that the reality of menopause and perimenopause are communicated and taught to women so we can be aware of what is happening to our mind and to our body.

"Medical care is a right and healthcare should be available to every single person in this State, free of charge, 24/7, from the point of need.

"Too often, it is quite literally a post-code lottery.

"But centres like this (the Menopause Hub) are making a difference.

"They provide equal and affordable access to high-quality medical care and treatment, in our own communities, breaking down those barriers which have kept so many people, and women in Cork, from accessing the care they need."

Ms Cairns also called for greater awareness of menopause issues among general practitioners (GPs).

"We have a long, long way to go and we have to continuously push for supports and information," she added.

"Clinics like The Menopause Hub help to smash the taboo surrounding menopause and help support women during a really challenging period in their life."

Menopause Hub CEO Loretta Dignam said she was delighted to open her third clinic in Cork.

"Lots of women from Cork got in touch after we opened our second clinic in Santry, and we're looking forward to meeting more women from the county to help the through their menopause journey," she said.

"They can contact us directly, and do not need a referral from a GP.

"It doesn't seem that long ago

when the subject of the menopause was only talked about in hushed tones, if at all.

"Thankfully, the situation is changing, and a long overdue national conversation is taking place.

"The roll-out of a menopause guide to GPs, for example, was welcome but more needs done.

"Free HRT to all women going through menopause would be a great place to start, especially during the cost of living crisis."

For more information about the Menopause Hub, visit themenopausehub.ie.

FOOD, HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

Clonakilty clinic is restoring lost hair and confidence

Hair can fall out for a variety of reasons – from a genetic predisposition to hormonal imbalance – and lead to mild or drastic hair loss. This loss can also lead to acute embarrassment, lack of confidence, anxiety and depression. There is hope however for those affected by hair loss, with a clinic in Clonakilty now offering a solution in a treatment called Platelet Rich Plasma (PRP) or scalp injectable therapy.

Registered nurse Olive O’Sullivan at the Aesthetic Clinic in Clonakilty says that “this is a fantastic treatment modality showing excellent results”.

The revolutionary science uses the patient’s own platelet-rich plasma, which is injected into areas of the scalp. This stimulates growth in the hair follicles. “After the treatment, you can grow new baby hairs in 16 weeks,” shares Olive. Well-known TV presenter Dáithí Ó Sé recently underwent a course of Platelet Rich Plasma treatments to enhance his hair transplant and was delighted with the results.

“It’s an ideal treatment post hair transplant or as a primer prior to hair transplant to give the hair follicles the best boost to encourage them to strengthen or encourage new hairs to

grow,” says Olive.

While the procedure works well for different types of alopecia and male and female pattern baldness, it is not suitable for anyone who has been bald for years or if the bald area on the head has become shiny. “It will only work if the hair follicles are still alive,” says Olive, “which is why we encourage clients to attend their doctor to have bloods done prior to treatment to confirm the reason for hair loss and rectify any issues beforehand to support the regrowth of hair.”

A series of monthly treatments over three to six months, with ongoing maintenance of one treatment every six months, is recommended.

Recovery time is minimal with the majority of patients who use PRP able to wash their hair after two days and resume



exercise after three days.

Does it hurt? “The clients I have treated to rate pain as two out of ten, a mere pick,” shares Olive, who is currently treating her own husband’s scalp, with approximately 50-70 injection points.

PRP is also used as a full face and neck rejuvenation treatment, plumping crepey skin and fine lines and wrinkles and restoring radiance by boosting collagen growth and elastin in the skin, giving a more youthful appearance. Again, recovery time is minimal for this treatment.

Olive O’Sullivan is well-known for being Ireland’s first eyebrow tattoo nurse, using a natural looking hairstroke technique called microblading, a Browtique treatment that is covered by Laya Healthcare for cancer and alopecia patients. She has a gold standard training in PRP, as well as serving clients who want/need hyaluronic acid skin boosters. She trained with MERZ, using the best hyaluronic acid out there – Belotero Revive, endorsed by Harley Street’s Dr Sara Tonks (who treats Vogue William’s skin) and Alice Hart Davis, a beauty journalist and author of The Tweakments Guide. Added to her arsenal and to suit every budget, Olive also trained with Profillio, Galderma and Restylane.

Fees for PRP are €550 per treatment and €1250 for three. To book in for a consultation with Nurse Olive at the Aesthetic Clinic in Clonakilty email theaestheticclinicclonakilty@gmail.com or call 021 4193011. For online bookings go to www.browtique.ie. Appointments only. No walk-ins.



Community and women’s groups invited to apply for Local Enhancement Programme 2024

Cork County Council is inviting applications from community and voluntary groups for funding under the new Local Enhancement Programme (LEP) and Women’s Groups Fund 2024.

Funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development, the €254,559 LEP capital only fund will help groups, particularly in disadvantaged areas, with funding for small scale capital projects such as improvements to their facilities and purchase of equipment.

Within the LEP, €40,926 will be available for the Women’s Groups Fund to assist groups and clubs with small capital projects and equipment purchases, as well as the continued support of Women’s Sheds Groups.

Welcoming the fund, Mayor of the County of Cork, Clr. Frank O’Flynn said, “Community and voluntary groups have

an incredibly positive impact in every corner of our county. Funding such as this will help to bolster these efforts, shaping the future of our towns and villages with impactful projects. I encourage groups to consider making an application, to avail of this opportunity to turn those long-awaited plans into a reality.”

Chief Executive of Cork County Council, Valerie O’Sullivan, added, “Cork County Council’s Local Enhancement Programme is targeted towards enhancing facilities for communities impacted by disadvantage, as identified in the Local Economic and Community Plan. The new scheme follows on from the very successful Community Support Fund in 2023 which supported over 180 groups in Cork County. Funds such as these help communities turn their aspirations into reality, in turn building stronger, more

vibrant communities for residents and visitors alike.”

The Local Enhancement Programme (LEP) Fund can be used to develop and improve facilities, for once-off maintenance, upgrade to amenities or equipment as well as for energy efficiency type projects. Grants will be available for projects of €1,000 or less and over €1000. The LEP is supported by Cork County Council’s three Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs).

The closing date for applications is Monday February 26 at 3pm. Applications can be made online via Cork County Council’s website at www.corkcoco.ie

For further information, contact the Council’s Local Community Development Unit on 021- 4285561 or 021-4285828 or email communitydevelopmentunit@corkcoco.ie

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ASTROLOGY

Kate Arbon

Kate Arbon is an astrologer, writer and spiritual teacher. Living in West Cork for over 20 years she gives personal consultations locally and internationally using traditional natal and Horary astrology.
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February Sun Signs

February is a month with strong signs of new growth and new hope. The next few weeks are filled with intense planet energy with a clear indication of what is just around the corner. Imbolg is the ancient fire festival of spring that marks the cross-quarter day in the Sun's cycle (halfway between Solstice and Equinox). It is a recognition of the longer days and eventual passing of winter darkness. The day when this event occurs is on February 4 this year but in recent years it has always been celebrated on St Brigid's Day instead.

Astrology really kicks off the month on February 5, when Mercury, the planet of connection, communication and curiosity, meets with Pluto. Pluto plays a major role this month. In the highly charged first degree of Aquarius, it represents a new cycle or era beginning and it connects with several of the personal planets in the first weeks of February. When this planet of power struggles,

secrets and shadows join with Mercury, information about hidden agendas comes to light. This is a great time to do some research or investigation as new revelations are easier to obtain.

The New Moon phase is always a good time to consider what happens next and how to proceed with plans and intentions. On February 9, we have the New Moon in Aquarius. The Sun and the Moon are both in a stimulating aspect with Uranus the planet of change. Look to see where Aquarius falls in your birth chart to know what area of life will be activated. Use this energy to break out of a rut or create new projects. It can be a tense volatile energy if there is no positive outlet or pathway for expression. If restricted, this energy can break out in a chaotic way causing havoc for a while. If you feel wired or hyped up, find some physical activity to help ground your energy. It's a great time for sudden insights and moments of creative innovation.

Fiery planet Mars moves into Aquarius and joins with Pluto on February 13 and 14. This is a very potent combination that puts two dynamic forces together. It is not the most romantic energy for a St Valentine's celebration but it can certainly give intensity and passion to personal encounters. If you want a gentle and sweet shared experience it may be easier to wait several days for things to settle. The Mars-Pluto dynamic represents a power play or desire to gain dominance. We are likely to see some powerful and assertive moves. This cycle is a follow-on from the conflict that escalated at that time is still playing out. This energy prompts action to annihilate whatever stands in the way of a desired outcome. Use this powerful time to focus your personal intention in alignment with something higher and ultimately beneficial for all – a higher will (Pluto) is the greater force here.

On February 17, Venus is the next planet to join with Pluto. This combination amplifies the potential for purification of the Pluto theme. Venus represents what we like and want to have more of. She is also about harmony and cooperation. With Pluto, she shows us where we harbour habits or patterns that prevent the positive expression of love and care for each other. Pluto reveals the 'shadow' side of love and how it becomes overbearing or obsessive when it is too focused on one person, idea or thing. This is a good time to set aside any resistance to abundance or connection and use the Pluto energy to clear and release the past.

Venus moves on to join with Mars on February 22 and this pairing brings a positive few days when we can share, connect and enjoy a balance between the male and female energy. In Aquarius, this combination brings idealism for the future to the forefront. It may not be a touchy-feely love

style but it is perfect for setting out what you truly want, and definitely do not want, in your romantic relationships.

As we approach the month's end on February 28, Mercury and the Sun combine and then join with Saturn in Pisces. Saturn is a stabilising or restrictive energy and Sun Mercury represents information and enlightenment or insight. There could be a hold or bar on communication or travel or some kind of censorship issue. Whatever occurs now will reveal the negative effects of imposing limitations and constraints on this activity. We may have some serious pushback around the end of the month. Any urge to limit self-expression is contrary to our natural creativity and spiritual connection.

February has a New Moon in 21 degrees Aquarius on February 9 at 10.59pm and a Full Moon in six degrees Virgo on February 24 at 12.30pm



Aries: Get involved in charity events or social action groups that interest you and you will make headway in many different areas of your life through the people you meet and the information you discover. You may be asked to take responsibility or even a leadership role or to contribute and participate more fully than you have in the past. You will enjoy being part of a team or group effort this month. Being involved in a community or circle of friends and building your social network is important to you at this time.



Taurus: Over the New Moon don't mix business with pleasure if you want to avoid trouble. Not everyone will be on your side over the next few weeks so you may want to choose your friends carefully and keep your personal thoughts and opinions to yourself. With your career and reputation very important to you at this time, you can make significant gains regarding your ambitions. Recognition for your efforts and receiving credit for your accomplishments are likely now, but only if you've 'done your homework'. This is an excellent time to ask for a promotion or to engage the support of those in positions of higher authority.



Gemini: This is a time to lift yourself out of your usual everyday concerns. You'll benefit from getting a larger perspective on your life. Although it may all seem overwhelming for a while remember that as long as you keep plugging away you will make gains. You really can get things up and running if you try. A chance to do things a little differently will make all the difference in the world. Don't slow down because someone can't keep up with you. You have to maintain the momentum. A teacher or mentor who appears on this New Moon may be particularly important to you later.



Cancer: Don't push your luck now. Joint financial affairs and investments could become an issue. It's a good time to clarify each person's expectations and to take care of any legal business, insurance, contracts and so on. On a personal level, there is a desire to intensify the level of intimacy and honesty in your closest relationships and to clear away anything in yourself which is impeding that deeper union you seek. Any temptation to make abrupt decisions and changes could lead to additional problems that you can do without. Stick to what's clear and avoid taking on other people's responsibilities.



