



New Libraries for Durrow and Abbeyleix

Durrow Library



On 10th June, 2008, Irish author Deirdre Purcell officially opened the new library in Durrow's renovated Courthouse.

The building is a welcome addition to the town as it will also act as a meeting place for community groups when the library is closed.

Services now include internet and photocopying facilities and the library hosts a fabulous new selection of adult and juvenile books, all of which are proving very popular with the local community.

enjoyed discovering the many features of the library, including the eye-catching spiral staircase (pictured above) and children's story-telling area. The library boasts three storeys filled with newly expanded book stock along with 13 new computers providing for public internet access. It comprises of an area of 380 m2 and is open to the public for a total of 39 hours per week; including two late evenings and Saturday opening. As of the 31st July, 2008, 11,000 people had visited the library, while the number of books and other items issued to the public amounted to 8,370 for the same period.

Minister Gormley expressed his confidence in the library service as an extremely important part of community life, a statement which is endorsed by the fact that there are already over 900 registered members using the library. This project has made an important contribution to the architectural and civic heritage of Abbeyleix and has the capacity to operate as a significant local amenity to local residents for many years to come. For further information contact Laura Brett at (057) 8730020

Abbeyleix Library

The new public library in Abbeyleix was officially opened by Minister for Environment, Heritage & Local Government, John Gormley T.D. on 11th June, 2008. The refurbished library, designed by de Blacam & Meagher Architects, is situated in the renovated Market House which was built in 1836 by Viscount John de Vesci. A large number of people attended the opening reception and



Durrow Opening Hours

Mon: 1.00 p.m. – 4pm & 6.00 p.m – 8.00 p.m.
Wed: 1.00 p.m. – 4pm & 6.00 p.m – 8.00 p.m.
Fri: 10.30 a.m. – 12.30 p.m.
Sat: 11.00 a.m. – 1.00 p.m.

Abbeyleix Opening Hours

Tues: 10.00 a.m. – 7.30 p.m.
Wed: 10.00 a.m. – 5.00 p.m.
Thurs: 10.00 a.m. – 7.30 p.m.
Fri: 10.00 a.m. – 5.00 p.m.
Sat: 10.00 a.m. – 4.00 p.m.



Message from the Cathaoirleach

As Cathaoirleach of Laois County Council, I am pleased to be associated with the 2008 edition of the 'Our County' newsletter.

Laois County Council continues to provide leadership in the promotion and development of the social, economic and cultural life of the county and this

newsletter provides an opportunity to update the people of the county on the progress being made on social and infrastructural projects.

The Council provides a wide range of services for the benefit of all the citizens of the county and I would like to acknowledge the hard work of my fellow elected members and all the staff in delivering these services.

In carrying out its functions, the goal of the Council is to provide services to the highest standards for all of the people in County Laois and I look forward to working towards achieving this in co-operation with the County Manager and his staff and my fellow Councillors.

I hope you enjoy reading this newsletter and if you want to get more information on the Council or its services, please log on to our website at www.laois.ie.

Cllr Tom Jacob,
Cathaoirleach of Laois County Council

Cllr Tom Jacob was elected as Cathaoirleach of Laois County Council at the Annual General Meeting of Laois County Council held on 30th June, 2008 and Cllr John Bonham was elected Leas-Cathaoirleach.

Also at their June meetings, Cllr Willie Aird was elected as Mayor of Portlaoise Town Council, Cllr Brian Stanley was elected Deputy Mayor and in Mountmellick Town Council, Cllr Denis O'Meara was elected Cathaoirleach and Cllr Joe Melia was elected Leas-Cathaoirleach.

Message from the County Manager



Once again, I am delighted to welcome the publication of 'Our County' which provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the progress made by Laois County Council over the past year. Significant progress has been made on major infrastructural projects such as the M7/M8, Portlaoise Main Drainage Scheme, Portlaoise Orbital Route, the Civic Plaza and other projects.

Furthermore, the Council has contributed very positively to the quality of life of our citizens through the successful completion of two major leisure complexes in Portarlington and Portlaoise and the continuation of the playground programme. In addition, new libraries have been completed in Durrus and Abbeyleix with a further project due to commence in Mountmellick. The Council has pursued a citizen-centred approach to services and this has resulted in new area offices in population centres such as Graiguecullen and Portarlington. Great strides have been made in the whole area of social inclusion with many new initiatives. Major progress has also been achieved in tourism with events such as the World Fleadh, Electric Picnic, Gordon Bennett Rally, Rose of Tralee Regional Finals and other festivals. The Council is also seeking to stimulate indigenous industry through the provision of enterprise centres and opportunity sites at various locations in the County.

I wish to thank the elected members of the Council for their ongoing support and co-operation. I also want to thank all the Council staff for their dedication and commitment to improving the services we provide. Finally, I wish to acknowledge the valuable work of the business and community sectors and to assure everyone of our ongoing support to improve and develop County Laois over the coming years.

We hope you enjoy this publication of 'Our County' and the information it provides.

Peter Carey
County Manager

Laois County Council - Building Sustainable Communities

Errill

Housing Developments

The Cathaoirleach of Laois County Council, Cllr John Moran officially opened a new development in Errill Village known as St. Kierans on 23rd June, 2008. This project, which consists of 10 social houses and 4 affordable houses and cost €1.98 million, is a great advancement for the community of Errill. The contract for this scheme was signed on 23rd December, 2005 and work commenced shortly thereafter.



