



LAOIS CONNECTS - MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK 2012

Laois Community Forum hosted Laois's first ever county-wide Mental Health Awareness Week which took place from the 15th September to 22nd September. The Awareness Week called 'LAOIS CONNECTS' was held to highlight the importance of taking care of our own mental health and also the importance of engaging with each other in communities. The week also highlighted the professional services and supports available to everyone. The word CONNECTS stands for Community, Ourselves, Nurture, Nature, Engage, Cope, Talk and Support. Laois CONNECTS was held in collaboration with a number of agencies - the HSE, Mental Health Ireland, Laois Sports Partnership, Laois County Council, Laois Partnership Company, Laois VEC as well as contributions from a number of organisations such as the GAA, the IFA, GROW, Shine and Portlaoise Lions Club. The event was supported by the Leinster Express.

The week featured a countywide series of talks, workshops and seminars on topics such as dealing with stress in our lives, coping with bereavement and loss, depression and also talks on suicide awareness. The week started with a strong focus on mental health issues and young people. Laois Comhairle na nÓg in association with Youth Work Ireland (Laois) hosted an event called I MIND "Stay Connected" which was developed by young people and facilitated by experienced adults.

Caroline Mc Guigan, CEO of Suicide or Survive spoke in Portlaoise on her 'Journey to Wellness' and hosted a Wellness Workshop which had a full attendance in Mountmellick. John Bannon attracted a large audience in Portlaoise on 'Stress and Coping with it'. Laois GAA and

Laois Sports Partnership hosted a talk in the GAA Leinster Council offices and speakers included GAA President Liam O' Neill and former All-Ireland winner with Offaly and RTE commentator, Michael Duignan. Events such as Dr. Eddie Murphy's Talk on 'Healthy Body, Healthy Mind' and the Cookery Demonstration with TV3 Chef Edward Hayden attracted large crowds. The IFA sponsored the talk in the Killeshin Hotel by Mary Mc Evoy, known to many as 'Biddy Byrne' from RTE's 'Glenroe'. Margaret Healy, Chair of Farm Family & Social Affairs / IFA also spoke.

Apart from talks and seminars, there was a lot of emphasis on physical exercise as being key to good mental health. There were a number of walks organised throughout Laois which ended with a big Family Fun walk in Emo Court on Saturday 22nd September led by Dr. Eddie Murphy from RTE's 'Operation Transformation'. There was also a taste of meditation and spiritual healing, laughter yoga, cookery demonstrations and art therapy. Ms Bernie Foran, Acting County Librarian, Laois County Council gave details of self-help books that cover a range of everyday issues experienced by teenagers at Mountmellick Library. There was also a chance to see 'Wally – A Film Documentary' which inspired a successful mental health programme called "Hear me See me" for teenagers. For a full update on Laois Connects Mental Health Awareness Week 2012, please contact Honor Deevy, Community & Enterprise, Laois County Council. Tel: 057 86 74337. Email: hdeevy@laoiscoco.ie. Website: www.laoiscommunityforum.ie/laoisconnects



*Cllr Paul Mitchell,
Cathaoirleach.*

We are delighted to welcome the publication of the 2012 edition of 'Our County' newsletter which provides us with an opportunity to focus on the achievements and continued commitment provided by Laois County Council to its community over the past year.

The upgrading of the Clonaslee Sewage Treatment Plant is just one example of how Laois County Council through the use of green technology aims to improve the quality of our environment.

The opening of the Gort na nÓg playground in Rathdowney and the amenity area in Mountmellick further demonstrates the role Laois County Council plays in improving the environment and social infrastructure of our community.

The success which has been achieved to date by the towns and villages of Laois in the Pride of Place competition is also just recognition of the vital contribution that communities make to our society.

Tourism and the promotion of the county continued in 2012 through the organisation and promotion of various events.

Music Generation Laois commenced in April this year and marked the beginning of an exciting new chapter for music education in Laois. It is managed by Laois Music Education Partnership and supported by Laois County Council, Laois VEC and Laois Partnership Company. We look forward to the expansion of Music Generation Laois and to providing the children and young people of Laois with an opportunity to access music education in an affordable way, particularly in this time of economic instability.

Laois County Council will continue to face further challenges in these times of economic difficulty but through the co-operation and commitment of Elected Members and staff, we are confident that this county will continue to be strong and vibrant.



*Peter Carey,
County Manager.*

ENVIRONMENT NEWS

Green News from Green Schools

61 schools in Laois now have the prestigious Green Flags award. Many thanks to everyone involved. Hopefully next year will be an extra lucky one for Green Schools in Laois as more schools are working towards achieving their first green flag. If you are a parent or grandparent and you would like more information on green schools, please contact Ann-Marie Kelly, Environment Awareness Officer on 057 867 4331 / email amkelly@laoiscoco.ie for further information. Remember all our individual small changes can collectively make a big improvement to our environment.