Leo: Partnerships, marriage, and one-to-one relationships demand your attention now. You are called upon to cooperate and perhaps to relinquish some of your own personal interests for the sake of harmony and mutual benefit. You may end up questioning yourself as well as the motives of the people around you. Get to the bottom of things before it's too late. Once you have all the facts you will be in a much better position to make a decision. Don't let anyone pull you in a direction you don't want to go. Do what's best for you but put the emphasis on 'we' rather than 'me'.



Virgo: Doing your best work and taking pride in it are a focus for you now. You should be able to make some worthwhile career moves or at least secure your current position so that you don't have to worry about your financial future. This is a good time to examine how you use your time and energy, to improve your efficiency and productivity. Watch out for health matters as you are concerned with your body now, and you may be inspired to begin a self-improvement program, create better habits, or begin a new diet or fitness plan.



Libra: You are energised and inspired creatively and emotionally coming up to this New Moon time, and you want to bring forth all that's deep within you. You express yourself more freely, playfully, and spontaneously and are more willing to take chances. You will have Lady Luck in your corner so be sure to look for good deals. Social activities, travel and attending different cultural events will all lead to meeting people who can help further your goals. The dramatic and performing arts, sports and games, or other forms of self-expression and entertainment appeal strongly to you now. You can accomplish much if you set your mind to it.



Scorpio: From the beginning of this month, you will have been enjoying the success that you worked hard to achieve. Don't be too quick to put your energy into new projects as you approach the New Moon, wait until the end of the month. All kinds of creative work are favoured and you might find yourself more closely involved with children at this time. Don't be surprised if there is some conflict between your personal enjoyment and what others think you should be doing for kicks. Those things that need to be discussed and settled with the family can be dealt with in the next few weeks.



Sagittarius: Take a trip back into your past and you will find the answers you are looking for. Now it's time to make changes instead of doing a repeat performance. Take time to talk with neighbours and those you cross paths with daily. It may result in more positive and smoother-running relationships generally. You'll want to fritter away your time on fun and social events over the New Moon, but this may not be at all bad, things have been serious enough for you to want to take a break now. This is a good time to participate in or contribute to any community events in your area



Capricorn: Money, possessions, financial security, and practical matters are a focus for you now. You can make some very interesting professional or financial moves this month. Be ready to put your money on the table to get ahead. If you have been overly extravagant with your resources, you may begin to see how you can get back on track. It should become clear to you what your next steps are regarding your resources. Your astute vision will enable you to correctly assess the right investment, job, or any other money matter that arises after the New Moon phase.



Aquarius: During this time you can make an impression on others by making a strong statement to the world about who you are. People acknowledge you and are likely to follow your lead, or at the least, they stay out of your way. You are likely to feel more confident and vital now. However, you may be so preoccupied with yourself and your own desires that you unintentionally ignore other people and their needs. Include the ones you love in your plans and things will get progressively better. You should be able to strengthen the bond with someone who has been an influence in your life.



Pisces: You'll be torn between what you want to do and what you have to do. Retreating from the world for a while and spending some quiet time alone to relax and rejuvenate appeals strongly to you over the New Moon phase. You may feel like you are at a low ebb and as if nothing is happening or you may simply not want to be 'where the action is'. Don't overreact, overdo or overindulge to compensate for things not going according to your plans. Sometimes it's best to do what you must to just get it out of the way. You'll get your turn to please yourself. Competitive ambitions and ego drives are on hold now.

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too long (the ideal length is that it falls just about three inches below your belly button. This is a great day or evening look, depending on your footwear; you can keep it funky and flat during the day and raise the heel for evening time. You don't have to seek out only wide-leg black trousers, although many of you believe that they will be the most slimming. Once you keep the look in similar or like shades, you can get the same effect – a dark green trouser with a dark green fitted top or a burgundy trouser with a burgundy top can be striking and slimming at the same time. Don't be afraid, try it out, take photos in the dressing room of the shop and peruse at your leisure at home so that you are confident to buy, without any regrets.

I've had a lot of questions recently about how to wear clothes or what to wear when you have a long torso. The best piece of advice that I can give you is to choose high-waisted jeans, trousers and skirts and always tuck your tops in – this adds femininity and balance. Cropped jackets, cropped sweatshirts and t-shirts or belted jackets create definition at a slightly higher position on your frame. Layered tops give the same effect, or tuck tops in to visually shorten your long torso. A-line skirts and wide leg trousers work really well too and always size up in a jumpsuit.

If you have a short waist or torso, how do you elongate your look? Always position your belt lower than your natural waistline, this gives the illusion that your torso is longer than it actually is. Wear vertical stripes or vertical patterns or details on your upper half to give the illusion of length. Avoid high contrasting colours on your top and your bottom half as this will cut your frame in half and further emphasise your shorter waist. Choose columns of colour as this will give you the overall illusion of length, so go for tonal outfits or outfits in a block colour from head to toe. Look for dresses and jumpsuits that don't have a defined waist, by that I don't mean loose fitting, just one that doesn't have a belt in situ or elastic – look for a snug fit without an obvious waistband. Choose mid-rise trousers or jeans over high-rise. It is so important to draw attention to your shoulder line; by raising the line of vision you can create length in your upper body. There is no clothing item out there that can give an illusion of length to a shorter waist than a properly fitting uplifting



Pic: www.gooseberry.ie

bra. This creates maximum space between your breast line and your waistline, so if you do not buy anything else in February other than some well-fitting bras, then you will create length in every item of clothing that you already own.

Glorious shades of powder blue, pale pink and cool mint will emerge over the next short while. These colours work really well with your wardrobe staples of black and taupe or sand. Double-breasted blazers in every colour imaginable might tempt your fancy over the coming weeks. They are a great addition to any wardrobe and I'm sure that you will

find a blazer in a colour that makes your heart sing and adds a lovely glow to your beautiful face. Belts are very 2024, seek out luxurious ones, as they will add the perfect finishing touch to any outfit and you probably have a hat box full of them somewhere, like me! Make Google your best friend, look up how best to wear them and with what, how thick or how skinny and, you never know, you might just learn how to create an entirely new look for yourself, all by yourself. Take your power back, you know you, you know what you like and what you don't like. Stop hiding yourself away, hold up your head, especially when life makes you weary. Let go of whatever is holding you

back or down, foods, people, your mindset, too much phone scrolling, not enough 'me' time. Someone once said to me 'Treat yourself like you would treat your very best friend' and it's so true. I have learned so much more about the beauty and enormity of friendship this past year. We only want the very best for our friends and loved ones so going forward make a promise that you also want the very best for yourself too.

I've had a lot of questions recently about how to wear clothes, or what to wear, when you have a long torso. The best piece of advice that I can give you is to choose high-waisted jeans, trousers and skirts and always tuck your tops in – this adds femininity and balance.

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Winter and being indoors can be a time for craving sugary foods and carbs, which can contribute to symptoms of lethargy and irritability. It's time now to come out of hibernation, refocus and revive yourself in preparation for spring and, if you have gained a few sugary pounds, rest assured that some much-needed movement will see them fall away quickly.

Many of us have introduced lighter coloured winter coats over the last few years, with cream, camel and light grey rapidly overtaking the bleakness of black, at a time of the year when we need something bright. It's all too easy to get lost in black or any dark shade for that matter but designers have made sure that, for the most part, these lighter coloured coats are machine-washable, and that makes all the difference. Make-up on collars can be an absolute pest!

So now, what to wear or buy and how to wear it. Wide-leg trousers are not just in, they are IN! Do you like them? Are you struggling to transition from the staple skinnies that we lived in over the past long while? I think that they are like a breath of fresh air, a wonderful contrast, and isn't that what style is all about? If you are nervous or fearful of the wider leg, start off by buying one pair and Google 'til the cows come home' how to wear them. Keep an eye out on the street how others wear them and pick and choose 'your look', a look that works with your body shape and height.

The monochrome black and white look will always be a 'power' look, wide-leg trousers, a gorgeous white shirt and a beautiful black sleeveless sweater. It's all about proportions here, anyone less than five foot six should tuck in the white shirt, anyone taller than that can leave the shirt out, provided it is scalloped at the end and not

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END OF LIFE MATTERS

Melissa Murphy

End of life Doula Melissa Murphy, a companion, guide and resource supporting our community in end of life matters.

I've wanted to write about carers/caregivers for a while now, because without them, where would we be as a society? As an end of life doula, people in caregiving roles have reached out to me over the years. They'll say something like "I'm not dying, but I'm looking after (mother/father/sister/husband) and would like some support just for me". It's wonderful that people realise how end of life/death doulas can support families/caregivers too. This relationship may include helping to navigate decision-making, supporting meaningful conversations around wishes and plans, as well as simply being someone to talk to. I felt it was important to create a piece inclusive of a few voices with themes of lived

For the caregivers

experiences.

"To care for those who once cared for us is one of life's highest honours." Tia Walker

What do you feel as you read this quote? How do these words land for you? I find it quite moving, but also have mixed feelings, having listened to and witnessed the shadow side of caregiving both personally and professionally. Being a caregiver can also feel stigmatising, isolating and much more. It can be difficult to speak about caregiving if you're in the depths of it and it's a subject prone to platitudes ("You're a saint!" or "God doesn't give more than we can handle!") Teacher and writer Joan Halifax writes about this candidly in her book 'Being with Dying': "While caregiving can be one of the most noble and useful practices life has for us, one that is healing, for both (dying) people and their supporters, a glowing beatified image of service can cast a very long, very dark shadow. On one hand there's the self-less saint, possessing seemingly endless resources of compassion and generosity. On the other, there's the martyr – bitter, exhausted and unable to perform the smallest service without simmering resentment."

This is a topic for which there are no easy solutions (or even questions I have found) so the intention here is to make space for caregivers – of all kinds – in our community. Someone I recently spoke with said they did not really consider themselves to be a caregiver, as they're not living with their person. How-

ever they attend to a great many needs of (a parent in this case); travelling often to another city and having that parent stay with them for extended periods of time. Caregivers are a humble, quiet bunch. To my surprise, I was thanked on the street this week while wearing one of my caregiving hats, but don't consider myself to be such – at least not in the way I describe here. I intended to go home that evening to a quiet house until I put that hat back on another time – as needed. The caregivers I connect with these days have much on their plates; some we might imagine: tidying the home, routinely doing the hands-on physical care, financial management, shopping, meal preparation and transportation. There are also family dynamics to contend with (of past and present), navigating the assisted decision-making law (which commenced last year), minding life balance and self-preservation, acquiring information and resources, such as carers allowance and respite supports, to name a few. That caregiving was once a communal experience in days gone past is an important theme mentioned that I sense many pine for.

Woven into all these aspects are generous (oh so necessary) doses of humour, creating space for regular breaks away (even for a couple of nights), mindful nourishing moments and practices such as taking to the sea or solace under a canopy of trees, sharing updates and successes, noticing the way



"random strangers go out of the way to help at times." One wise carer said they have come to "accept that others in the family circle do what they can and are able to" in reference to a shared caregiving situation. However, asking for more support can sometimes be a way to relive pre-carer moments; stepping away from the caregiver role to be with their person can provide an opportunity to enjoy when one was simply a daughter, spouse, and so on.