Knockmay

On 26th May, 2008, contracts were signed with Carroll O'Keeffe Builders for Phase I of Knockmay Regeneration, designed by Evelyn Duff Architects.

This phase will see an extensive refurbishment of Oakleaf Place Housing Estate being carried out and the contract price is over €5 million.

Phase II of this project will consist of a community building and when finished will comprise a community centre, childcare facility and meeting rooms.

It is intended to be a one stop shop for social and community services for the wider community.

Laois International Golf Challenge in Association with 4 Aces Wholesale

The Laois International Golf Challenge 2008 took place from 19th to 22nd May. The Challenge was open to all golfers affiliated to a club or with a GUI handicap (or equivalent). This year, the Laois International Golf Challenge attracted golfers and golfing societies from Ireland, Northern Ireland, England, Wales and Sweden. The Challenge was run on a four ball, betterball basis and guaranteed four days of golf with competitions and prizes each day. The best accumulated scores over the first three days were entered into the final at the Seve Ballesteros designed Heritage course at Killenard, County Laois (20 teams). Those who did not make it to the final played a separate competition on the final day in Portarlington Golf Club.

Along with Laois County Council, this year's new sponsor was 4 Aces Wholesale. The committee also drew on the support of Fáilte Ireland East and Midlands Region for their assistance in promoting this event, which was launched on March 4th 2008 in The Club House at The Heritage Hotel, Killenard. The launch was attended by Cathaoirleach of Laois County Council, Cllr John Moran, County Manager Peter Carey, Carl McGinty, Golf Editor, Irish Independent and sponsors 4 Aces Wholesale.



The overall winners of the 2008 event were locals Kenneth Farrell & Damien Delaney of Mountrath Golf Club (pictured above). Next year's event is already in planning stages and information is available through the clubs, the websites and from Laois County Council's Tourism Officer.

Gordon Bennett Classic Car Run 2008

The 5th Annual Gordon Bennett Classic Car Run commemorating the 1903 Road Race took place over the June Bank Holiday this year in fantastic sunshine. The event was launched by Cllr Brian Stanley, Leas Cathaoirleach Laois County Council, on 30th May at a Civic Reception in Áras an Chontae. The Gordon Bennett Route commemorates the biggest Sporting Event of the time in Ireland and runs through Counties Laois, Carlow and Kildare. It is of great historical importance and a landmark in motor racing in Ireland. It is an extremely valuable tourism attraction in its own right and links the numerous tourism and heritage sites which are dotted along the route. The Route was signposted and an accompanying guide published which was launched last year by the then Minister for Tourism, Mr. John O' Donoghue. This year saw the launch of a new driving map for visitors, which the committee hope will be of great assistance to everyone and will help to promote the route.

Rose of Tralee Regional Finals, Portlaoise, June 2008

Six of this year's Irish contestants for the 2008 International Rose of Tralee were selected at a glamorous event at the Portlaoise Heritage Hotel. For only the second time, the Regional Finals of the Rose of Tralee were held outside the Kingdom, and Laois County Council was delighted to be associated with this prestigious event.

During the 5 day event, Laois County Council's Tourism Officer, Frances Roche, organised tours to local hospitals, libraries, tourist attractions and gave the Roses time to meet and greet with all their

well wishers. A number of local pubs officially 'twinned' with the Roses which gave everyone a base for the families and friends. There was also a Reception held at Áras an Chontae where Cathaoirleach Cllr John Moran welcomed the Roses and the festival to County Laois. Local girl, Heather Fogarty, serenaded the gathered guests while The Laois School of Music played a special arrangement of 'The Rose of Tralee'. The highlight of the event for a lot of the girls seemed to be the Classic & Vintage Car Parade on Saturday which was organized with the Gordon Bennett Classic Car and Ballinakill Classic Car Associations.



Rose of Tralee contestants at a reception held at Áras an Chontae

The Slieve Bloom Signage Project

Late in 2007, a review of tourism signage in the Slieve Blooms was undertaken by Laois County Council and Offaly County Council with funding provided by Fáilte Ireland under the Innovation Fund. This project has now been completed and new signage on the routes from 10 outer towns, Castletown, Kilcormac, Mountmellick, Borris-in-Ossory, Mountrath, Portlaoise, Tullamore, Pike of Rushall, Roscrea and Birr has been installed. Nine inner villages were identified under the review and information boards identifying walks, accommodation and facilities were placed in Rosenallis, Clonastee, Kinnity, Clareen, Cadamstown, Camross, Ballaghmore and Ballybrittas.

World Fleadh 2008

The World Fleadh is a celebration of Irish & Celtic Music which took place over the August Bank Holiday weekend and attracted up to 35,000 visitors to Portlaoise during the five day event. There were three main music venues - the Festival Dome, the Dunamais Arts Centre and the Sky Venue, with session trails throughout the pubs in town. Musical highlights of the 2008 programme included Sharon Shannon, Mundy, Damien Dempsey, Jack L, Shane McGowan, The Hothouse Flowers, Frankie Gavin, Lunasa, Grada and the Kilfenora Ceili Band. Sunday night played host to Hibernian Rhapsody, a musical extravaganza, fronted by Frankie Gavin with guest artists Brian Kennedy, Moya Brennan and Anthony Kearns.