Bingy – the Environment Anti Litter Mascot

The Environment Section ran a competition to name their anti litter mascot – a very friendly, life size litter bin! After reviewing all the entries received, the winners were from Lady's Meadow National School Senior Infants class. Thanks to their great idea, the litter bin is now known as Bingy. Keep an eye out for Bingy who will play an important part in our environmental anti litter campaigns.

Eh, by Gum!

Laois County Council teamed up with the national Gum Litter Task Force campaign to assist in promoting the important environmental message that chewing gum is subject to €150 litter fine. The theme of the 2012 campaign is to 'bin it your way, step away from €150 fine'. As part of this campaign, Environment Section staff along with Kevin Doyle, Laois Shopping Centre Manager, the Bin it Dance Crew and Bingy launched the campaign. The dance crew brought the print campaign to life by posing the 5 different dance moves (the gum swish, the gum slam dunk, the gum curve, the gum pop and the gum strut) and treated shoppers to a nice musical and dance interlude on launch day. These dance moves are ways to bin your gum when you're done!



As part of the mid campaign boost, two branded Eco Cabs offered people around Portlaoise free transport around town and distributed gum wraps to help people keep the area clean and free of gum litter. Both events were a great success and luckily for everyone the sun was shining on the day too!



Gort Na nÓg Playground & MUGA

Friday, 29th June 2012 saw the official opening ceremony of Rathdowney Playground and MUGA, a facility for young and old to play and enjoy. This Playground and MUGA is an excellent example of the work of a community that not only identified a need in their area but also worked tirelessly to be able to address that need in difficult and challenging times. It is an example of what can be done when communities and state agencies work together to provide facilities that will benefit not just the children of Rathdowney but also the children of the surrounding communities. With the playground and MUGA all families with children of varying age groups will now be able to avail of these facilities. The playground and MUGA are the ideal place to bring your family, while the younger children can use the playground the older children/teenagers can use the MUGA to play basketball/kick ball, tennis, frisbee, etc. They are in a safe environment where they can be supervised by their parents. These facilities are open to the public during daylight hours.

"This project shows that community spirit is alive and growing in Rathdowney. It portrays the town as having a community with a sense of purpose; a much needed requisite in the deflated times we now find ourselves in", stated John King MCC. "The playground development will also have a knock on effect on small businesses with an increase of numbers visiting the town of Rathdowney from other areas", he added.



The Playground name was announced at the launch night in January following a competition held for the local school children. Isabelle Kelly from Kiladooley NS was the winner with the name Gort na nÓg (Field of the Young). Isabelle cut the ribbon at the opening day and the ceremony was followed by light refreshments.

Having been offered an amazing site at St Fergal's College by Co Laois VEC the Playground Group secured funding of €250,000 for the Playground & MUGA as follows; Laois Partnership has granted aided €187,500 which is 75% of

the cost, with €31,250 from Laois County Council and €31,250 from the local community. The Rathdowney Playground Group raised this money, through various fundraising activities (fun days, 5km walk, scrap metal collection, guess the value of the trolley) and donations. This funding has provided the necessary financial support to allow the Rathdowney Playground Group made up of dedicated parents and community members to develop the first state of the art play and games area for the children of Rathdowney and surrounding areas. The project is a joint effort involving the Rathdowney Playground Group in co-operation with Laois County Council and Laois Partnership Company.

Laois County Council insure and manage the facilities and like the other play facilities in County Laois it is open to the public during daylight hours, currently attracting record number of visitors. Contact: sports@laoiscoco.ie or 057 8674363

Amenity Area Opens in Mountmellick

An Outdoor Gym, Table Tennis & Chess Tables, Boules and Meggars Courts are amongst the facilities in the newly developed amenity area exercise stations in a new outdoor gym, which was officially opened on Tuesday 5th June in Irishtown, Mountmellick Co. Laois by Cllr John Bonham, Cathaoirleach, Laois County Council and Cllr Stephen Lynch, Cathaoirleach, Mountmellick Town Council. The facility was developed by Laois County Council in association with Mountmellick Town Council with the assistance of National Lottery Funding from the Local Authority Sports Capital Programme, administered by Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport.



The outdoor gym consists of seven exercise stations with different pieces of equipment, including a cross-trainer, a double air-walker, a leg press, a double-rider, and a shoulder-builder. The gym is specially designed to safely exercise all parts of the body, and each piece of equipment is accompanied by detailed instructions. The facility uniquely also contains a toddler play area which facilitates parents and grandparents to exercise while the toddlers in their charge play safely within view.

In his address, Cathaoirleach, Laois County Council John Bonham MCC, congratulated the Members of Mountmellick Town Council on their vision and tenacity to deliver such an unique project for the town, especially in times of scarce resources.

“In many European countries – and, indeed, in other parts of the world – it’s a common sight to see communities coming together in outdoors settings to recreate,” he said. “This not only keeps people fit, but also offers important social benefits.