Nearing the end of this piece, I caught up with an old friend from the states. He is one of those people who feels like an elder to me – quite literally because he's 30 years older, but mostly because he never ceases to inspire me with his stories. During our phone call,

he happened to mention that a close friend of his had recently died and he had helped care for her at home in the months prior to her death. He shared that he'd never done anything quite like that before in terms of caregiving and it was very intense – washing her, changing incontinence briefs, witnessing her demise complicated by motor neurone disease. He went on to say that he had long admired this friend and was grateful to be able to offer that time to her. He shared how while suffering was prevalent in terms of the complexity in illness and deep sadness, there was shared laughter and learning too.

What do caregivers need? Perhaps like grief – which is also a profound part of caregiving – what is needed could

vary moment to moment, day by day. A kind word, an offer of support, whether practical or emotional; appreciating those who are carers is a start. If you have a story or a caregiver resource to share, I would warmly welcome it.

"There are only four kinds of people in the world. Those who have been caregivers. Those who are currently caregivers. Those who will be caregivers, and those who will need a caregiver." Rosalyn Carter

To learn more or to connect with Melissa, email her at starsbeyondourskin@gmail.com or visit www.starsbeyondourskin.com. She also welcomes your questions or ideas for future columns.

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Rhub Cunningham embarks on Spring tour



Rhub Cunningham will support Rónán Ó Snodaigh and Myles O'Reilly in DeBarras, Clonakilty on February 9 before returning to West Cork for his own show at Levis' in Ballydehob on April 26.

Heralding the impending release of his new album, 'Peace, Pity and Pardon', recorded in Switzerland under the watchful eye of Thomas 'Gabu' Gabriel, Cunningham brings his inimitable musicianship and depth of lyricism to celebrated Irish venues, old and new.

His upcoming Spring tour, to Galway, Clare, Kerry, Cork, and Kilkenny, coincides with the 10-year anniversary of his sophomore album, 'The Window And Day', recorded in Iceland

by esteemed producer Valgeir Sigurðsson.

Cunningham has clocked up 10 independently released albums, recorded in seven countries, having spent over a decade on the move, taking in residencies in Berlin, Vienna, and Paris.

The Dublin native has opened for Joan Baez in Germany, Lisa Hannigan in the Netherlands, Villagers in France, James Vincent McMorrow in Belgium, Lisa O'Neill in Canada, and Wallis Bird in Australia.

Tickets for Rhob Cunningham's 'Peace, Pity & Pardon' tour are on sale now linktr.ee/rhobcunningham

OUT & ABOUT



Cork County winners in the National Disability Authority's 'Someone Like Me' National Art Competition included Emma O'Driscoll, 2nd class, Castledonovan NS.

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Skibbereen heritage Centre launches genealogy podcast resource

A new resource for those researching their Cork ancestry is now available online free of charge courtesy of the team at Skibbereen Heritage Centre.

Over five short episodes, The 'West Cork Genealogy' podcast features local genealogist Margaret Murphy sharing her extensive knowledge on how to carry out research with local historian Terri Kearney.

Margaret has been providing a genealogy service for the greater West Cork area now for over 20 years at Skibbereen Heritage Centre. In the podcasts she explores the common

pitfalls experienced by researchers, as well as sharing personal stories from her own research.

"I was amazed to find out how much information Margaret was able to unearth about my own family," said Skibbereen Heritage Centre manager Terri Kearney. "She was able to tell me even the size of the house built by my great-grandfather in the 1850s; it's extraordinary how much data is available online when you know how to search for it."

Starting off with the census records in episode one, Margaret and Terri go on to discuss how to research civil and church

records, land ownership records, as well as many other miscellaneous sources such as burial and school records, directories, maps and newspaper sources. The friends and colleagues also explore the historical context of these records throughout the podcasts and what they tell us about Irish society over the last two centuries.

All five of the episodes are available on the Skibbereen Heritage website, www.skibberheritage.com, or alternatively listeners can search for 'West Cork Genealogy' on Apple, Spotify and other hosting platforms.



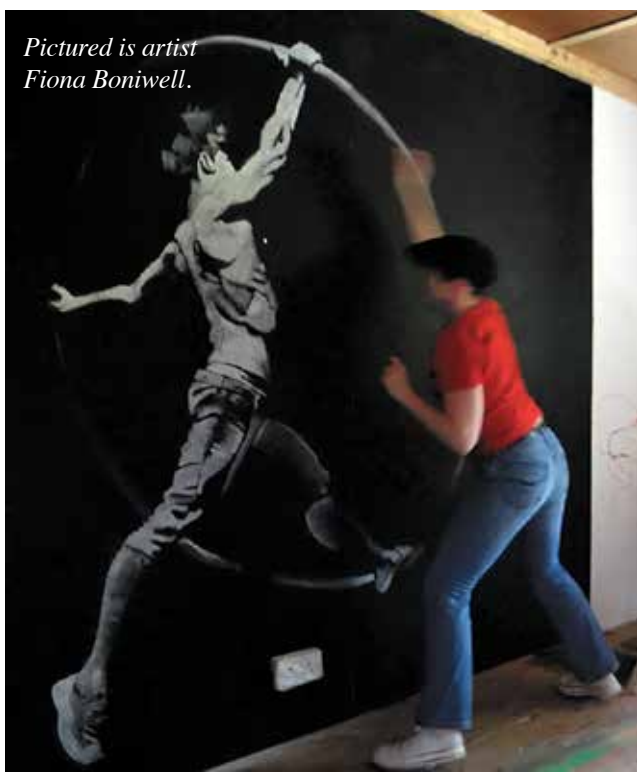
Genealogist Margaret Murphy speaks with historian Terri Kearney.

Uillinn artist residencies for 2024

Cork County Council and Uillinn: West Cork Arts Centre have announced a partnership residency for artists Patsy Tyrrell and Fiona Boniwell. Taking place in April and May 2024, this partnered residency supports artists seeking opportunities to research and develop their practice, and engage with Uillinn, local and diverse communities and the public. The award includes a studio space for four weeks at Uillinn and a stipend of €2,500 each. Both residencies are funded by the Cork County Council Arts Service.

Patsy Tyrrell, a visual artist based in Beara and a recent graduate of Sculpture and Expanded Practice from NCAD, has been awarded a residency from April 2 to May 4. For her residency, Patsy will build a body of work that investigates perception of place and landscape through embodied drawing and performance, developing drawings, reflections, and moments of performance, while inviting others to engage in this process with her via drawing and dialogue. Her practice is rooted in the importance of the invisible links that bind us together and to the landscape in softness, stillness and small encounters and moments of support. Her work currently explores how these moments of relation to each other and to our landscape can change our perception of the space around us.

Fiona Boniwell has been awarded a residency for the month of May. Organised in association with Age and Opportunity's nationwide Bealtaine Festival which celebrates the arts and creativity as we age,



Pictured is artist Fiona Boniwell.

Fionas' project, Running to a Pause, will share her work with the public via several events over the course of her residency, including a Bealtaine event at Uillinn. Fiona seeks to examine the theme of physical movement and her changing relationship with it as it relates to her own body over time. Fiona has always been physically active, focusing recently on martial arts in tandem with her visual arts practice. Fiona will explore this theme through studio-based drawing sessions along with a programme of participatory drawing and movement workshops. Her goal is to create a new body of work arising from the research and collaborative studio sessions at Uillinn.

Ballycotton to host podcast festival in March

The seaside village of Ballycotton will host the inaugural 'Talk the Talk' podcast festival from March 7 to 10, with a host of well-known names performing live versions of their podcasts at the popular venues of Sea Church and The Blackbird.

The line-up includes well-known artist and author Blindboy Boatclub, who will bring his eclectic 'The Bindboy Podcast' to Sea Church. The unique venue will also host IFTA-nominated actor Hilary Rose, known for her portrayal of Mairéad McSweeney in 'The Young Offenders.' Hilary will present her podcast 'Live Wild,' along with a special guest. Iconic Irish comedian, writer and actor Dave McSavage will also be at Sea Church with his podcast 'That's Why We're not Together.' Other highlights include 'Tales from the Pitch' with Ciarán O'Rathallaigh and



guest, and 'Hola,' the podcast with Laura Cronin and Audrey Fitzhagan.

Meanwhile, the Blackbird will play host to 'Real Lives Untold' with Sarah O'Connor, and The Murphy's Pubcast with Tony Kiernan and Fred Cooke. The festival will also see a free workshop by renowned podcast company ACast and lots more entertainment at both venues.

Commenting on the upcoming 'Talk the Talk' podcast festival, General Manager of Sea Church John Kidney said: "Ballycotton has really been put on the map recently with unique and quirky events and the upcoming podcast festival is no exception. We expect a huge buzz in the village over these few days in March, as people celebrate some of Ireland's most renowned podcasters, comedians and storytellers. We're especially excited that ACast will host a workshop for aspiring podcast makers – it's the icing on the cake for what promises to be a fantastic offering. We're also hugely grateful to our partners Talk the Talk for helping us bring about this festival"

For more information on all upcoming events at Sea Church, visit www.seachurch.ie

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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Folk alchemist Seamus Fogarty plays Levis' for the first time



MUSIC BOX

Lauren Guillery

Lauren Guillery is a rock musician and music lover. Her album 'Disaster in La La Land' is available on all music platforms.

It-folk musician Seamus Fogarty is set to tour Ireland next month, passing through West Cork on March 2 to perform tracks from his wide-ranging catalogue. Raised in County Mayo but living in London for over a decade, Seamus spent much of 2023 touring Ireland and the UK with renowned folk musician Lisa O'Neill.

'They Recognised Him', the first single from his latest EP 'Hee Haw' released last October is garnering high praise from DJs and personalities across the airwaves, with several plays from presenters John Kelly on RTÉ, Gideon Coe and Cillian Murphy on BBC 6 Music. Getting regular airplay is helping raise the Mayo musician's profile and introduce him to new audiences. "I think people are in a different frame of mind when they listen to the radio as opposed to streaming," he says. "Not that it's better or worse in terms of the music within, but I guess people have this idea that DJs are gatekeepers and that what they play is worth checking out. Cillian Murphy's been great to me and lots of Irish artists, hats off and fair play to Cork!" he exclaims.