The World Fleadh is a family event with street entertainment and amusements on Fitzmaurice Place, a French Market, kiddie's activity area, two town stages with free concerts each day, a number of dance and music workshops and this year introduced the first ever Pig Race, held in aid of the Cuisle Centre.



Portlaoise Leisure Centre



Portlaoise Leisure Centre opened to the public in December, 2007. The Leisure Centre won the Award for the Best Recreational Facility at the annual LAMA Awards held in January, 2008

Facilities include:

- 25m deck level pool
- Deck level learner pool
- Café
- Changing village
- Group changing rooms
- Fully equipped gymnasium including cardiovascular and resistance equipment
- Multi-purpose classes studio / meeting room

Adjacent to the leisure centre are the following:

- Outdoor running track
- Full size soccer pitch
- 7-a-side soccer pitches
- Outdoor children's playground
- Picnic tables and seating

Mark Roberts is the manager of Portlaoise Leisure Centre. Mark will be happy to answer any queries you may have in relation to the centre, pricing, membership options, accessibility, employment opportunities etc.

Enquiries to:

Mark Roberts, Manager,
Portlaoise Leisure Centre,
Moneyballytyrrell, Portlaoise
Phone: (057) 8681200 / (086) 0436785

Email: info@portlaoiseleisurecentre.ie

Sales Manager: Mark Walsh (086) 0436786

Further information is available on www.laois.ie or
www.portlaoiseleisurecentre.ie

Portarlington Leisure Centre



Portarlington Leisure Centre opened to the public in December, 2007.

Facilities include:

- 25m x 9.2m deck level pool
- 7m x 6m deck level learner pool
- Café
- Changing Village
- 2 group changing rooms
- Fully equipped gymnasium including cardiovascular and resistance equipment
- Multi purpose Classes Studio / Meeting Room.

Adjacent to the leisure centre are the following:

- Portarlington Community Centre including Sportshall
- Portarlington Town Park with jogging/walking trail
- Outdoor children's playground
- Picnic tables and seating

The River Barrow runs along the town park and behind the Leisure centre and provides a fantastic viewpoint from the gymnasium.

Sean Quirke is the manager of Portarlington Leisure Centre and Sean will be happy to answer any queries you may have in relation to the centre, pricing, membership options, accessibility, employment opportunities etc.

Enquiries to:

Sean Quirke, Manager,
Portarlington Leisure Centre,
Link Road, Portarlington, Co. Laois.
Phone: (57) 8645800

Email: info@portarlingtonleisurecentre.ie

Further information is available on www.laois.ie or
www.portarlingtonleisurecentre.ie

Laos County Council honours Special Olympics Ireland

Special Olympics Ireland were honoured at a Civic Reception in Áras an Chontae on 18th June, 2008, hosted by An Cathaoirleach, Cllr John Moran, to mark the occasion of their 30th Anniversary.

The event was attended by local Special Olympics athletes and volunteers from the Laois area, representatives from Laois County Council, local business people and many other supporters.

The athletes, accompanied by a member of An Garda Síochána, entered Áras an Chontae behind the Special Olympics Torch, which was then presented to An Cathaoirleach Cllr John Moran.

The mission of Special Olympics Ireland is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports, for children and adults with a learning disability. This provides continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendships with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community. Laois County Council are proud to be associated with the celebrations to mark the 30th Anniversary of Special Olympics Ireland.



Cathaoirleach Cllr John Moran accepts the Special Olympics Torch on behalf of Laois County Council

Voting.....It's the only way to have your say!!

Local and European elections are scheduled for 2009. In order to vote in these elections, you need to ensure that you are included on the Register of Electors.

The Live Register of Electors 2008/2009 is published and is available for inspection at Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise or at your local library, post office, courthouse or garda station.

You can also check if you are included on the Live Register of Electors by logging on to www.checktheregister.ie and click on Laois County Council.

The Register of Electors comprises four categories of electors: Presidential Elector, Dáil elector, European elector and Local Government elector. A person's citizenship determines their category and the type of elections at which they may vote as in the table below:

Citizenship	Type of election at which eligible to vote
Irish Citizens	All elections and referenda
British Citizens	Dáil, European and Local Government elections
Other EU Citizens	European and Local Government elections
Non-EU Citizens	Local Government elections only

Remember, if you're not registered, you can't vote.

The Draft Register of Electors 2009 - 2010 is now being prepared and will be published on 1st November, 2008. If you are not currently on the Register and wish to be included on the Draft Register of Electors 2009 - 2010, you must complete an application form in order to be added to the Draft Register and indicate whether or not you wish to have your name included in the Edited Register*.

To qualify for inclusion in the Register, you must:

- Be 18 years of age or reach 18 years of age by the 15th February, 2009
- Be ordinarily resident on the 1st September, 2008, at the address at which you wish to be registered
- Ensure that you are not registered as an elector at any other address.



Postal/Special Voting

Special arrangements apply in the case of the following:

- Electors who are ordinarily resident in a hospital or nursing home.
- Electors who have a physical illness or physical disability and who wish to vote from home.
- Electors who may not be able to attend a Polling Station in person in order to cast their vote due to circumstances of occupation/education.

Note: you must re-apply each year if you wish to be included on the Special Voters List.