Before officially cutting the ribbon, Cllr John Bonham, Cathaoirleach, Laois County Council and Cllr Stephen Lynch, Cathaoirleach, Mountmellick Town Council encouraged all locals to enjoy exercise in a safe environment while, at the same time, reaping the benefits of fresh air, sunshine and good company. We believe that the facilities can be used by all ages – will be of benefit to the whole community.”

To encourage use of this new facility, demonstrations were organised on the day by Laois County Council in association with Laois Sports Partnership.

Further Information is available from the Town Clerk, Mountmellick Town Council (057) 8644565 or Sport & Leisure Office, Laois County Council (057) 8674363 or sports@laoiscoco.ie



Bike Week 2012

Each year Laois County Council receive funding from the Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport to work with local communities to schedule a series of events countywide to promote cycling as an activity for all. Fourteen events were organised throughout the county between 16th – 24th June 2012. Events were very well attended with a good mix of young and old participating and although the rain was never too far away it didn't deter the enthusiasm of the participants.

A key event of Bike Week was the official launch of South Laois Tourism Cycle Trail in Durrow, Co Laois, the first cycle trail in the County. The trail consist of five road trails which range from 8km to 48km and a loop from Durrow to Cullahill, Ballacolla, Ballinakill and Attanagh while also connecting to Kilkenny Cycle Trail.

Bike safety played a major role with the Workshops at Civic Plaza, Portlaoise, with local primary school children and After School Clubs, delivered in partnership with Laois County Council's Road Safety Officer, Portlaoise Community Garda, Laois Partnership & Laois Sports Partnership. Participating children were given information on bike safety, road safety awareness, information on how to check their bikes and having fun in a safe way.

Other events included Family Fun Cycles in five different areas, Emo, Mountrath, Rathdowney, Clough and Clonaslee. All the family fun cycles were well attended, showing that there is a growing interest in the outdoors and use of bikes, with a mixture of abilities and type of bicycles eg: tandems & high nellies. Communities wishing to participate in Bike Week 2013 should contact Sport & Leisure Section, Laois County Council on 057 8674363 or sports@laoiscoco.ie

COMMUNITY

Laois takes Top Prize in All-Island Pride of Place Competition

Abbeyleix won top prize in the annual Co-operation Ireland All-Island Pride of Place Awards announced at the gala ceremony in Gorey, County Wexford on Saturday 5th November 2011.

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government Mr Phil Hogan T.D., along with Co-operation Ireland Chairman Christopher Moran and Pride of Place Committee Chairman Tom Dowling presented the group with their award.

Winning in Category Five, for populations greater than 2000, the judges said; “This is a marvellous community. It caters for all that a community would be proud to cater for. The presentations were excellent and the tour confirmed

the heightened expectations of the judges. The town with its stunning architectural heritage looked wonderful and there was compelling evidence of great synergy between the organisations on the day. With all its facilities and positive approach by the community this is an example to all bypass towns”.

During the evening, the Minister paid tribute to all the participating groups who work tirelessly to create and promote pride in their cities, towns and villages.

The All-Island Pride of Place Competition recognises and celebrates the vital contributions that community partnerships make to society. The focus is on people coming together to shape, change and enjoy all that is good about their local area. It differs from other similar projects in that they specifically recognise the involvement of the local community in all aspects of rural and urban regeneration including, promoting social cohesion,

involvement in planning, the promotion of heritage and environmental awareness.

The Competition is run by Co-operation Ireland in conjunction with the Pride of Place Steering Committee. Peter Sheridan Chief Executive of Co-operation Ireland said: "I congratulate all the winners of this year's Pride of Place Awards.

The accolade is recognition of the commitment and hard work groups undertake for the good of their local community. Although there can only be one winner in each category, this Awards Ceremony is an occasion to acknowledge the efforts of all groups, throughout the island, who were nominated by their local authority. In effect getting to this point is success in itself".

Cathaoirleach, Cllr. John Bonham, Chairman of Laois County Development Board, Cllr. John Moran and Mr. Peter Carey, County Manager congratulated all of the entrants and the prize-winners on their success in this year's competition and thanked them for representing Laois so well at national level.

progression since they won the Award in 2006. They boasted festivals and events, fundraising, the support of the local community for young and old alike, tourism initiatives, websites and technology advances, walking and cycling routes, while also displaying the hard work and commitment of the local people to making Durrow the best place to live, work and visit.

Sarah Gaughan, Caroline Sheppard, Cllr. John Bonham and Fergal Hassett performed a locally scripted pageant to demonstrate Durrow's successes and developments in history but also since 2006, when they were awarded the coveted prize.

Not too dampened by the inclement weather, eleven scarecrow men, reminiscent of that famous New York photo, looked on from their perch on scaffolding over the gates of Durrow Castle, as the judges were given a tour of the town and its locations, meeting children and adults alike along the way.