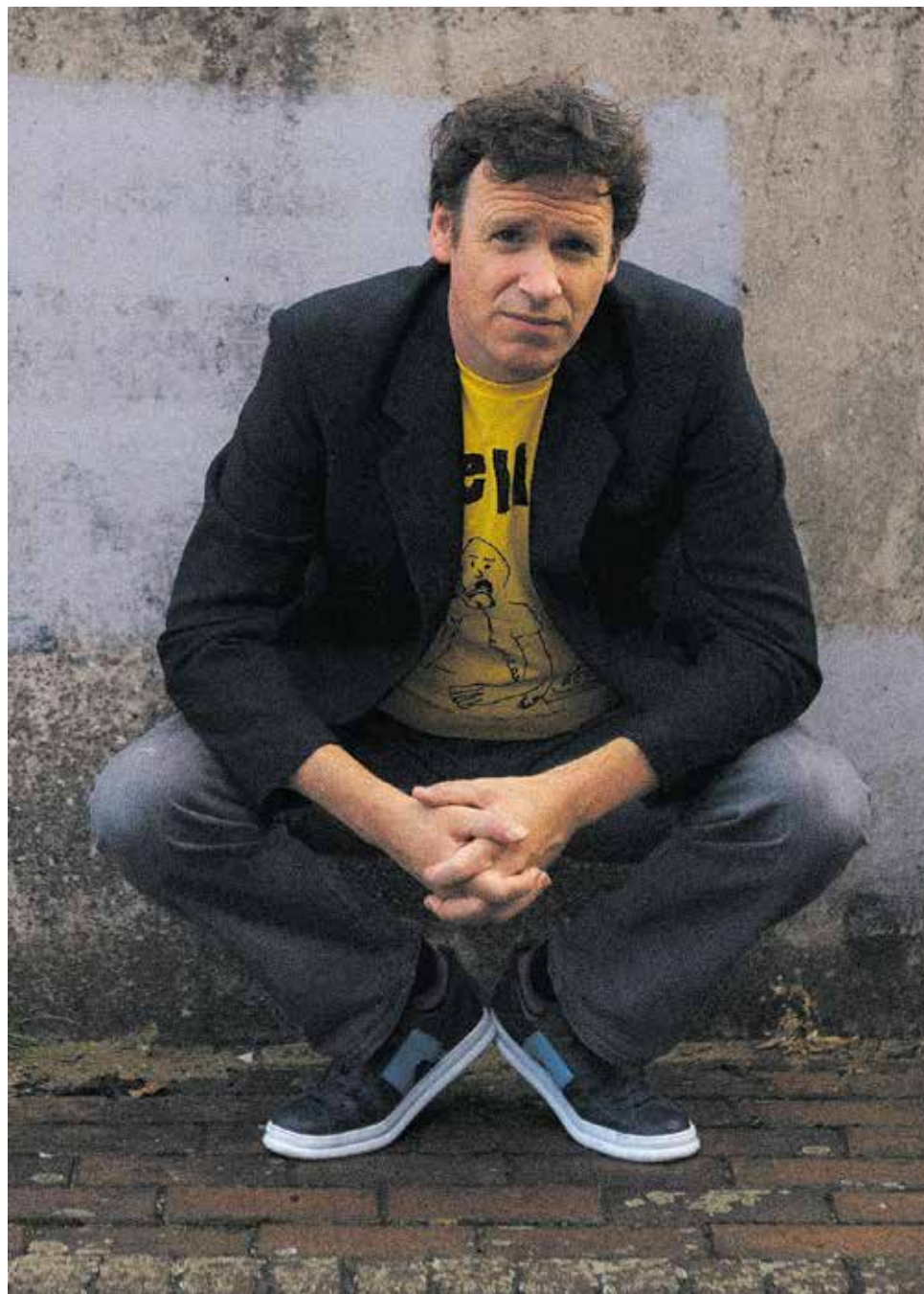
Fogarty grew up listening

to trad and folk music and learned to play the fiddle, the banjo, and the tin whistle from a young age. It wasn't until his teenage years that he picked up the guitar after his older brother John introduced him to lo-fi American music. His influences were as far-ranging as Johnny Cash, Pavement and Aphex Twin back then, but Fogarty discovered Steve Reich and John Cale in later years which vastly broadened his horizon.

He studied engineering in Dublin's DCU, writing songs mostly on his acoustic guitar around that time, and then he moved to Limerick to do a Masters in Music Technology. "I was always into this kind of songwriter stuff," he says, "but I also had this notion that I wanted to inject some weird electronic stuff into it." In 2005, he found a foot pedal and was given a cracked version of the Ableton Live software. "I never really looked back after that in terms of how you could play and perform music using the guitar or the banjo, and control accompaniment on a laptop."

Though his songs are embedded in folk music, they are slightly off-kilter – a strange and hearty stew of traditional structures warped and distorted with layers of electronic dissonance and interference. "Some of the tunes might come across melancholic so I always try and balance stuff out with a bit of zany – balance the heavy with lighter elements just to keep everyone feeling good," he explains.

From his very first album 'God Damn You Mountain' released on Scottish independent label Fence Records in 2012, Seamus was encouraged by label director Johnny Lynch to do his best to make it a full package, especially if he was to release music under his own name. "Fife was an amazing learning experience and place, with all different kinds of people involved, and there was really a DIY ethic and aesthetic." He drew and painted the cover art for that album and main-



tained this principle for most of his later releases, designing a T-shirt to sell at gigs and putting out a calendar with his drawings the last two years.

The only release that doesn't feature his own artwork is his latest album 'Bag of Eyes', released in November 2020 on British label Domino Records. It features a doodle by Billy Steinberg, the American songwriter behind 'Like A Virgin' and 'Eternal Flame'. Seamus explains that he came across the doodle in Margate where he was recording. "I thought it was some random band that had stayed there that had done it – it kind of reminded me of something I might try and do myself." Contacts were made in the US to ask for permission to use the artwork. "Billy was just delighted that anyone actually wanted to use some of his artwork for something!" he declares.

Because of the pandemic Fogarty never got around to touring his last album, but

supporting Lisa O'Neill was a great boost for his career. "It was exactly what I needed – to knuckle down again, and on the back of those shows I wrote and recorded a new EP. And that was purely to have something else to sell at those shows."

And so the five track EP 'Hee Haw' came out – an assortment of playful tunes dreamed up during the pandemic and his first release in three years. Once again, Fogarty embraced the weird and never strayed far from his Irish heritage, turning an old sean-nós tune into his very own, a seemingly slowed-down version of Suicide's 'Ghost Rider'. "My Irish isn't perfect," he admits "but I love how it allows you to communicate from somewhere completely different".

With three albums and three EPs under his belt – all extremely well-received, things are already afoot for another release. The time frame for the next album is for a release within the next year. So far, 80 per cent of

the album is done and Fogarty has been testing his new songs at his recent live shows. "It's a total pleasure to be able to play the tunes live and I'm still working on them a little bit," he says. As usually happens for Seamus, recording has been taking place in various locations. "I recorded some of it in Margate with Mike Lindsay, some of it at home, and some with Leo Abrahams, who's an amazing producer and engineer," he explains. "I recorded some of it in Hastings, where my drummer has a studio. What takes time then as well as finishing the songs, is trying to make them fit together into one glorious body

of work.'

Fogarty enjoys the challenge of figuring out how to get gigs and making them work. Though he loves going out on the road, he admits that it can be a grueling experience driving all over the place, especially when playing solo. He moved to London to join his partner Emma, who he met at a music festival in Scotland. A musician in her own right, Emma Smith plays the guitar and violin with British acts Pulp and Jarvis Cocker, and the bass with post-punk trio Bas Jan. With Nora, their five year old daughter and no other family over in England, touring and a busy life schedule can be difficult. "It's definitely tricky, and there's been a few overlaps," he confesses "but Nora has started coming to shows".

The tour will take Seamus Fogarty through some of Ireland's loveliest venues, starting in West Cork and passing through Galway, Waterford, Belfast and Dublin. "I just can't believe it," he exclaims. "I'm just so looking forward to going back and doing such a lovely run of shows. I'll be playing tunes off the EP and then just tunes off the other albums and then some off the next album, whenever that's going to come out." Improvising is a big element in Fogarty's live shows, and he embraces the fact that he doesn't really know what's going to happen in the performance. "I used to feel like such a failure when stuff went wrong, but now it's part of the show. Not that it goes wrong all the time, but I like to not be afraid to see where stuff can go."

For his gig in Levis', Fogarty will play as a three-piece. "We're bringing the laptop, a couple of synths, and drum machines," he reveals. "It'll be me on the guitar and electronics, my amazing drummer Aram Zarikian, and John, my brother, who sings and plays the accordion. John's got a beautiful instrument so he can add these lovely deep textures," he continues. "I'll do a few songs of my own, and it can get quite noisy but there's nice quiet bits in there as well."

Seamus Fogarty plays Levis' Corner House, Ballydehob on March 2.

New open mic at Gallery Asna

In another fantastic addition to the cultural offering of Clonakilty, Gallery Asna has a new weekly open mic event, every Sunday evening from 6pm to 8pm.

With a bounty of musical talent in and around Clonakilty, the gallery is hoping to showcase as much as possible of all ages and musical genres. Be it your first or 100th time playing to an audience, you are encouraged but not pressured to get behind the mic in this fully supportive environment.

If you feel inspired, visit the gallery on Sundays at 5.30pm to put your name down, grab a comfy seat and enjoy the show. Guitar provided. All welcome to listen. Follow @clonakiltyopenmic

February Gig Listings

Compiled by Lauren Guillery

Feb 9	Rónán Ó Snodaigh and Myles O'Reilly DeBarra's
Feb 16	Zoe Hayter Levi's Corner House
Feb 17	Eoin Jordan + Stan Notte Levi's Corner House
Feb 18	The Breath Connolly's of Leap
Feb 23	Session Americana Levi's Corner House
Feb 24	Eve Clague Levi's Corner House

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Oscars buzz at Clonakilty Film Club

Clonakilty Film Club was pleased to know that selecting 'Anatomy of a Fall' to conclude its Spring season was the right decision, given it has just been nominated for five Academy Awards! It will compete in the 'Best Picture' category against 'Past Lives', which concluded the Club's Autumn season before Christmas... both films are worthy so its will be exciting to see who takes the Oscar at the ceremony in March.

Having shown 'Driving Madeline' and 'The Old Oak' in January, next up for the Club on February 6 is 'Fallen Leaves' from Finnish director Aki Kaurismäki, which Tara Brady of The Irish Times described as "the crowd-pleaser of the season". Aki Kaurismäki (Le



Havre, The Other Side of Hope) makes a masterful return in this hopeful and satisfying love story, typically melancholic, wryly humorous while also being life affirming and wonderful fun.

'Lies We Tell' from director Lisa Mulcahy follows on February 20. Based on the novel 'Uncle Silas' by Sheridan Le Fanu, this Gothic thriller set in 19th century Ireland sees teen-

age Maud grieving the death of her father who has left her everything in his vast estate. As a minor, Maud must live under the guardianship of her Uncle Silas, the family black sheep, until she comes of age. Things turn sinister and Maud becomes a prisoner in her own home, as Silas conspires to force her into marriage with his son, in a move to seize her fortune.

'Fremont' on March 5 is a little gem from Iranian born director Babak Jalali, a warm, poignant and deadpan tale of self-discovery. Afghan immigrant Donya is a former translator for the US army, now living in Fremont California, where she works in a fortune cookie factory. Donya suffers from chronic insomnia, as she battles to overcome loneliness

and rebuild her life. In an effort to reconnect with the world, she sends an unconventional message out in one of the fortune cookies ...

As mentioned, concluding the lineup on March 19 is the much talked about 'Anatomy of a Fall'. As well as Best Picture at the 2024 Academy Awards, it is nominated for Best Directing by Justine Triet, Best Actress in a leading role, Sandra Hüller, Best Original Screenplay and Best Film Editing. It also received the Palme d'Or at the 2023 Cannes Film Festival.

Sandra, a successful German writer, has been living in the French Alps with her husband Samuel and son Daniel. When Samuel's dead body is found below one of their chalet's windows, a police investigation

raises many questions. One year later, Sandra is on trial for murder. As the trial proceeds, Sandra and her husband's complex relationship comes under intense scrutiny. The conflicting evidence, inconsistent testimony and shocking truths that are revealed make 'Anatomy of a Fall' a compelling and gripping drama.

The Telegraph called it "A sparkling intellectual thriller than lingers for days." and the Irish Times described it as "... a fascinating, knotty courtroom thriller."

All are welcome, no membership required. Films start at 8.30pm at Clonakilty Park Cinema, Screen 2. Doors open from 8.20pm. €10. Follow Clonakilty Film Club on Facebook for updates.

Ora Quartet in concert at Abbeystrewry

St. Barrahane's Church Festival of Music and the National String Quartet Foundation present the Ora Quartet, at Abbeystrewry Church, Skibbereen on Thursday February 15, 8pm, with Siún Milne and Molly O'Shea, violins, Ali Comerford, viola and Yseult Cooper Stockdale, cello.