All application forms for the Register can be obtained from the Corporate Affairs Department, Laois County Council at (057) 8664247 or (057) 8664105, by email request to register@laoiscoco.ie or downloaded from our website www.laois.ie. They are also available in your local Post Office, Garda Station or Library.

* *Edited Register* - contains the names and addresses of persons whose details can be used for a purpose other than an electoral or other statutory purpose e.g. for direct marketing uses by commercial or other organisations.

New Area Office in Graiguecullen

On 16th May, 2008, the new Graiguecullen Area Office was officially opened by Cllr John Moran, Cathaoirleach of Laois County Council. The new office, located at Sleaty Road, Graiguecullen, is open on Wednesdays and Thursdays from 9.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. and 2.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m. (Tel: (059) 9165960).

The following services are available:

Water Services: Applications for Well Grants, Water Connections, Sewerage Connections. Reports of water leaks, sewerage blockages, disruption to water supply.

Roads: Road Opening Licences. Reports of potholes, flooding, general road/footpath repairs.

There is also an On-Line Access facility available in the Area Office. The Area Office provides services to the Council's 3,500 customers in Graiguecullen and follows major investment and a significant amount of work carried out in the Graiguecullen area over the last year.



Elected Representatives, Staff and Guests at the official opening of the Graiguecullen Area Office.

The Portarlington Area Office, located in the Community Centre adjacent to the Portarlington Leisure Centre, is open to the public on Fridays from 9.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. and from 2.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m. The Area Office offers a range of services including on-line payment facilities, enquiry services, access to application forms and engineering clinics.

Council Meeting held at Castle Durrow

As part of the Durrow Tri-Centenary celebrations, President Mary McAleese attended Castle Durrow on 31st March, 2008. To mark the occasion, the March monthly meeting of Laois County Council was held in Castle Durrow.

The Members of the Council also attended a formal reception hosted by the Durrow Development Forum.

In 2008, Durrow 300 celebrates three hundred years of growth and development from its inception as an estate town in 1708 into the bustling urban centre it is today.

As part of the celebrations, an Arts Festival was held in Durrow for the first time ever this year. From 6th to 14th September, the town of Durrow hosted a range of arts activities from painting exhibitions, comedy shows, music and book launches as well as adult and children's workshops.



Elected Members and Staff of Laois County Council pictured with President Mary McAleese at Castle Durrow in March, 2008.

Explore and Celebrate the Heritage of Laois!

More is being discovered about the heritage of County Laois every year. Under the auspices of the Laois Heritage Plan and with support from the Heritage Council, surveys have been carried out on a wide range of aspects of our heritage, from wildlife habitats and bats to thatched houses, mills and bridges.

The information gathered through these surveys will help to inform decisions about the protection and management of the heritage of Laois in the future. One of the main aims of the Laois Heritage Plan 2007 - 2011 is to raise awareness of the heritage of the county and to promote enjoyment of this heritage by residents and visitors alike. Through surveys like the ones listed here and those planned for future years, we hope to bring the heritage of Laois to life for all.



Thatched house in Jamestown, an important element of our built heritage

Surveys carried out in recent years

- Bridges
- Birds and bats using Slieve Bloom bridges
- Habitats
- Hedgerows
- Bats in Laois County Council properties
- Graveyards
- Architectural heritage of Portlaoise
- Mills
- Thatched buildings
- Industrial heritage
- Eskers
- Traditional Crafts
- Mountmellick Canal

Reports on all of these surveys are available free of charge from:

**The Heritage Office,
Laois County Council,
Telephone: (057) 867 4348
E-mail: ccasey@laoiscoco.ie
Web: www.laois.ie/heritage.**

Copies are also available in all branch libraries.

Celebrating Laois Heritage

The Heritage Office of Laois County Council is holding a conference on the theme 'Celebrating Laois Heritage', on 15th November 2008, at Mountmellick Museum. The conference aims to bring together all those with an interest in the heritage of County Laois, to explore and celebrate the rich wealth of built, natural and cultural heritage of the county.

Speakers at the conference will present the results of the recent research and surveys on the built, natural and cultural heritage of Laois, including topics as diverse as the populations of bats in the county, the cultural heritage of graveyards, habitats in the Killeshin area and research into the architectural heritage of Portlaoise.

Catherine Casey, Heritage Officer with Laois County Council, said – 'This conference is a great opportunity for the people of Laois to come together and learn more about the County's heritage, to share views, and to discuss issues with a range of heritage specialists'. The conference will also provide the opportunity to discuss progress with the Heritage Plan for County Laois, which is now in its second year.

There is no charge for the conference, but places will be limited. Those interested are advised to book early to avoid disappointment.

Further information and are available from :

**Catherine Casey,
The Heritage Office,
Laois County Council,
Telephone: (057) 867 4348
E-mail: ccasey@laoiscoco.ie
Web: www.laois.ie/heritage.**



Exploring and recording the natural heritage of Laois

Pride of Place: Judgement Day for Portlaoise Parish Centre & Mountmellick Voluntary Housing Association

Community pride was very much in evidence in Portlaoise and Mountmellick on 18th June 2008, as the judging team for the All-Ireland Pride of Place Competition visited Laois. This year, the Pride of Place competition had three new categories, Services for the Elderly, Community Facility, and Care for the Environment. Defined as single issue categories, Portlaoise Parish Centre represented Laois in the Community Facility category, while Mountmellick Voluntary Housing Association represented Laois in the Services for the Elderly category.