The judges, officials and Elected Members were introduced to over 40 clubs and organisations in the town, as well as local people, business owners and passers by, who wanted to tell them how much Durrow has improved and developed in the 6 years since winning the competition.

Evelyn Clancy, Chairperson of Durrow Development Forum thanked the judges for visiting Durrow and also thanked all the local people who helped out in preparation for the day. Donal Connolly and William Beatty thanked the community for such a wonderful day, complimenting them on their progress over the past 6 years, and wishing them the best in their future endeavours.

Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Paul Mitchell stated, on behalf of Laois County Council, how proud we are of our heritage and our local communities, Durrow being such a wonderful example of how communities, by working together, can achieve anything.

The results of this years Pride of Place Competition were announced in Thomond Park, Limerick on November 5th 2012.

"Marvellous Community!"

Just one of the many compliments uttered by the judges, who visited the town of Durrow recently, judging in respect of the All-Island National Pride of Place Competition 2012.

Pride of the local people in Durrow was displayed in the best possible way, as the judges were treated to visions of Durrow, past present and future, through the guises of pageants, scarecrows, castles and bicycles, no less!

Having won the competition in their category in 2006, Durrow was entered by Laois County Council in the "Previous Winners" category this year; a category created to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the Pride of Place competition, and to showcase the wonderful work being carried out by communities all over Ireland and Northern Ireland, showing the progress that has been made by them over the years, since their success in the competition.

None other than Durrow could stake such a claim of



Green Technology in Clonaslee

Laois is now on the national stage when it comes to green technology thanks to a 6.23 hectare Integrated Constructed Wetland (ICW) project, which will significantly improve wastewater treatment infrastructure for Clonaslee and the receiving water quality of the Clodiagh River.

A necessary upgrade of the Clonaslee Sewerage Treatment Plant used ICW technology as it is sustainable in effectively treating polluted waters, is more environmentally sensitive and more cost effective to construct and operate. The ICW mimics the natural wetland structure while the design aims to use local biodiversity to remove pollutants using their natural biological, chemical and physical processes. The wastewater flows through a series of shallow ponds (cells), which are planted with various types of reeds and other emergent (marsh) vegetation before discharging to the receiving water. The ICW structure and the vegetation used are not only capable of withstanding a flood event but provide additional benefits such as habitat enhancement, amenity creation and boost the aesthetic value of the area.

The old treatment plant catered for a 500 population equivalent (pe) but the new site can cater for 1200 population equivalent (meaning the sum of pollution created during 24 hours by industrial facilities and services to the individual population for the area). Surface water runoff from Clonaslee is also treated and managed through the ICW.



Although ICW systems are designed to be as self maintaining and self operable as possible, they will be monitored on a regular basis by Laois County Council staff and will operate under and comply with the effluent standards set out in the Wastewater Discharge Licence issued by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Overall this green technology reduces the environmental footprint of the wastewater treatment process, supports a wide range of wetland wildlife, provides significant carbon sequestration, effective recycling of nutrients, provides a focus for education and increases awareness of wetlands, which is ultimately a win-win for the environment.

ARTS

Culture Night 2012

Culture Night 2012 in Laois was a great success. The Arts Office, Laois County Council are delighted with the success and the level of participation in the variety of free events that were held throughout the county on Friday 21st September.

Parents and children came along to the Arthouse in Stradbally to join in the fun of making art with the artists, Karen Hendy, Gemma Guihan, Lorraine Walsh, Collin Rush and Vera McEvoy. From ink painting to shadow puppetry to making your mark on a giant sheet of paper, there was something for everyone.

The Rathineska Comhaltas Group gave a performance highlighting some wonderful musical skills from the entire group. Laois Open Door Theatre presented a selection of drama and comedy that examined the shifting nature of the Irish character. Followed by a concert with original music showcased by a very talented line up of musicians and singers from the Laois Songwriters Circle including Mick McAuley, James O'Connor and duo Eva Queen and Brian Flanagan.



Events around the county included an exhibition of rings made by the public and displayed at Helena Malones' Studio in Portlaoise and there was a music and art trail in Mountrath. Singing group Vocalese appeared in the Library Portlaoise and enthralled the audience with a variety of songs from their wonderful repertoire. Portlaoise Library hosted a very successful workshop with writer Jean O'Brien and there was a talk on the works of Samuel Beckett by Arthur Broomfield in Mountmellick Library. A large group of enthusiastic adults and children

enjoyed an interactive workshop with local Rathdowney artists Sandra Kelly and Alison Cahill in the Marian Centre, Rathdowney where they recreated different images of local areas on the walls.

The Dunamais Arts Centre was a hive of activity with lots of sound from the well attended Stampede Drumming workshop with Eddie O'Neill and an open mic event for young music makers introduced by Stewart Quinn. The Finale event at the Arts Centre was hosted by Portlaoise Comhaltas group and featured the Ceoltoiri an Duchais, a group of musicians who attended the Careers in Music workshop in Abbeylax in the summer. The large audience were treated to a wonderful concert from the very best of our talented young traditional musicians. Laois Writers Group presented a Literary and Music event at the Mile Bush, Portlaoise attended by a large audience who enjoyed readings and music from local and visiting writers and musicians.