After several years of enjoying playing together in various chamber music formations, these four outstanding musicians decided in 2023 to join as a string quartet and made their debut in Fuddlefest, Wexford in August last year. Projects in 2024 include a series of collaborative concerts at The Everyman Theatre, Cork in addition to a National String Quartet Foundation touring programme.

This delightful programme includes Haydn's ground-break-



ing 1772 set of string quartets, which was written while the 40-year-old composer was at the Eszterháza Palace near Vienna. It is bright and optimistic in character, perhaps an antidote to the uncomfortably damp and marshy living conditions at the palace!

Emma O'Halloran's 'Dying is a wild night' is a reflection on mortality inspired by events in the composer's family. It was premiered at 2019 West Cork Chamber Music Festival.

Benjamin Britten's second quartet is a work of startling originality and was written as a

tribute to Purcell and premiered on the 250th anniversary of his death.

Tickets: €15. online from Eventbrite; Thornhill Electrical; at the door on the night; text/call 086 2264797; www.barrahanemusic.ie

Take a moment to appreciate the simplicity of a moment

'Huh!?', a month-long photographic exhibition by Clonakilty artist Thady Trá, opens at Gallery Asna, Clonakilty Community Arts Centre on Saturday February 3 at 5.30pm.

Thady Trá is an analog photographer who has been mainly shooting on 35mm since completing a photography course in St. Johns Central College, where he discovered his love for film and darkroom work. His shows, with 40 or so prints displayed on pegs, evoke the creative atmosphere of his darkroom on

the upper floors of Clonakilty Community Arts Centre. There is usually also an interactive darkroom element.

The Centre's resident artist and tutor James Waller describes Thady's work as: "It's not the grandeur of the subject, but the simplicity of the moment."

'Huh!?' consists of a variety of pieces from Thady's recent trips to London and Berlin, as well as of Clonakilty – a special series of photographs that you won't want to miss.

Gallery Asna is open daily Mon to Sat 11am to 5pm.



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MOVIES THIS MONTH

Strictly Syncing 2024 launched in Bantry

Since 2018, Strictly Come Dancing Bantry has been a yearly event, interrupted only briefly in 2021 by Covid restrictions.

This year Strictly returns, but for 2024 there is a twist, as audiences will be treated to a new format to mark what will be the final year of St Finbarr's BNS. This new show will combine Strictly Come Dancing with Lip Syncing. 'Strictly Syncing' also promises to offer a 'Stars in Their Eyes' experience, as acts imitate the image and moves of their chosen lip sync legends as closely as possible.

Since 2019, the Strictly Bantry shows have been choreographed and produced by Theresa O'Donoghue and Josie McAuliffe of TJ Productions. With over 30 contestants recruited, the show promises to ensure that St Finbarr's BNS gets the send off it deserves. Show regulars Theresa and Josie will also be joined by local pho-

tographer Tony O'Donovan of 'Moments in Time' photography, whose pictures are invaluable in capturing the event.

Following its launch at The Westlodge on Saturday, February 3, the live shows will be hosted at the same venue on Friday, March 8 and Saturday, March 9, 2024.

As in previous years, funds raised will go towards making further improvements at the school. This year, two charity partners will also benefit from the proceeds. As Brian Gleeson, Principal of St Finbarr's BNS explains, "We will be supporting The Rebel Wheelers and purchasing equipment to be used in The West Cork Children's Disability Network. We thank you, the public for your continued support of this event and look forward to seeing you at the spectacular shows."

Ticket sales will be announced on all social media platforms and local news outlets.

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

The Craft Corner

This month **Natalie Webb** is showing us how to make Valentine heart flowers

“A sweet little gift for someone you love.”

Materials:

- Coloured card, I used pink, red, orange and green.
- Scissors
- Glue
- Lollipop sticks (these can be bought in bundles from your local craft shop)
- Marker
- Pencil

Method:

Draw a heart shape and cut it out, you can then use this one as your template for drawing the rest.

Draw around your template and cut out four heart shapes of the same colour.

Fold each heart shape in half.

Glue one half of a heart to another half of a heart, repeat with the other two hearts so that you have a pair, you should have a flat side on each.

Glue a lollipop stick onto



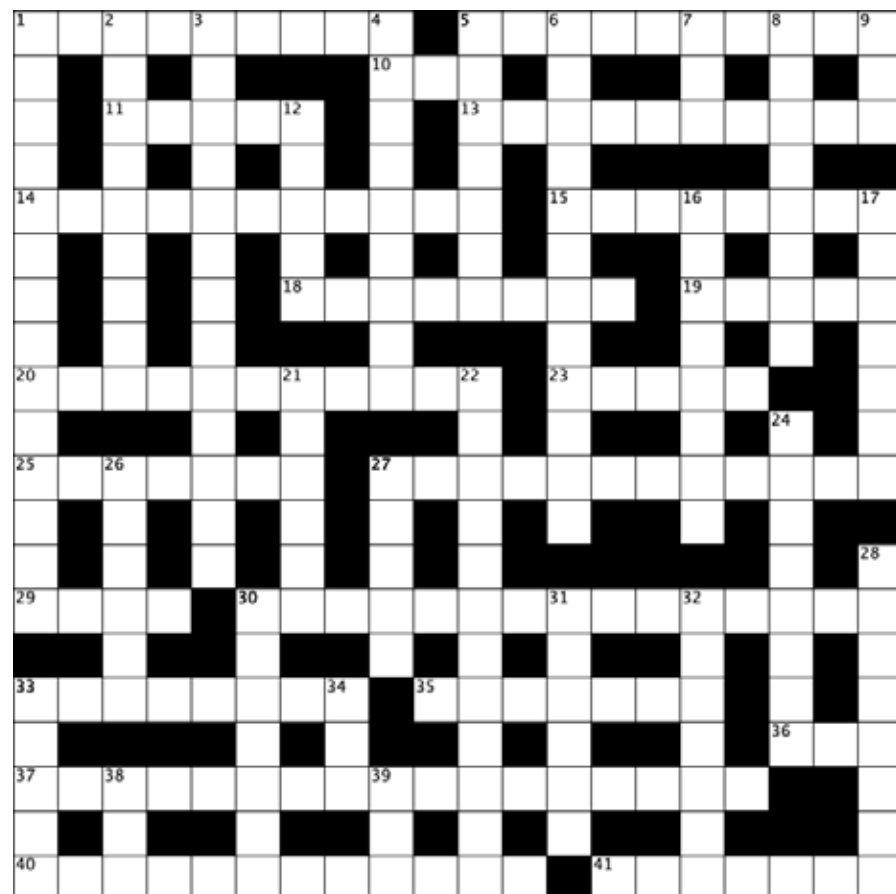
one of the flat sides, then stick the flat side of the other heart shape onto this. (Follow the photos if this isn't clear!)

Cut out two double leaf shapes (check photo) and draw on a leaf pattern.

Put glue on one side of the leaf shapes then stick them onto the lollipop stick, back to back.

Make as many of these as you like all different colours! Then put them in a little vase as a cute table display.

In the news Crossword



Across

- Waterway linking Red and Mediterranean Seas (4,5)
- Denial of responsibility for horribly acrid slime (10)
- Peculiar light in the sky, in brief (3)
- Flavour present in soy sauce or miso (5)
- Viciously evil (10)
- Who might wear a keffiyeh? (11)
- Shuffling, sounds like shiny jewellery! (8)
- Looking at striking sort of blow (8)
- Valuable metal slab (5)
- Former US presidential hopeful (3,2,6)
- Hot boozy drink (5)
- Release the hound (7)
- Irish 2024 BAFTA nominee for his role as a disrupter to the upper classes (5,7)
- Indecent speck of dirt (4)
- Burial places of old Ireland (10,5)
- Quaked (8)
- Pacific nation formerly called New Hebrides (7)
- Mother is silent (3)
- Impossible to identify as different (17)
- Tooth adjuster (12)
- Boaster's lack (7)

Down

- Sea roads for freight (8,6)
- Maths symbol (9)
- Newspaper's back pages (10,3)
- It may keep things moving (9)
- Link between West, Raab and Cooper (7)
- Alexander, Soviet author of the novel 'One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich' (12)
- Guacamole base, informally speaking (3)
- Company forums (8)
- Rubbish from Peter O'Toole (9)
- Cake cover (5)
- Irish satirist, musician and podcast host (8)
- Shout out during a shootout? (3,4)
- Stick (6)
- Treasured violin made in Italy (12)
- Metallic element, symbol Cr (8)
- Stone, lapis _____ (6)
- Lacking in originality, boring (5)
- Northern Ireland get-together – that rarely gets together! (8)
- Earned fair and square (7)
- Red Sea rebels (6)
- In disarray, hair perhaps (7)
- Capital of Ecuador (5)
- Mafia boss (3)
- Feature of Morse code (3)
- Where we should encourage healthy microbes to live (3)

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Sudoku

The goal of Sudoku is to fill a 9x9 grid with numbers so that each row, column and 3x3 section contain all of the digits between 1 and 9

		4	8					9
		5			4			
			2	6	7			1
						3		
			5	2	3	8	4	
2	5							9
8			6	7				
	6							2
1						7		

#135571 Difficulty: hard

							9	1
	3	5						
			7		2			
			2		3		4	
				1			2	6
3		8						7
	5	9					8	
				6				5
			7	4				

#21601 Difficulty: moderate

Across: 1 Suez Canal; 5 Disclaim; 10 UFO; 11 amount; 13 malevolent; 14 Palestinian; 15 hobbit; 18 glaucous; 19 ngo; 20 Ron deSantis; 23 roddy; 25 unlash; 27 Barry Keoghan; 29 smt; 30 megalithic tombs; 33 quiver; 35 Vanuatu; 36 amun; 37 indistinguishable; 40 orthodontist; 41 modesty
Down: 1 shipping routes; 2 equal signs; 3 classified ads; 4 lubricant; 5 Dominic; 6 Solchlenitsyn; 7 ovo; 8 meetings; 9 rot; 12 timg; 16 Blindboy; 17 get down; 21 adhara; 22 Stradivarius; 24 chromium; 26 lacini; 27 band; 28 assembly; 30 merited; 31 Howl; 32 roused; 33 Quito; 34 don; 38 dot; 39 gu

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Spring concerts series at St Brendans Church

West Cork Music is delighted to announce its Spring 2024 Concert Series in St Brendan's Church, Bantry.

On Friday, February 2 at 7.30pm, the acclaimed chamber group Ficino Ensemble presents a musical odyssey, performing rarely heard music by Mozart, McKay and Penderecki. Mozart's noble and epic Diver-timento for String Trio and Irish

composer Deirdre McKay's atmospheric Between will set the stage for the dynamic and evocative Sextet by the late Polish composer Krzysztof Penderecki for which the ensemble will be joined by pianist Finghin Collins.

On Sunday February, 25 at 3pm, Cork-born violinist Mairéad Hickey and Dutch cellist Ella van Poucke perform Bach, Telemann and Ravel.

This concert is a collaboration with the Ortús Chamber Music Festival, the Cork festival which is co-curated by Mairéad Hickey and runs through to 3 March.

On Friday, March 8 at 7.30pm, the Irish Chamber Orchestra returns to Bantry with Norwegian violinist Henning Kraggerud for a performance of Bach's Goldberg Variations. Whether you're a newcomer to Bach or a die-hard fan, this is the perfect place to experience the endlessly fascinating, inventive little masterpieces which form the Goldberg Variations. Before the interval, Henning will talk us through his acclaimed arrangement before performing the stirring, beautiful, dance-like whole alongside the Irish Chamber Orchestra.