Pride of Place is an initiative of Co-operation Ireland, which aims to recognise the efforts of local people to create pride in their area and to celebrate the vital contribution that community groups make to society. The competition focuses on people coming together to shape, enhance and enjoy all that is good about their area. The day started in the Parish Centre, Portlaoise, where the judges, Ms. Anne Anderson Porter and Mr. John Quinlivan were greeted by a student string quartet from the Laois School of Music as they arrived in the centre. A presentation was made by Fr. John Byrne, Parish Priest in Portlaoise and Mr. Declan Kelly, manager of the parish centre, which outlined the background, construction and facilities that are currently available in the centre.



*Declan Kelly, Anne Anderson Porter,
Fr John Byrne, John Quinlivan*

Posters and displays around the hall showcased the work of the many groups who currently use or have office space in the centre, including the Laois Support Services against Domestic Abuse, Laois Traveller Action Group and Laois County Childcare Committee.

In the afternoon the judging team visited Mountmellick to see the work of Mountmellick Voluntary Housing Association. A presentation was made by Francis O' Loughlin, John Carroll, Seamus Sexton, and Sr. Mary Caulfield, on the background, development, and cost of building the 24 unit housing scheme and Community Centre at Wolfe Tone Court, Mountmellick.



*The judges pictured with members of the
Mountmellick Voluntary Housing Association*

The Cathoirlach of Laois County Council, Cllr John Moran, and County Manager, Mr Peter Carey both acknowledged the excellent work carried out by both groups and wished them every success in the competition. The results of the all-island competition will be announced by Co-operation Ireland at a special gala event in Waterford in November, 2008.

**BEST OF LUCK TO PORTLAOISE PARISH CENTRE AND
MOUNTMELICK VOLUNTARY HOUSING ASSOCIATION.**

Twinning News

In 2007, Laois County Council and the County Commissioners of Williamson County, Tennessee, both agreed to explore the possibilities of a twinning arrangement between the two Counties. Exploratory visits were arranged and in March, 2007, a delegation from Laois visited the city of Franklin, Williamson County and representatives from Franklin visited Laois in July. This opportunity first arose as a result of the O' More – Ireland Summer College Programme in Abbeyleix, led by Ms Marianne Moloney, Mr Kevin O' Brien and Dr Mark Hilliard of the O' More College of Design in Abbeyleix, who have held this summer student programme in Abbeyleix for the past four years.

Both Laois County Council and Williamson County Commissioners formally agreed to the twinning process late in 2007 and 7th March, 2008, saw the historic signing of the twinning agreement between County Laois and Franklin, Williamson County, Tennessee. Presentations were made by the visiting delegation to the Mayor of Franklin, Mr John Schroer, Mayor of Williamson, Mr Rogers Anderson, Dr Mark Hilliard, O'More College and to local County Commissioner Cheryl Wilson. Also attending the signing ceremony on behalf of County Laois, were newly elected President of the Laois Chamber of Commerce, Mr Pat Enright, CEO of Laois VEC, Ms Anne O Keffe, representatives of local areas and elected County Councillors. The delegation then traveled to Washington where they met with Mr John Bruton, EU Commissioner to the US.

Since the signing, Laois County Council have been delighted to welcome a number of people from Williamson County, Tennessee, including the Chairman of the Sister Cities, Doug Sharp, Mayor of Franklin John Schroer, Marketing Director Convention Centre and Visitors Bureau, Kellye Murphy and the annual visit of the O'More School of Design, Franklin.

A lot of progress has been made since March including an agreement of Laois VEC to initiate a programme of exchanges of students and teachers with O'More School, the Portlaoise Marching Band has been invited to march in the Veterans Day Parade in November and a luncheon was held for local tour operators to promote travelling to Franklin. During a visit by Kellye Murphy, a new Tourism Agreement was signed and the flag of Williamson County and the USA were presented, along with the best wishes of County Commissioner Cheryl Wilson.



*Mr John Bruton, EU Commissioner to the US. with
County Councillors and County Manager, Peter Carey*

Visit of French Musicians

Fifty French musicians from Colouneix-Chamiers visited Portlaoise from Friday, 27th June to Monday, 7th July and received a C ad M ile F ailte from the local community. Many of the delegation were musicians and stayed with host families for the duration, mainly from The Laois School of Music. Portlaoise has been twinned with Colouneix-Chamiers, in the Dordogne region in the South of France, since 1995.

Lucky Thirteen rather than the Dirty Dozen!

The 10 week Litter Challenge organised and judged by the Environment Section saw a clean sweep across the county as 21 towns and villages took on the fight against litter. Once a week, every week, these areas were judged on the presence and/or absence of litter and were awarded marks accordingly. Details of the overall winners, runners up and most improved are listed below:

Category	Town	Large Village	Small Village
Overall Winner	Borris-in-Ossory	Errill	Clough & Pike of Rushall
Overall Runner Up	Durrow & Abbeyleix	Castletown	Luggacurren
Overall Most Improved	Mountrath	Ballyroan	Ratheniska

Other highlights during the competition included 13 litter free designations awarded to very deserving towns and villages including Borris-in-Ossory, Ballacolla, Ballyroan, Castletown, Errill, Timahoe, Clough, Coolrain, Luggacurren, Pike of Rushall, Ratheniska, Shanahoe, Spink (9 being the most in any one week).