There were multi cultural events including an international cuisine evening at Portlaoise Educate Together NS, where people got to taste foods from other countries and a multi cultural concert at the Portlaoise Leisure Centre. Clonaslee Heritage Centre held talks by local experts. Other events included a Heritage walk in Portlaoise and Abbeylax and a free tour of Emo Court. The South East Arts Network also had a busy day in St Annes' Hall in Ballylinan where they held a wonderful art exhibition and entertainment included music and readings. There was music, songs and story-telling in places as far apart as Tolerton, Fisherstown and Camross in celebration of Laois Culture Night. The Arts Office are already planning for 2013 which it is hoped will be bigger and better than 2012.

Laois County Council would like to thank all those involved in culture Night in Laois

For more information about Culture Night please contact The Arts Office, Laois County Council, Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise, Co Laois. Tel: (057) 8674342/43 or email artsoff@laoiscoco.ie or website www.laois.ie

Music Generation

The Music Generation Laois and Laois School of Music Open evening held on Thursday the 13th of September in Portlaoise College, brought school teachers, principals, parents and young people together to find out more about current musical activity in the county.

Uilleann Piper Gay McKeown, Harpist Una Ní Fhlannagain, Choral Master Martin Barrett and the Ontoni Brass ensemble provided an insight into the Music Generation Laois programmes, through performances and practical demonstrations. Music Generation Laois creates access to performance music education to children and young people and the project delivered a range of successful summer camps in July of this year.



Music Generation Laois has now launched a series of programmes for schools, community groups, including brass lessons, uilleann pipe lessons, harp lessons, a choral music programme which can enable schools and communities to establish a choir, and The Music Box, an access and music tuition programme for children with special needs. Students can also sign-up to attend evening classes in Brass, Harp, The Music Box and Uilleann Pipes in Portlaoise College.

Rosa Flannery, Co-ordinator of Music Generation Laois, was delighted with the response to the event. 'There is fantastic enthusiasm among young people and the wider community about the music programmes being offered by both Music Generation Laois and Laois School of Music. Many of the instruments being offered by Music Generation Laois are not currently widely available to young people in the county. The Open Evening gave children, young people and the wider community a chance to explore a range of instruments, from trumpet to uilleann pipes to harp.'

Laois School of Music has been providing music tuition in the County for over 10 years. Laois School of Music tutors and Music School Co-ordinator Nuala Kelly, provided information on their classes at the Open Evening, including classes in violin, viola, cello, clarinet, saxophone, flute, piano, keyboard, guitar, drums and recorder. Laois School of Music also offer 'Kindermusic' an introduction to music to children aged 4 to 6. Kindermusic is a great way to start a child's music education in group settings, allowing them to explore a variety of instruments and develop musicality through song and movement. Laois School of Music also provide a series of ensembles for students to join, including a junior and senior orchestra and a woodwind ensemble.

For further information on Music Generation Laois or Laois School of Music programmes and music lessons, contact Laois County Council Arts Office on 057 8674343 or artsoff@laoiscoco.ie

Leaves Literary Festival 2012 - Celebrating the Literary Arts in Laois



The Leaves Festival provided wonderful opportunities to listen to the best of writing emerging from Ireland. The Programme included readings, classes in creative writing, book launches, children's events and music.

The festivities commenced on Friday 9th November with the official launch in Áras an Chontae at 7.30pm. The event incorporated the launch of exciting new poetry collections by Ann Egan, Kathy D'Arcy, Jamie O'Connell and Pat Boran with James Ryan chairing the readings. Readings by all the authors were interspersed by music from guitarist Conal Rae from Laois School of Music. Admission was free and books were on sale on the night.

The Festival also included a Children's' programme. On Friday 9th November award winning author and illustrator Niamh Sharkey, Laureate na nÓg, visited schools in the County to create a Monster Doodle and then went on to Abbeyleix Library. Children's' author Roisin Meaney paid a visit to some lucky schools in Laois and gave a reading in Portlaoise Library, admission to the children's events were free of charge.

Adult writer's workshops also took place in the Dunamais Arts Centre. Hennessy award winner Niamh Boyce held a workshop titled "Poems Beget Poems" on the 9th November. This workshop suited writers who have begun to write poetry and would like to explore it further.

Also for adults, well known writer John MacKenna held a workshop entitled, "Seasons of the Heart", exploring the ways in which we can draw on nature and our own life experiences to create fiction and memoir. This workshop ran in the Dunamais Arts Centre.

The final event on Saturday 10th November was an exciting mix of readings and music featuring Christine

Dwyer Hickey, Niamh Boyce and Nuala Ní Chonchúir, chaired by Seamus Hosey, with music by harpist Claire O'Donnell. This took place in the Arthouse & Library, Stradbally.