Tickets will be available at the door, online at westcorkmusic.ie or by ringing the West Cork Music office at 027 52788.



west | cork | music **Concert Series**
St Brendan's Church, Bantry

MAIRÉAD HICKEY & ELLA VAN POUCKE
Sunday
25 February
3pm
Works by Bach, Telemann and Ravel.

HENNING KRAGGERUD & THE IRISH CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
Friday 8 March
7.30pm
Bach's Goldberg Variations

Tickets on door, from www.westcorkmusic.ie or 027 52788

History speaks at Spoken Word

DeBarra's Spoken Word will dive deep into history, all the way back to 1798, at its event on Wednesday, February 7.

Moze Jacobs shares how the idea first came up last summer on the back of a chance encounter on a West Cork bus where a man called Jim Scanlan was talking enthusiastically about the videos he was making. Mostly about the Irish landscape and history, often with a soundtrack of poetry, music, and/or factual information. His creative activities seemed a good fit for a monthly event that revolves around the spoken in all its guises. The rest is history.

Born in County Cork, Jim Scanlan moved overseas with his family when he was seven-years-old. "I am Irish regardless of my accent. Irish history used to fascinate me as, being schooled and raised in England, I knew so little about it. And while I can't say that

I'm a professional filmmaker, I've always loved film. It is the tragic characters in particular, that move me. Ireland's history is full of such characters."

1798 was an important and dramatic year in Irish history. Tragic in some ways (a lot of bloodshed) but also significant. It was the year of the Irish Republican Rebellion, instigated by the Society of United Irishmen in the wake of the French Revolution.

The Society was exceptional as it had support both among Catholics and Protestants.

Two short films (less than 10 minutes) will feature large on the big screen during the event at the back of DeBarra's Folk Club in Clonakilty. There is 'The Battle of the Big Cross' about the only rising in Munster during the Irish Rebellion, which took place between Shannonvale and Ballinascarthy. The footage was filmed in Asna Square, Clonakilty, to

mark the 225th anniversary of the Battle in June 2023. The ceremony was attended by many descendants of the people involved and recorded by Jim Scanlan. The film combines this with images depicting the failed French invasion of Bantry Bay in 1796 and other (re-enacted) scenes such as the fighting between redcoats and rebels.

Similar sequences are in 'The Croppy Boy' about the historic background of the rebellion, narrated and researched by Scanlan who uncovered many interesting facts, especially about the heroic roles of women: "To an exclusive male membership the society was not confined. Many brave women took the oath and joined." No Hollywood budget, or cast, was available but the "real people" who populate the movie, albeit in 18th-century costumes, more than make up for it with their genuine emotion. What shines through is a fierce but gentle love of country. Almost as if, collectively, the Irish side of history is given a new lease of life by the actors, their faces, eyes. These quieter moments are interspersed with numerous action-packed scenes. Soldiers, fighting, blunderbuss guns and canons, summary executions, man-to-man (or woman) fights, corpses, buildings on fire. There are even glimpses of sailing ships in Bantry Bay during the failed invasion of 1796 in the run-up to the Irish Rebellion.



Will Beara produce Ireland's next Country music star?

Effie Neill from Ardgroom, Beara is among eight singers who will be competing for the title of Ireland's 'Glór Tíre' Country Music Champion 2024. Effie will appear on the first episode of the 20th season of 'Glór Tíre' on TG4 on Tuesday March 12 at 9.30pm. This long-running hit show is widely regarded as the premier platform for new and emerging country and Irish talent, and as

essential to the lifeblood of the genre.

Taking part is something of a dream come true for Effie, whose mentor will be Michael English, one of the most respected voices in country and Irish music. "It was always my goal to be on this show, as it's a great platform to build on your musical profile," she said. "I am really excited for the coming weeks and to have this opportunity to perform along-

side very talented musicians."

Effie, who has been gigging since she was 14-years-old, cites Philomena Begley, Big Tom, and Dolly Parton as her inspirations. Indeed, she will enter Glór Tíre with considerable momentum; in 2023 she won the Star of the Cowboys and Heroes Festival and released two singles, which have notched up more than 100,000 views on social media.



The exciting re-enactments were filmed by Cathy Keane. A Galway woman who moved to Enniscorthy (Co Wexford), she started a taxi business and then began to organise guided bus tours for visitors (and locals) to historic sites. "Of course these took in Vinegar Hill, a very significant battlefield and the location of one of the most important battles that were ever fought on Irish soil, part of the

1798 rebellion. Across different counties, including Cork, almost 30,000 people died in a few months." Around the same time she came into contact with a re-enactment group and started to film them. Photography and film are one of her long-term interests.

Both filmmakers will be present on the night and are happy to answer questions. Also present will be Cionnaith Ó

Súilleabháin, a representative of Dúchas Clonakilty Heritage which organised the 225th anniversary commemorations last summer.

The free event starts at 8:30pm, all welcome. Followed, as per usual, by the Open Mic.

Online video interview with Jim Scanlan and Cathy Keane available to watch on Youtube.

PETS



CANINE CORNER

Liz Mahony

Liz Mahony is an experienced Dog Trainer and Holistic Therapist for all animals. In her monthly column, Liz aims to promote mutual respect between carer and dog. Contact Liz at corkdogtrainingclasses.com.

It took me many years and a traumatic accident to bring me to my calling: to study to be a professional trainer of dogs and to learn the healing therapies that would help unlock an animal's psyche to allow it to heal. It's been a long journey and each animal, mostly dogs, have brought me further along

What it means to me to be a dog trainer

my learning path. While it's always been a worthwhile journey for me, there have been times when I've questioned my abilities if I've seemed to fail. I've looked on those times as another learning curve to strive to do even better for the next client who has a problem with their dog.

On the other hand the times when the pets and owners have suddenly found what they've been looking for in each other; when their paths suddenly synchronised, have been moments of pure joy for me to witness.

Since Covid and all the troubles it brought with lack of socialisation for both animals and people, the behavioural problems or the division between carer and pet seems to have grown much wider. It's been a relief to be able to bring therapies to various fraught situations or misunderstandings, to start that path to healing and bonding.

But, as the saying goes: "It takes two to tango". All relationships need an honest input

on both sides. Occasionally, a client wants me to conjure up a 'quick fix' without them having to do anything. It never works that way. There has to be a willingness to change on both sides.

I find that in those circumstances, a dog refuses to co-operate. I have dogs who literally walk away from any offer of help to them, be it through training or therapies, because they know their owner expects them to change but aren't prepared to make any changes themselves. Those situations are heartbreaking, as far as I'm concerned, but there's nothing I can do. I can only admire the intuitive powers of the dogs in question and respect their decisions, knowing that my own arguments or suggestions to their humans are falling on deaf ears.

Thankfully, those situations are few and far between. In most cases, the client has called me to their home out of a genuine concern for the welfare of their pet. Then, it's a question of finding the easiest and longterm



solution for both parties.

And then, just occasionally, I witness a miracle like I did the other day. I was called out to help a couple with their young dog. On my arrival, the dog went into orbit – literally. OTT doesn't fully describe him! When a dog is so stressed, his brain is totally out of gear and

he cannot focus. He paced; he whined; he jumped; he circled; he pawed at everyone; he chewed.

So I recommended we sit at the table and ignore him while we chatted about this behaviour and when it had manifested in the first place. I questioned them about his diet, his routine, and so on. We must have chatted for at least 30 to 40 minutes. Once in a while, the dog sat down and paused for breath. But, not for long. Immediately when I thought I could start dealing with him, his OTT behaviour kicked in again! I was quite worried that I wouldn't be able to help these people.

And then suddenly, he lay down under a chair and began to relax. He actually remained there for over five minutes, so I decided to try my luck.

I called him to me. He peered out hesitantly and then reluctantly came into my space. There was a look in his eyes that told me he wasn't sure what to do, so I stayed sitting and began a small bit of training.

It was like a light bulb had been turned on. He took to the training and proved to be a highly intelligent pupil, especially when I voiced praise and followed up with a food reward. I could almost hear him saying: 'That's what you want of me!'

I was able to stand up as he gained confidence, and continue with more basic training. He was so quick, eager to learn and proud of himself. There was still an uncertainty about him but he listened to everything I said.

He'd gone from OTT rebel to star pupil and he was enjoying himself. But, the miracle moment for me was when I was about to leave. He tentatively asked to put his paws on my lap and I allowed him while I praised him softly. He looked me in the eye, sniffed my face, and then allowed me to alter his collar without any of the previous hassle. It was an emotionally high spot for me and one that stayed with me for the rest of the day!

MOTORING



CAR REVIEWS

Sean Creedon

No range anxiety with the Hyundai Kona E.V.



New Year, new car and it's another electric one. Looking at my diary for the early months of the year I think most of the new cars I'm going to be reviewing in 2024 will be electric ones.

Last summer I drove the Hybrid version of the Hyundai Kona and I was very impressed. My daughter, who is often my front seat passenger, was also impressed, so much so that she is thinking of buying a new one sometime this year, maybe for the 242 reg.

So after driving the hybrid version of the Kona I was really looking forward to the full electric version and I wasn't disappointed.

My test car came in a discreet but attractive Ecotronic Grey. As usual with most electric cars there is no attractive grille at the front, like you would find in a diesel or petrol car. The front of the Kona is like most electric cars, bland.

The new Kona is bigger in every area than its predecessor, but we are talking millimetres here, e.g. the new version is 145mm longer than its predecessor.

The interior is really attractive and it's so bright you could do with sun glasses. The seats are bright and a white roofline accentuates the bright décor. It would be a shame to wear muddy boots in the Kona, but

if the seats do get dirty I think they could be easily cleaned with a J-Cloth.

The cabin takes its inspiration from Hyundai's award-winning Ioniq 5 and Ioniq 6 siblings. A 12.3-inch digital driver's display sits beside a similar sized touchscreen infotainment system, both of which are user-friendly.

Many drivers will be happy to hear that Hyundai have retained physical buttons on the dash for the radio which means you never have to take your eyes off the road when driving. And you also get slave controls on the steering wheel.

When you sit in the first item that grabs your attention is the

heads-up display on the windscreen that tells you what your speed is and the speed limit on the road you are travelling on. A great idea as nobody wants penalty points at the start of a new year, or indeed any time of year.

The boot is large and there is a 'well' which would take a full-size spare wheel, but as usual with electric cars, no spare is provided. So as usual my advice to people buying new is to haggle for least a 'mini' spare wheel.

When I meet people in shopping centres when driving a new car the first question is usually the price. But when I am in an electric the second question

is always about the range. With the smaller 48kWh battery the official range is 377km, while the official range for the 65kWh battery is 514.

Now a cold, wet January is not the best time of year to judge the range in an electric car, but I was able to get approximately 440km in my test car, which had the larger battery.

I have been driving electric cars for a few years now and while I didn't make any very long journeys last week I can safely say that this was the first time in an electric car that I didn't have any range anxiety.

There are four driving modes, Eco, Normal, Sport and Snow.

Naturally the best range can be achieved in Eco mode, but if you want to see how quickly the range will drop, select Sport mode.

The Kona is now a spacious car, very comfortable to drive and also a very quiet car on the road and not just because it's electric.

Prices starts at €36,995 for the 48kWh model, while my test car with the 65kWh battery starts at €39,995. As usual with all electric cars, road tax is €120.