We still have our 5 month pilot Community Action Project running in Clonaslee and Ballylynan and both villages have achieved great success. They are scoring over 90% so they are one step closer to achieving litter free status over a more prolonged period. If you live in either of these villages, please get involved – the Tidy Towns group welcome additional volunteers all year round! Full details are available from Environment Awareness Officer, Ann-Marie Kelly email: amkelly@laiscoco.ie or telephone (057) 8674331.

Avoid a sticky situation – Chew it and Bin it!

Laos County Council was selected to participate in the national Gum Litter Taskforce Campaign to change attitudes and behaviour among a minority of gum users who throw chewing gum on the streets rather than disposing of it in a bin. Irresponsibly disposed chewing gum is litter and anyone who throws it on the ground (rather than in a bin) can be fined €150.



Pictured at the recent campaign launch in Lyster Square were staff from the Environment Section, Central Area Office and Portlaoise against Litter who handed out free Stubbi pouches.

Stubbi Pouches

These are reusable, soft, compact pouches that fit neatly into a pocket or bag. They have a dual purpose as users can dispose of cigarette related litter and/or chewing gum in safe and responsible environmentally friendly manner. The pouch contain papers for wrapping chewing gum on the outside, while the inside pouch has a fireproof lining which is used to safely and hygienically extinguish cigarettes, locking in odour



So to avoid the fine—apply for your Free Stubbi today! Contact the Environment Section on (057) 8674322.

In Search of Eco Sleuths in Laois Schools

The Environment Section recently unveiled the 2008-2009 Environment Schools programme which features two new media training programmes specifically for Secondary School students. The Young Environment Reporter Project, in exclusive association with the Laois Nationalist newspaper, will provide students with an opportunity to find out how to research and write a news article which will be printed in the Laois Nationalist while the New Media Institute will assist schools in making a short movie about an environmental issue. Additional projects include the internationally recognised Green Schools Programme as well as our own Tidy Schools and Art from Waste programmes.

Green Fingers E-Magazine Launched

Another first for Laois is the new Green Fingers E-Magazine. The difference between this and other magazines is that it will be available on line for you to read every quarter (Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter) – that way you don't have to worry about recycling it and together we are reducing the amount of waste we produce. Green Fingers will provide information on a variety of waste and environment related topics including campaigns, grants, composting workshops and competitions!

Log onto the Environment Awareness pages on www.laois.ie for full details.

Competition Time – Win a €50 voucher

Summer holidays and weekend breaks are traditionally the time for switching off from work, to relax and unwind. Perhaps you came across a good environmental practice during your travels (e.g. the type of waste/recycling bins you saw, how waste was dealt with in the facility you stayed in or maybe your Hotel or B&B encouraged you to reuse your bathroom towels for the length of your stay rather than having fresh ones every day). The best idea will win a special prize, compliments of the Environment Section!

Send your answer, along with your name, address and contact number to Ann-Marie Kelly, Environment Awareness Officer, Laois County Council, Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise, Co Laois. Alternatively, email: amkelly@laiscoco.ie with these details.

Closing date for entries is Friday, 5th December, 2008.

Dáil na nÓg

Dáil na nÓg is the National Youth Parliament of Ireland and gives young people the opportunity to represent at a national level the views of those under the voting age of 18. The Office of the Minister for Children is responsible for and funds Dáil na nÓg.

It is an annual event where the children and young people of Ireland meet on a national level to discuss issues that are important to them.

Each young person represents their local authority area. It is an opportunity where the views of all Irish children can be heard.

The Dáil na nÓg delegates have the chance to let the decision makers in Government know what they think of issues that affect their daily lives, for example road safety and play facilities.



Dáil na nÓg delegates in Croke Park

Delegates representing their county are elected at Comhairle na nÓg, which is held each year through each Local Authority. Four students from Laois - Marie Callier, Jessica Brennan, Karen Coleman and Fiachra Kavanagh - who were elected at Laois County Council's Comhairle na nÓg in October, 2007, represented Laois at the National Dail na nÓg which will take place on February 15th, 2008, in Croke Park. The themes discussed were Reforming the Educational System and Mental Health.

Civic Plaza at Áras an Chontae

The new Civic Plaza at Áras An Chontae was officially opened by An Taoiseach, Mr Brian Cowen T.D. (then Tánaiste and Minister for Finance), on 21st April, 2008. The Civic Plaza provides an important visual focus at this central pivotal location in the civic and commercial hub of Portlaoise. The Plaza is divided between a green park and an open hard paved civic square with a pedestrian link connecting both elements. The park is a green space suitable for casual every day usage while the formal civic square provides a hard landscaped civic area designed to accommodate open air events such as concerts, meetings and recitals.



The civic space incorporates permanent and semi-permanent canopy structures and computer controlled water jet features. The feature lighting, seating and street furniture create a civic environment which has a visual quality appropriate to both its location and function in the centre of the town.

Significant parking capacity has also been provided in a split level two deck structure with some parking spaces provided utilising the existing ground level, recess ground parking levels and upper deck parking spaces.

The official opening was attended by Elected Representatives, County Council Staff, representatives of the design and construction teams, local Clergy and representatives of Dunnes Stores who donated the land.