For more information on the Arts Programme contact: The Arts Office, Laois County Council, Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise, Co Laois. Tel: 057 8674344/42 Fax 057 8674382 or email: artsoff@laoiscoco.ie.

Midland Masterclasses Laois Programme

Laois Drama Course

The final course in the series of four is titled "Signposts for Success" with Anne Mekitarian which took place in the Dunamais Arts Centre on Saturday 24th November from 10am to 4pm.

The course was an ideal opportunity for drama enthusiasts who wished to learn more about the whole process of producing and directing plays. Inexperienced directors learned how to tackle a script. The question of where to start, what to look for, how to organise and channel ideas, was explored in a safe and fun environment. This interactive Master Class provided a set of rules and guidelines to give participants the confidence to take them through the rehearsal process and on to presenting their first production. Actors, set builders, technicians etc., interested in the process, were all welcome.

Anne Mekitarian graduated from Samuel Beckett Centre TCD with B.A. (Hons.) in Drama & Theatre Studies and M.Phil. (Irish Theatre Studies). A professional drama teacher, Anne is a director, actor, adjudicator and DLI Summer School Director. She compiled, devised and directed No Hay To Save In Brooklyn (based on Brian Friel's early plays) and presented it at international festivals in USA, at Edinburgh Fringe Festival, at Gothenburg Celtic Festival and at numerous venues throughout Ireland. Other directing credits include: A Midsummer Night's Dream; A Phoenix Too Frequent; Yerma; Bedroom Farce; Factory Girls; The House of Bernarda Alba; The Plough And The Stars; Philadelphia, Here I Come; Calendar Girls.

Further information: Tel: (057) 8663355 or www.dunamais.ie

Laois Teens Explore Life Through The Lens Exhibition in Áras an Chontae

Youth Work Ireland Laois in Partnership with Laois Partnership have been delivering photography workshops throughout Laois since April 2012. Youth Work Ireland Laois is working together with Photographer John Lalor to facilitate the workshops with funding from Laois Partnership.

The main aim of the workshops with young people from towns and villages throughout Laois, is to allow them to explore the world around them in a new and profound way.

The Arts Office hosted an exhibition of the photographs from this project in Áras an Chontae, Laois County Council, in December. The official launch took place on Thursday 6th December at 5pm.

The participants involved in these workshops have been given the opportunity to explore their creativity through a view finder or lens, and encouraged to use photography as a means to express their youth voice and to realise their own unique potential.

Through this process of taking photographs in their environments- home, school, youth club etc. the young people are learning life skills and gaining knowledge of their personal development. They are learning from their peers experiences and reactions of their worlds while gaining insights into project planning, task management and taking ownership of a worthwhile activity.

Portarlinton, O'Moore's Place Portlaoise and Kiln Lane Portarlinton, Stradbally and Abbeyleix are the areas that have benefited from these workshops. The young people participating vary in ages from 10-17 years with maximum of 12 young people in each workshop.

Some comments made from the young people participating in the workshops so far:

"Amazing, great experience, excellent", Aisling O'Shea, Lisa Kerry, Zoe Maher, O'Moore's Place, Portlaoise

"I definitely would come back and do this again, it was brilliant!" Chloe Houlihan, O'Moore's Place, Portlaoise

For more information contact Joe Thompson – Project Coordinator, Youth Work Ireland Laois – 086 1756714 or Aishling Hennessy, Youth Arts Worker, Youth Work Ireland Laois – 087 6478677

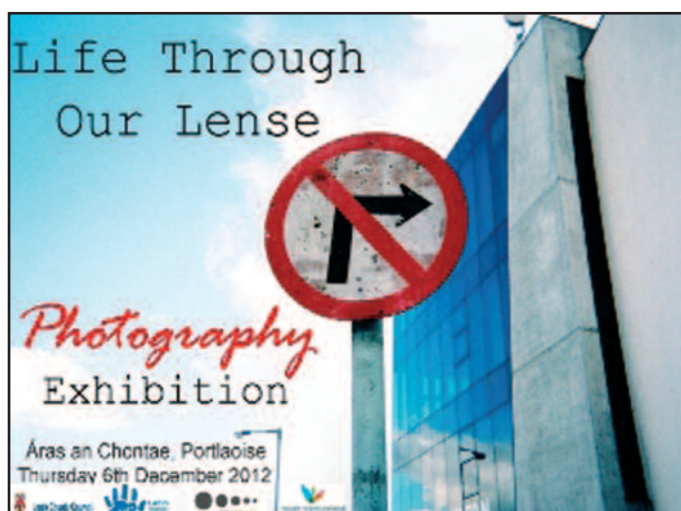
The Art of Sound: A Glimpse into the Creativity of Irish Composers

The Art of Sound is a photographic and multi-media exhibition devised by the Dublin-based Contemporary Music Centre, and was on display in The Arthouse and Library, Stradbally, Co Laois until November 30th. The exhibition explored the creative process in music as well as providing an introduction to a number of the leading figures in Irish composition. The exhibition comprised Eugene Langan's striking portraits of Irish composers together with images of their musical handwriting. An audio-guide with music and narration took the visitor on a journey of discovery into their musical worlds. Originally devised by the Contemporary Music Centre in partnership with the Music Department of University College Cork, The Art of Sound exhibition at the Arthouse, Stradbally was made possible through the support of the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon, Music Generation Laois and Laois County Council Arts Office.