GARDENING

Gardening in February



GARDENING

John Hosford
The Weekend Garden Centre

As the days lengthen and the momentum of the year gathers pace, so does the list of jobs in the garden. January's weather was a salutary wake-up call with low temperatures of minus eight and minus ten degrees Celsius being observed in West Cork. Continue to keep a vigilant eye on the weather forecasts. Early sowings in the greenhouse will need the protection of some frost proofing with a thermostatically-controlled fan heater, as young, tender seedlings will be killed by low temperatures and frost. Keep the heavy frost protection fleece on standby for frost protection.

Seed potatoes

Secure your seed potatoes as soon as possible. As mentioned on last month's issue seed potatoes are likely to be very scarce due to the heavy rain of last summer and autumn. Put seed potatoes sprouting in a cool and dry but frost-free place. Place in single rows on slatted wooden or plastic trays. First early potatoes are the first to mature, usually two to three weeks earlier than second earlies. These are normally ready for harvesting in June or July or a few weeks earlier if grown under cover in a greenhouse or polythene tunnel. Protect early crops with frost

protection fleece. If there is an exceptionally cold weather forecast seed potatoes should get covered indoors also to provide an extra layer of insulation. If space is at a premium, you can also grow your seed potatoes in a large tub, potato growing bag, or the deeper grow bags. Earth up to bury the developing tubers. Choose from the large selection of varieties available by considering flavour, cropping results and blight resistance. Early varieties are harvested by midsummer and can be followed by another crop such as French beans, cabbage, lettuce or courgettes. Maincrop varieties are harvested in late September or mid October and can be stored in a cool, dry frost-free store. Many of these varieties can be used up to Spring next year.

Main crop include: Rooster, Kerrs Pink, Golden Wonder, Arran Victory, Desiree, Pink Fir Apple, Sarpo Mira, Cara, Setanta.

Vegetables and herbs

Early sowing

Towards the end of the month, you can sow lettuce, radish, salad onions, peas, broad beans, beetroot, summer cabbage and spinach. Warm the soil up by covering two to four weeks prior to the planned sowing date. Rake the soil to a fine tilth with a soil rake, making shallow drills with a cane or draw hoe and cover carefully. Retain the seed packets, as they are great sources of information, which point you in the direction of success. Peas can be sown in a piece of plastic guttering, which has been drilled to provide drainage. Sow the seeds evenly in two rows 2.5-5cm apart and water thoroughly. Keep them in a greenhouse or window-sill. Once a few leaves have emerged, they can be planted out under a cloche by carefully sliding them out of the guttering



Snowdrop open days can be good sources of choice varieties.

into an already prepared shallow trench.

Shallots

Now is the time to plant shallots. Prepare the ground thoroughly, incorporating plenty of organic matter. Add an organic fertiliser and rake the soil to a fine tilth. Plant the shallots 15-18cm apart. Using a trowel, plant them with the bulb tips just beneath the surface of the soil.

Asparagus

Prepare a bed for planting asparagus. Dig the plot thoroughly, removing perennial weeds completely and incorporating plenty of organic material.

Prepare a runner bean trench

Mark out the position of the row and dig a trench about 60cm wide, filling with compost or manure. Scatter over pelleted poultry manure.

Runner beans are planted outdoor at the end of May or early June. Choose a sheltered position that is sunny and gets plenty of shelter. Do consider a Runner Bean wigwam, which can be a very attractive feature incorporated in a mixed border. Runner beans have attractive orange or scarlet, white and pink flowers. Runner beans will reward you with prolific crops from summer to autumn. Start your runner beans off indoors within one seed in a pot or fibre pot. Biodegradable pots are recommended, as they disintegrate away without adding to a pile of accumulated waste. Liquid feed at weekly intervals once cropping commences with a liquid seaweed-based, organic fertiliser.

Lawns

Keep off the grass when frosted or frozen. Prepare the ground for sowing at the end of March/April, removing all perennial weeds.

Summer bulbs

Pot up Dahlias and Begonia bulbs in a frost-free area with good light. Label your pots

with details of variety, colour and height. Spray occasionally with water to encourage buds to grow. Dahlias are a terrific plant for garden borders or in containers for the more compact varieties.

Lilies are a terrific bulb available in a dazzling array of colours and many have a delightful fragrance. Look for good, plump bulbs which are not shrivelled or dried out.

Snowdrops

Plant and divide snowdrops after flowering but while the foliage is still green. Snowdrops succeed better when they are planted in the spring 'in the green'. Look out for choice varieties from specialist nurseries and garden centres. The Snowdrop open days can be good sources of choice varieties. Look out for these in the local press, gardening magazines and via announcements at local Flower and Garden Clubs. Look out for the Snowdrop Garden Open Day on February 18, 2024 at Bride Park Cottage in Killumney (P31 YW52). In aid of CUH Charity.

Pruning trees and shrubs

Trim winter flowering heathers, as they finish flowering. This is an essential job, otherwise the plants will become straggly and its centre will become bare.

Buddleia, Caryopteris, Ceanothus, Hardy Fuchsias, Santolinas Ceratostigma and Lavatera may all be pruned hard this month. Cut back almost to the ground, leaving one or two buds on each stem. After pruning, give a feed of organic fertiliser. A mulch of well-composted farmyard or stable manure will get them off to a good start. If these aren't available, substitute with the excellent Gee-up made in Blarney.

Roses

Complete pruning during the month, using a sharp secateurs and loppers and pruning saw for stronger shoots. Feed at the end of the month with a good organic rose fertiliser. Mulch heavily

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Fruit garden

Finish winter pruning of apples and pears. Prune autumn-fruiting raspberries. Continue planting of fruit trees and bushes when soil and weather conditions are favourable. Feed

apples and pears early in the month with sulphate of potash. Mulch bush and cane fruit. Cover strawberries with a cloche or frame for an early crop. Protect fruit buds from bird damage by netting, mesh or a fruit cage. Gooseberries are particularly susceptible to attack by bull finches.

FARMING

Dealing with delays and making plans

FARMING
IN WEST CORK

Tommy Moyles

In his farming diary, West Cork suckler farmer and columnist with the Irish Farmers Journal, Tommy Moyles covers the lay of the land across all agri and farming enterprises – news, views and people in farming across West Cork and further afield.

In association
with



Heifers have moved to the calving accommodation on Tommy Moyles' farm at Ardfield.

It's been a busy month on the conference and seminar scene, with a few big national events, as well as local. Breaking away from the normal business and policy content, Carbery held a farmer welfare event in Rosscarbery, each of the West Cork co-ops held their individual dairy events and Drinagh co-op held a successful suckler event in Bantry too. It was postponed by a week because of a weather warning and temperatures were below zero for the rescheduled meeting but it didn't deter a good crowd from showing up. A few extra rows of seats had to be added such was demand. Breeding, nutrition and animal health were all covered and well-appreciated by all concerned. Dairy might dominate the headlines but there is a sizeable dry-stock sector in West Cork too, much of it on marginal land.

Some of those in attendance have been affected by delayed payments from the new CAP with many waiting on their ACRES payments. A total of 28,084 farmers in the Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES) are awaiting a payment from the Department of Agriculture.

This is 10,000 more farmers than the 18,600 farmers that the Department had deemed to be impacted by the delay in payments back in December. A total of 2,660 farmers in Cork are yet to receive their payment, while 992 were paid since the

payment run for the scheme commenced in mid-December.

14,106 farmers across counties Donegal, Galway, Kerry and Mayo still remain without their payment. Many of the farmers impacted are in areas where the land would be classed as marginal from an agricultural perspective so environmental payments play an important part in their annual income. Most of those affected are participants in the co-operation project (CP) stream of ACRES. This is the first year this model is being implemented and is more complex than the ACRES general stream.

The Minister for Agriculture, Charlie McConalogue said that payments to ACRES CP participants will begin to issue this in February 2024. Payments to farmers in the CP stream are worth on average €5,500.

Those payments have been the headline issues but there are a lot of farmers still waiting on issues to be ironed out regarding payments for other schemes. There's always issues when a new CAP swings into action and the fact that Covid-19 extended the previous one probably doesn't help.

I'm sure Department of Agriculture staff will be glad to see the processing of 2023 CAP payments reach a conclusion too and hopefully it all runs smoother in 2024.

Home farm

Calving has either gotten underway or is on the verge of occurring on many farms

in West Cork and preparations will get underway for calving shortly. The calving shed doubles as the main straw and hay store from June to January, so working out where to swap around bales to make space is high on the agenda for this week. Having sheds that can fulfill a few roles means you get bang for your buck from them but there's always once or twice in a year where you need to re-jig them. In order to save time, there's a bit of planning needed for that. In a way it's a real-life

version of the puzzle where you need to get a fox, hen and sack of grain across the river but can only take two at a time. It's not a big deal but a bit of thinking now can save a lot of time when things get busy.

The main calving pen consists of two bays that are straw-bedded with a feeding area alongside it. As half of it is storing bales now, freeing that up is a priority. In order to do that, I'll need to clean out the straw-bedded area of the cow house. In recent years, the rest

of the main cow shed has been used to hold older cows ahead of calving. A move to use easier calving bulls facilitated this move.

A bay of that is then used to store straw so that it is conveniently located next to where it's required. It took a while to end up with this system but it frees up a lot of time and knocked a lot of rushing around out of what is a busy time on farm.

The heifers are the main group that go to the straw shed.

It's mainly the heifers closest to calving that go there, but they're often joined by any heifer that was a bit flighty. Thankfully those are thinner on the ground this year. For whatever reason, that house seems to have a settling effect on them. Maybe because there is more interaction with me in terms of bedding or feeding or maybe they just like the sound of the radio.

OUT & ABOUT IN WEST CORK



The organisers of the Drimoleague Cheval ride making a cheque presentation to Dr Jason Van Der Velde at West Cork Rapid response in Ballinascarthy.

FARMING

A West Cork Farming Life: Proinnsias Creedon, Barrathanaknock, Clondrohid, Macroom

Interview by Tommy Moyles

The farm of Proinnsias Creedon, Clondrohid, is one of a number of Teagasc Signpost programme demonstration farms located around the country. His farm is one of three Future Beef farms in the Teagasc Cork west region.

Describe your farm?

I run a dairy calf-to-beef system on just over 80 acres of variable land with a good bit of rough grazing ground with my wife Máire and sons Ciarán, Aodhán and Diarmuid. My father milked cows here until 2008 and we switched to sucklers then before the move to calves. There's a lot of heavy soils and that's why we prefer to run a heifer beef system on our farm, as they tend to be lighter than bullocks. The farm is in one block and is situated roughly 720ft above sea level and gets an average rainfall of over 1,300mm/year.

You only got involved in calf rearing in recent years... how did that come about?

When Covid struck, the lads were home from school all the time and they wanted to get a few calves. We eventually bought 20 calves in June 2020. In 2021, we bought 32 calves in March, which went well for us and, in 2022 we bought 44 in March and April. A few were bought on farm and the rest from the marts in Bandon and Macroom. In April 22, we bought whitehead heifers that did very well for us, so I got in contact with the farmer who bred them and bought whitehead heifer calves from him and yearling heifers. We bought 55 last year, of those 31 were Angus heifers from within the parish and I've agreed to buy from those two farmers this year. They want a strong calf to sell and that suits us too, so I suppose you could say I've all the calves bought for this year, I'm just waiting for them to be born.

How have you found the switch from sucklers to dairy calf to beef?