Abbeyleix Fire Station

On 22nd April, 2008, the new fire station in Abbeyleix was officially opened by Mr. Tony Killeen T.D., Minister of State for Environment & Energy.

The Minister was greeted by Councillor John Moran, Cathaoirleach of Laois County Council, Members of Laois County Council, Mr. Sean Fleming T.D., County Manager Peter Carey and officials of Laois County Council including John Daly, Director of Services. Martin Collins, Chief Fire Officer, and employees of Laois County Fire & Rescue Service welcomed invited guests including retired fire fighters, families of Abbeyleix Fire Crew and representatives of the Church Authorities while Station Officer, Sonny Tyrrell and the Abbeyleix fire fighters demonstrated their skills.

The new fire station cost €800,492 and was funded by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. This building was designed by Pat Fitzpatrick and constructed by Richard Blake and Company who delivered a building constructed to the highest standards.

Laois County Council is fully committed to the development and upgrading of the Fire & Rescue Service. The role of the Service has changed over the years and the highly trained crews deal not only with fires but other areas such as road traffic accidents, incidents involving dangerous chemicals and major accidents and emergencies and community fire safety. The hard work, commitment and dedication to duty of all our firefighters ensures

a quality service for our community.

Laois County Fire & Rescue Service will continue to provide a valuable and quality service to the community 24 hours a day every day of the year.



Abbeyleix Fire Crew photographed with Chief Fire Officer, Martin Collins, Senior Assistant Chief Fire Officers Declan Power and Enda Kelly and Assistant Chief Fire Officer Shea Brennan.

Arts Office News

Arthouse@Stradbally Artists' Studios

Laois County Council's Arts Department were delighted to receive a grant of €440,000 ACCESS funding towards developing artists' studios in the Courthouse, Stradbally. The development of the Arthouse@Stradbally is the most exciting capital project in the midlands since the inception of the Dunamaise Arts Centre almost ten years ago.

Before and since the opening of the Dunamaise Arts Centre, County Laois has placed itself firmly on the map as a centre of excellence in relation to the arts. Laois County Council is one of the most highly regarded counties for its development work in the arts and the county has certainly benefited from the ground work that has been undertaken over the last 20 years. To proceed with the Arthouse@Stradbally is an obvious development in the artistic landscape of the county. It will be a state of the art facility and such a venue will be in high demand. The Arts Office has noted the steady increase in professional artists moving to our county and it will be another reason for people to choose to live here. The public will benefit also as there will be a high level of activity and events focussed around the studio and its inhabitants.



Stradbally Courthouse

This project will involve four artists' studios and living accommodation, for local, national and international artists, an exhibition area, recording studio, sculpture garden, dark room and coffee area. The library will also be refurbished and will continue to operate in the building. Preliminary work has commenced on this project and it is hoped that building work will commence in 2009.

Laois Youth Theatre



Central to the Laois County Council's Arts Programme are five Youth Theatre groups countywide. These groups meet once a week for their two hour workshops which take place in Portlaoise, Stradbally, Mountrath, Portarlinton and Rathdowney and run from September until June. The workshops are co-ordinated by professional drama facilitators and an assistant.

The Laois Youth Theatre is affiliated to the National Association of Youth Drama and so it benefits from training, guidance and the services it provides. Activities involved in the Youth Theatre include producing plays, attending workshops and participating in youth arts

activities. It is a great social network for young people and great fun also. If you are interested in joining, further details are available from the Arts Office at (057) 8674344.

UNIT

*October-December
Location- Portlaoise*

Over the last number of years the Arts Office has invited artists to work in our county and respond to their experience here. We have involved the public through attending workshops, school events and seminars. In 2006, Laois Arts Service Artists' Symposium was held in the historical/heritage context of the rurally based Emo Court. This project supported artists responses to the rural environment of Emo Court over a number of weeks.

In 2007, Finding Portlaoise - Urban Interventions, encouraged focus on the context on the growth and change of Portlaoise, the county's capital town, which has experienced significant social and infrastructural changes over the last number of years.

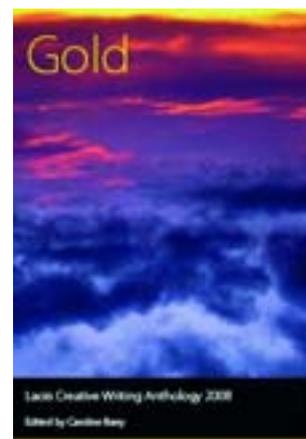
In 2008, UNIT has been developed as an artists' project that explores life in Portlaoise from the ground up, addressing, investigating and highlighting aspects of everyday life through works of contemporary art and practice. The project asks artists to spend time in the town, meeting people, exploring the social, economic and geographical contexts. The project has an unusual structure with four curators - Sarah Seanson, Padraic E. Moore, Sally Timmons and Cliodhna Shaffrey. They will each in turn select four artists to make new work in reaction to Portlaoise and its surrounds. The artists will be invited to consider aspects of everyday life through a range of works and UNIT discussions with the curators.

Watch out Portlaoise, some interesting things will be happening in and around the town....