This multi-media exhibition looked at new music making from the first idea through to the final performance. The creative process usually took place behind closed doors, but this exhibition brought it to life through striking photographs of the composers and images of their work.

The Art of Sound exhibition featured photographer Eugene Langan's dramatic and perceptive photographs of Irish composers. An audio-guide narrated by Eamonn Lawlor, RTÉ lyric fm, brought to life the music that is displayed, leading to a truly unique and rich experience for the visitor.

The exhibition ran from 5th November to 30th November. (Contact Laois Arts Office on (057) 8674342 or (057) 8674343 for further information.



Library Services in the county continue to provide an excellent space for sections of the local community. The public libraries in Laois offer more than just books and have wide ranging services in all branches.

These include broadband internet services at very reasonable rates, printing, photocopying and scanning facilities, free WIFI for members, audio books, DVDS, music, online resources, daily newspapers and magazines, free events and clubs.

Modern libraries offer a rich cultural and educational environment that provides a space and access for those who wish to enrich their day to day lives.



Laois Libraries are now on Facebook! Like Us and keep up to date with what's happening in branch Libraries locally and nationally.

Children's Books Festival events are continuing in branch Libraries throughout the county. This year Laois Libraries have had author visits from Judi Curtin, Michael Smith, Maeve Friel, Joe O'Brien and Maura Byrne. Children from local schools were invited to attend and listen to their favourite authors read from their work. Other library events include arts and crafts classes, competitions and shows.

Summer Reading Challenge



The drip drip of the rain and the recession didn't do much for a lot of children this summer. However the libraries Summer Reading Challenge proved a big success over the summer months. Over 500 children of all ages from the county completed the challenge, reading 6 books each in July and August. This initiative further promotes literacy and reading in children and encourages reading for all ages. Well done to all the winners!

REMINDERS

Household Charge

The Household Charge (€100) is an annual charge introduced by the Local Government (Household Charge) Act 2011 payable by owners of residential property. Laois County Council would like to thank all citizens who have registered and paid so far. The collection of the charge is critical to enable this Council to continue to provide local essential services including fire and emergency, street cleaning, public lighting, parks and libraries. These facilities benefit everyone. Late payment fees and interest are now applicable and the charge due for December 2012 is €129.00.

Registration and payment of the charge is still being accepted @:

- Online: www.householdcharge.ie
- Locall 1850 357357 to register and pay
- Cash Office, Aras an Chontae, Portlaoise
Mon – Fri 9.30am -3.30pm
- Registration forms are available from
Laois County Council Finance Section:
057-8664062

Domestic Wastewater System Registration

Laois County Council wish to remind owners of properties not connected to a sewerage scheme that they are legally required to register their septic tank on or before 1st February 2013. The easiest way of registering a septic tank is by logging onto www.protectourwaters.ie and following the instructions on the website.

Alternatively, you may also register by completing a registration form and sending it with the fee of €50 to Protect our Waters, PO Box 12204, Dublin 7. Laois County Council will also accept registration forms and the fee at its Cash Office. All cheques and postal orders should be made payable to "Protect our Waters".

Registration forms are available from the Council. Should you have any queries you should telephone 1890 800800 or email support@protectourwaters.ie or the Environment Department of the Council.

Farming Accidents

There has been a 35% increase in farm accidents over the last five years, with bigger more intensive farmers suffering more accidents.

While those are the headline figures from a presentation by Teagasc Health and Safety Advisor, John McNamara, to the National Farm Safety conference in June last, the safety issues behind the headline figures were identified in a presentation notable for its clarity. Quoting figures from the National Farm Survey 2011, Mr McNamara said in 2010 there were 2,500 farm injuries. The National Farm Survey 2011 is the fifth in a series of farm surveys carried out by Teagasc.

The surveys cover the five-year period before the year of publication. The 2011 survey covers the years 2006 to 2010, while the 2006 survey covers the preceding five years. While the surveys cover a five year period, the figures reported are for the previous year to the survey. This is in order to make the most accurate estimate and allow for any lapses in recall in relation to earlier years. It is interesting to contrast the figure of 2,500 farm accidents in 2010 with the number reported to the HSA that year: 86. Given the lack of reported accidents, the level of information gleaned by Teagasc in the surveys is a valuable contribution to measuring the true state of safety on farms and to assessing the causes and consequences of accidents.