It's been an all-merciful learning process. We were used to having bucket-reared calves

when we had dairy cows but it's different when you buy in the calves compared to rearing your own. You'd know the form of every calf from the very start but that isn't there with this system and, I suppose you have to get to know the calves and their behaviours. Like in the first batch of calves we had, there were two slow drinkers. It took us a few days to work that out and we fed them separately after. Little observations like that help to avoid sick calves and we have very little antibiotic use.

How did you deal with the difficult weather in 2023?

Last year we had planned to pull ration from the calves diet in July but when the weather broke, we ended up having to feed right through the summer. There were times when we had to make straw available to them in a round feeder at grass too because all the rain meant the dry matter of the grass was too low and they weren't getting enough fibre. Demand for straw dropped when they went into fields with strong grass.

You work off farm... does that mean you have to be more organised or how do you manage?

I work full-time off the farm as a secondary school teacher and it's an hour's commute to work so we have a system in place. Calves need a set routine so they're fed at 9am in the morning and 5.30pm in the evening and the calves have access to water, ration and straw all the time. My wife Máire is at home full-time and only for that we probably wouldn't manage this system. She feeds and checks them and the older heifers in the morning and I do the feeding in the evening. We have a whiteboard in all the cattle houses so we write a tag number on it if any animal is off form, or if there's something to watch out for.

Last year we invested in a milk cart for mixing the milk and we have a water heater. The cart holds 160 litres and it mixes and pumps out the milk into the feeders.

We built a new slatted shed for the older heifers in March 2023 and there's a meal bin outside that and one outside the calf house. That saves a lot of time. Before that house was built yard work took two hours every evening and now it's 45 minutes. If we have no silage to put out and just ration, it takes 40 minutes at a handy pace or it

could take an hour if I have to put silage on my own.

As February gets underway what's happening on your farm?

There are heifers being fattened for factory. We sold eight in the first week of January, and I hope to have a few more go in a month. The big job now is getting the calf houses ready to buy in the dairy beef calves. We applied for a TAMS (Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme) grant for a new crush and handling facilities near the shed and for a new roller door for one of the sheds too.

Do you enjoy farming?

Yes, I do. I like working outside; it's obviously a change from my full-time job. I like working with cattle, seeing them grow and develop from the young calves we buy in at three-quarter-weeks-of-age to the 22 or 23-month-old cattle we finish. Every day is a new day. Some days are more challenging than others, after all, no one likes working outside in stormy or freezing conditions, but then those days are the days when people say that a lovely beef stew would be just the thing to warm them up, so somebody has to go and feed the animals.

I like the challenge of trying to improve the farm with new research and new technologies. I enjoy blending that with the best of old ways to improve the farm and the land for future generations. I enjoy working with the figures that come with all the science behind grass growing and beef production.



The Creedon family, from left, Aodhán, Máire, Proinnsias, Ciarán and Diarmuid in the front. The Creedons are participants on the Teagasc signpost programme and run a dairy calf to beef farm near Carrigadrohid.



HSA focusing on livestock safety ahead of calving season

The Health and Safety Authority began a two-week farm safety inspection campaign on January 22 with a focus on the safe management of livestock during calving season when the risk of injury to farmers increases significantly.

In the last five years, 80 people have lost their lives in farm related work activity in Ireland. Of these fatalities, 18 involved working with livestock. In 2023 there were 16 farming fatalities and five of these involved livestock.

According to Pat Griffin, Senior Inspector with the Health and Safety Authority; "The Agriculture sector can be a hazardous working environment and

working with livestock continues to be a significant trigger in work-related fatalities on Irish farms. Farmers should review the risks, ensuring appropriate controls for safety are in place. Farmers should also monitor and manage their fatigue and stress levels at this time of year. These steps can prevent serious injury and even death."

Key questions to ask whilst working with livestock:

- Is there a plan in place to minimise the risk of attack?
- Has an adequate physical barrier been established between the farmer and the freshly calved cow when tagging, treating, and handling calves?
- Is there adequate lighting in

the yard and farm buildings?

- Do you need help? Are the extra resources trained and experienced?
 - Are handling facilities including calving boxes adequate for your herd size?
 - Are you wearing arm length gloves and washable protective clothing and boots to avoid zoonotic infections during calving?
 - Are facilities and procedures adequate for loading and unloading animals?
- Many farmers suffer serious or fatal injuries while attending cows at calving time. Work practices such as taking a newborn calf from a cow, hand milking, navel dipping, and stomach tubing pose a risk of injury.

Pat Griffin continued "Never turn your back on cows with newborn calves. The cow may perceive you as a threat and attack. We know that long hours and prolonged night work increases the risk of accidents during this busy time due to fatigue. We advise that if you are fatigued, you should seek assistance and get more rest. We encourage farmers to read our guidance and put preventative control measures in place to ensure safety on their farms during this calving season."

To avail of more advice and guidance material in relation to livestock and many other farm safety hazards visit the HSA website at www.hsa.ie.

SPORT

Jujitsu brothers hoping to bring gold back to West Cork

With its origins in Japan, jiu-jitsu is one of the essential martial arts disciplines in Mixed Martial Arts (MMA). **Matthew Hurley** is surprised to find there is not one but two jiu-jitsu clubs in West Cork, with the Bandon club already boasting two superstars, brothers Shane Carmody (18) and Stuart Carmody (17), who are aiming for gold at the World Jiu-Jitsu Championships later this year in Las Vegas.

Like any siblings, these jiu-jitsu brothers are fiercely competitive with each other, a factor they say has helped them to thrive in the sport. Between them the Carmody's share fierce dedication and ambition and have taken home more than 50 gold medals combined in the past year, an incredible achievement.

Shane recently took quad gold in the Irish Open in Dublin and then went on to place fourth in the Abu Dhabi World Championships. Stuart placed second in the IBJJF worlds held in Long Beach California and achieved double gold in the IBJJF European Championships held in Rome. The two are the best jiu-jitsu fighters to come out of the West Cork region.

"You always have someone there with you, driving you on, so it really helps with progression," shares Shane. "Every single day, it pushes you to be better."

While happy with the headway they're making, the brothers are pushing ahead hard and hoping to take more major wins this year in the World Championships in Las Vegas bringing gold home to Cork, as well as other titles like the European and Brazilian nationals.

"Fingers crossed," says Shane. "We're going to Brazil in the springtime to compete at the Brazilian National. From there, we're looking to head to California for the Worlds."

While taekwondo was their family sport, Shane and Stuart's introduction to jiu-jitsu came through older brother Sean who was interested in a career in MMA.

"For MMA, you need jujitsu. Sean started in 2019 and we got involved in the sport later that year. We've been doing jiu-jitsu ever since," says Stuart. Despite the fact that taekwondo is an Olympic Sport and one that arguably garners more media attention, the Carmody's sights became firmly focused on jiu-jitsu.

"I just prefer jiu-jitsu to be honest," admits Shane. "With jiu-jitsu, you can take someone down, you can control them, much like in UFC. You can see how effective the grappling side of the art is. For me, it was more of an effective sport."

The brothers are thankful for the support around them, such as coaches, in particular Irisney Lima, who has been behind them every step of the way.

"When I started in MMA, Stewart Dollery was a huge



Shane Carmody



Stuart Carmody

help to me but when I switched to jujitsu, it was at Gym Galera," Shane says "Coach Irisney Lima has been with me day in and day out. We train together, we work together. A lot of my success in the sport comes from him. On the odd occasion, I train with Sean Livingston and Liam Beechnor too."

Jiu-jitsu is an essential discipline of MMA, which is why the brothers are keen on it.

"The second you hit the ground in MMA, all you're doing is jiu-jitsu. Of course there are many aspects like the striking or the takedowns in MMA, but it is all jiu-jitsu from there."

The Carmody's hope is that one day jiu-jitsu will be up there with the popularity of GAA, rugby, soccer and athletics in West Cork.

"My hope is that jiu-jitsu will be the number one sport in Bandon in future years," says Shane.

At the moment, there are only two jiu-jitsu clubs in West Cork.

"Most clubs have a number of locations around West Cork so there is a lot of work that can be done on this."

While happy with his performance in jiu-jitsu, Shane's aspirations are in MMA and he is already making strides. "Jiu-jitsu is vital for development in MMA," he explains. Shane recently had his MMA debut at Chaos Fighting Championship where he won his fight by unanimous decision.

With his sights set on a world champion title by the end of 2024, he's looking to further his MMA career, before advancing towards UFC.

"Obviously, that is a long road ahead so we'll see where that goes," he says.

Stuart is keeping his toes on the jiu-jitsu mat before possibly putting his energy into a coaching career.

"I'd hope it will be possible to one day become a black belt world champion in Brazilian jiu-jitsu and to start running my own school, a gym with



locations around West Cork," he says enthusiastically.

Right now these incredible athletes are covering most of their own expenses so any sponsorship to get them to the World Championships in Las Vegas and to train in Brazil next year would be greatly received and well deserved by their impressive track record.

A fundraising pub quiz and raffle will take place in the Munster Arms in Bandon on February 17. Raffle and quiz tickets can be bought for €5 from Studio Galera or by emailing getgoldforcork@gmail.com.

Search for 'Get Gold for Cork' on [gofundme.com](https://www.gofundme.com) to donate.

OUT & ABOUT IN WEST CORK



From left to right, Sean Collins, Gerry Hegarty, Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan and Jimmy Sheehy, who meet recently at Aughadown to discuss the Ilen Rovers Sports Capital Grant application.

Clonakilty Parkrun celebrates 10 years

Clonakilty Parkrun is a free, fun and friendly weekly 5k community event that will celebrate 10 years on Saturday Feb 3. The run takes place at 9:30am every Saturday morning at Clonakilty Showgrounds with the support of the Clonakilty Agricultural Show Committee.

Over the past decade Clonakilty Parkrun has held over 400 runs, which is a testament to its continued success. This free 5k event is suitable for all ages and all abilities. Volunteer Niamh Ryan says, "we have people who walk it every week, others who fly around the course and everyone in between. Everyone is welcome and everyone feels a sense of satisfaction when finished." Parkrun is positive, welcoming and inclusive and most importantly, there is no time limit.

It is clear that those involved with running have a psychological profile different from non-runners. For instance, across a range of the studies runners reported lower depression, anxiety and stress symptoms, and higher mood and vitality compared to non-runners.

Whether you are just trying to be more active, recovering from injury or a more serious runner, why not give it a go. To register and for further details see www.parkrun.ie/clonakilty

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Dear Sacred Heart of Jesus In the past I have asked for many favours. This time I ask for this special one(mention favour). Take it Dear Heart Of Jesus and place it within your own broken heart where your Father sees it. Then in his merciful eyes it will be your favour not mine. Amen. Say the above prayer for 3 days, promise publication and favour will be granted no matter how impossible. Never known to fail. D.N.

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MIRACULOUS PRAYER
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ST. JUDE'S NOVENA
May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be adored, glorified, loved and revered throughout the whole world now and forever. Sacred Heart of Jesus pray for us. St. Jude worker of miracles pray for us. St. Jude, helper of the hopeless pray for us. Say this prayer nine times daily and by the end of the 8th day, your prayers will be answered. Say it for nine days. It has never been known to fail. Publication must be promised. Thanks St. Jude. M.M.B.

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MIRACULOUS PRAYER
Dear Sacred Heart of Jesus In the past I have asked for many favours. This time I ask for this special one(mention favour). Take it Dear Heart Of Jesus and place it within your own broken heart where your Father sees it. Then in his merciful eyes it will be your favour not mine. Amen. Say the above prayer for 3 days, promise publication and favour will be granted no matter how impossible. Never known to fail. T.McC.

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