The Arts Office are co-ordinating this project and further information is available from the Arts Office at (057) 8874344

Gold

The Arts Office employed Caroline Barry as Laois Writer-in-Residence for a six month period which concluded in April of this year. During her six months residency, Caroline ran a series of workshops for 8 to 12 year-olds and teenagers. She worked with the Portarlinton youth club, hosted workshops with the Laois Writers Group and the Ballylinan Writers Group. She held workshops in Mountrath Library, the CBS in Portlaoise and for the Prisoners in Portlaoise Prison. She also held several one-to-one consultations with writers in the county, going through their work and offering advice and possible solutions to anything problematic that came up in their text. She also edited the fifth Laois Anthology of Literature entitled 'Gold'. It was launched recently at the 'Leaves' literary festival. This anthology comprises work from local writers and is available for €10 from the Arts Office, Laois County Council.



Laois County Council Website wins 2008 Irish eGovernment Award

Laois County Council's website www.laois.ie was awarded the best overall Local Irish eGovernment Award at the 2008 Irish eGovernment Awards. The award was presented by Minister Eamon Ryan T.D., Dept. of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, at a ceremony in the Four Seasons Hotel on 21st February, 2008. This award has become the benchmark for recognising excellence in Irish eGovernment and technology innovation in the local government sector.

The award recognises the efforts of the County Council to design their online services around the end users needs while also being designed to maximize interactivity. Special mention was also given to the efforts made to achieve this while ensuring that the online services were fully accessible to all members of the community.

Do it On-line at www.laois.ie

Did you know that you can avail of many on-line services through the Laois County Council website?

These include:

- **Pay online** – Motor Tax Renewal, Water Charges, Fire Charges, Parking Fines, Landfill Keyfob, Composters and more
- **Planning on-line** – View planning applications and associated documents
- **Application forms** are available to download
- Check the **Register of electors** to see if you are registered to vote.
- Renew and browse for **Library books** on-line,
- View **current job vacancies** and download application forms and supporting documentation.



Head of ICT, Mr John Forde, An Cathaoirleach, Cllr John Moran and County Manager, Mr Peter Carey with the Irish eGovernment Award.

Fire in the Home

Fires happen and unfortunately for some have fatal consequences. In 2006, 42 people in Ireland died in fires. This compares to 41 people in 2005.

In 2006, 39 out of 42 fire related deaths occurred in the home. These 42 fatalities occurred in 36 premises. In only 8 of these cases could it be established that there was a working smoke alarm present.

It is extremely important that every house has a working smoke alarm.

In the event of a fire DIAL 999 or 112

Check your smoke alarm regularly

**SMOKE ALARMS
SAVE LIVES!**

Laois Civil Defence

Laois Civil Defence is a volunteer based organisation whose members are proud to serve as a high quality back-up service, supporting the primary emergency services and the local community. Volunteers are multi-skilled and the main programmes of activity undertaken are:

First Aid: Provision of first aid and ambulance service.

Rescue Skills: Urban rescue, open country search for missing persons with Laois having the only K9 H.R.D. search and rescue dog within the local authorities, water based search and recovery.

Auxiliary Fire Service: Pump and ladder drills, pumping floodwaters and supply water to the community.

Warden Service and Radiation Monitoring: Radiation detection and monitoring.

Welfare Skills: Provision of hot meals, drinks and psychosocial support.

Radio Communications: Operation of two independent radio systems U.H.F., V.H.F. and Marine Band Radio. These systems are operated from our specialised Operational Support Unit.



Laois Civil Defence on duty

Training centres are located at Stradbally, Durrow and Mountmellick. If you are interested in the above and are aged between 16 and 65, contact us to find out more on (057) 8664000, email: lpreston@laoiscoco.ie or visit our website at www.laoiscivildefence.org

Health and Safety

Did you know that at the time of going to print, 41 people have lost their lives in 2008 while at work in Ireland. While viewing statistics like these, we sometimes overlook the fact that real people are involved, that the fatalities involve someone's spouse, father or mother, brother or sister, son or daughter. The affect fatalities of this nature have on people and communities is incalculable, especially to the immediate family, relatives, and friends.

As ever, Agriculture and Construction are the two sectors that accounted for the vast majority of these fatalities. While there has been progress in both sectors in recent years, with the construction sector showing a reduction of just under 50% and the agriculture sector close to a 40% reduction, this year's figures clearly show that there is no room for complacency. The vast majority of fatal accidents could easily be prevented by implementing good safety practices in the workplace and taking a few simple steps such as planning the work activity, not taking shortcuts, maintaining and using the correct plant and equipment etc.

It is important to remember that thinking and acting safely does not stop when you finish work, as many of us conduct high risk activities in our everyday lives, from driving, gardening and DIY to playing contact sports. In addition, we need to be vigilant against the risk of fire in our homes – so the message clearly is to Put Safety First by simply Thinking and Acting Safely at all times.

FIRST TIME BUYERS BEWARE!

Can you afford to miss our amazing

Affordable Homes?



Affordable Homes are Now for Sale at a Significant Discount to the Market Value

To qualify for an affordable home, you should:

- Be a first time buyer
- Have sufficient income to meet your mortgage payments
- Satisfy certain income limits

Properties are currently available at various prices at a number of locations throughout the county

All property details are now on our website: www.laois.ie

For more information contact our sales team at:
(057) 8664110 / 8664237 / 8664240
or e-mail:affordable@laoiscoco.ie

Tá cóip den fhoilseachán seo ar fáil fresin as Gaeilge on Rannóg Gnóthaí Corparáideacha ag (057) 8664105 no ríomhphoist corpaffairs@laoiscoco.ie