Quoting from the survey – a statistically robust survey of 995 farmers – which includes a module on health and safety, Mr McNamara gave figures for the causes of farm injuries, the numbers of workdays lost, the treatment required, the status of the person injured, the location of the accident, and injury rates by size of farm and farming system.

While the increase in injuries between the 2006 and 2011 surveys are a cause for concern, viewed over the 20-year period covered, the National Farm Surveys show a positive improvement in farm safety.

The 1991 survey reported that there were 5,000 injuries on farms in 1990. Looking at the surveys over the period, the trend seems to be a fall, followed by a rise. For example, in 1990 there were 5,000 farm injuries, while in 1995 the number fell to 2,000. However by 2000 the number rose to 3,000 and then in the 2006 survey it fell to just under 2,000. In the 2011 survey 2,500 injuries were reported.

Consequences

The 2011 farm survey figures for the consequences of farm accidents suggest that the injuries suffered by farmers are serious. Nearly half (49%) of those injured were treated as in-patients in hospital, while a further 36% had to attend

A&E. Nine percent had to attend a doctor. Only 5% needed no treatment or just first-aid treatment. The survey reports that 1.5% of accidents resulted in death. This would suggest 25 deaths a year. However, based on fatal accidents reported to the HSA over the five year period 2007 to 2011, the highest number of deaths in the farming sector was 22, with the average working out at 17 per year.

The consequences of the injuries measured by the number of days lost were significant. Seventeen percent were out of work for 100 days or more. Thirty-three percent of those injured were out of work for between 20 and 99 days. A further 17% were out from work for between 10 to 19 days, with 22% missing work for between four and nine days. Just 11% were out for three days or less.

Risk and Prevention measures

The farmer is the person most at risk of being injured in a farm accident. Seventy-three percent of those injured were farmers, while 9% were workers. Farm spouses and family members are also at risk, with 9% of the injuries suffered by spouses and 7% by family members. Two percent of those injured were classified as 'others'.

Full-time farmers are twice as likely as part-time farmers to suffer injury. In a paper handed out as back-up material to his presentation, Mr McNamara notes these farms tend to be large in scale. In the paper he also notes that the injury rate is highest amongst dairy and sheep farmers.

The farmyard is the riskiest place to work on a farm. Seventy-one percent of those injured were injured in the farmyard, while 19% were injured in buildings and 10% in the fields. At 42% of accidents, trips, falls and blows are the most common causes of accidents, followed by livestock at just under 33%. Vehicles and machinery are given as the cause of 11% of farm accidents. Chainsaws, at 3%, were the fourth most common cause of accidents.

Commenting on the causes of accidents, Mr McNamara said "rushing is a key problem". Looking at the figures over the period of the five surveys, he said the trend shows a significant decline in machinery accidents, but an increase in livestock accidents. Just 55.1% of the farmers surveyed had completed the HSA's Farm Safety Risk Assessment document, while 21.9% had attended a short health and safety training course.

Be Winter Ready – Grit for Public Use

In the event of extreme adverse weather over the winter period Laois County Council will provide grit for public use at strategic locations throughout the County. Members of the public are advised to access and load the grit in a safe manner and that use of the material is entirely at their own risk.

SOCIAL NETWORKING

Keep up to date with our environment campaigns – follow us on Twitter @ Laois Council or like us on www.facebook.com/LaoisEnvironment. The Environment Section tweets regularly and updates our facebook status a couple of times a week.

ROAD SAFETY

Laois County Council and An Garda Siochana are committed to reducing the number of accidents along our County's road network this Christmas and throughout the year.

This message comes as thousands of motorists take to the roads over the coming weeks as the festive season gets into full swing.

The following points should be taken into consideration when driving:

- Don't drink and drive
- Slow down
- Drive at an appropriate speed for the type of road and current weather conditions, Remember in frosty weather to expect poor road conditions, reduce your speed.
- Ensure that all passengers are appropriately restrained
- All drivers should ensure that their vehicle is in good working order paying particular attention to tyres, lights, seat belts and child restraints.
- Prepare for long journeys, check for road works, AA Roadwatch is helpful, allow time for unexpected delays.
- Remember to stop for a break, have a cup of tea or juice, rest for half an hour. Driving under fatigue is as dangerous as driving under the influence of alcohol.

LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL FOR SALE ON OPEN MARKET PRICE €69,000

These new properties are for sale on the open market. This is an excellent opportunity for single buyers and families to buy in this supremely well-located development.

MARYBOROUGH VILLAGE, MOUNTRATH ROAD, PORTLAOISE

3 Bed Semi-Detached Houses @ €69,000



CASTLETOWN Private Sites for Sale NOW ON OPEN MARKET

Serviced residential sites are now available in Castletown for purchase on the open market.
Only 13 sites now available ranging from €25,000 to €30,000

Contact Ciara at 057 8664110 for further details and site map.

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

The Cathaoirleach and Members of Laois County Council together with the County Manager and staff would like to wish you and your family a Happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year.