



Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland Award for Abbeyleix Library

Laois County Council was honoured recently when one of its public buildings, Abbeyleix Library, was bestowed with the prestigious Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland Award for the best Conservation/Restoration building of 2009. Mr John Gormley, Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, who also officially opened the library in June, 2008, presented County Manager Peter Carey with the award at the function held in Farmleigh House.

The library has been a tremendous success in its first year. The stock range consists of an eclectic mix of over 22,000 items to cater for all ranges of age and taste. Over 1,700 members have joined and the library has received over 40,000 visits. Over 45,000 items were

issued to its borrowers in the first year and some 1,800 people have also attended the 140 various events held so far in the library. The art gallery, which is incorporated into the design of the building, has hosted numerous exhibitions throughout the year and has become a very popular space with local artists who wish to exhibit there. The gallery supplements wonderfully the overall ethos behind any library, which is that of expanding the cultural viewpoint of the community.

Through the renovation and restoration of Abbeyleix Library, Laois County Council has raised the bar very high in terms of the standard and quality of public buildings in Ireland - a feat that the entire organisation should be extremely proud of.



Abbeyleix Library 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.





*Cllr James Daly,
Cathaoirleach.*

We are delighted to welcome the publication of the 2009 edition of the 'Our County' newsletter, which provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the progress made by Laois County Council over the past year.

Our commitment to a customer-centred approach to service provision was enhanced by the opening of the new Area Office in Portarlington in December, 2008. During the past year we also opened a new Fire

Station and Recycling Centre in Portarlington. The Council continues to contribute positively to the quality of life of our communities through the successful operation of leisure complexes in Portarlington and Portlaoise and the continuation of the playground and Libraries programme.

Laois County Council was also involved during the year in the organisation and promotion of events such as the Rose of Tralee Regional Finals, Magnet Festival, Electric Picnic and Gordon Bennett Rally. As well as enhancing the profile of the county, the hosting of such major festivals impacts positively on the local economy.

This is the first edition of the newsletter following the election of a new Council in June, 2009 and we would like to welcome the newly elected members of the Council. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank the outgoing Members for their hard work and dedication over the years and to wish them well in their future endeavours.

The term of office of the new Council commences at a time of major financial upheaval, at both national and local level. While there are difficult times ahead and difficult decisions to be made, we are confident that the Council can meet whatever challenges may arise.

It is also relevant at this time to reflect on the achievements of

the outgoing Council. While the term of the Council coincided with a period of significant development in County Laois, the financial benefits which accrued to the Council have been used to fund many key infrastructural and amenity projects throughout the county.

Examples include:

- Civic Plaza, Portlaoise
- Portarlington and Portlaoise Leisure Centres
- Abbeyleix, Durrow and Mountmellick Libraries
- Playgrounds at Mountmellick, Durrow, Portarlington, Stradbally, Clonaslee and Portlaoise
- Slieve Bloom Amenity, Linear Walk Portlaoise and The Swan Mini-pitch
- Road construction and improvement works throughout the county
- Footpaths, parking facilities and traffic calming schemes
- Portlaoise Main Drainage Scheme, Portarlington Water Supply and many more water and waste water schemes around the county



*Peter Carey,
County Manager.*

We would like to thank all the elected members of the Council for their support and commitment over the past year. We also thank our dedicated staff for their ongoing efforts to provide the best possible service to our customers. We acknowledge the work of the business sector and community organisations throughout the county and despite the difficult times that lie ahead, we offer assurance of the Council's ongoing support for the development and improvement of County Laois.

The challenge facing the Council is to continue to provide leadership in the promotion and development of the social, economic and cultural life of the county, despite the changed economic circumstances. We are confident that Laois County Council is ready to meet the challenge.

Áras an Chontae on Target for Climate Change

Following a number of energy saving initiatives, Áras an Chontae energy usage has decreased by 11% in 2009 compared to 2008. This is significantly better than the annual 3% target set out in the National Climate Change Strategy.

The measures have included replacement of Halogen lights with ultra energy efficient LEDs, car park lighting reduction, reduction in unnecessary indoor lighting, PC shutdowns, etc. At current levels, the energy reduction should improve our Building Energy Rating Certificate from an E1 to a D2. Staff awareness and co-operation will help ensure that we continue to make savings and continue to achieve our Climate Change targets.

A Hybrid Street Light was installed at Áras an Chontae by Portlaoise Enterprise Centre based Advanced Renewable Energy Ireland LTD (ARE). ARE's product collects solar and wind energy to power the standard street light fitting. In this case, the ultra low energy LED technologies have been installed, so that ultimately, this one lamp will be capable of powering up to 3 LED flood lights and making the car park totally self sufficient. This pilot project will help assess the suitability of renewable energy lighting systems that may reduce Public Lighting operating costs.



Knockmay Development Project

Laois County Council is engaged in a multi-million euro re-development of the Knockmay area of Portlaoise. The area consists of six local authority housing estates built and occupied over a seventeen year period from 1980 to 1997.

Works include refurbishment of existing properties; construction of new properties and designing out features which contribute to anti-community behaviour, such as alleyways and vacant land.

The estates are being tackled in order of construction with the oldest, Oakleaf Place, being first. Work commenced in Oakleaf Place in May, 2008, and will be completed by the end of 2009. It is anticipated that work will commence in two further estates within the next three years. The project is funded by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.



Another vital element of the Project is the Community Forum. The Forum was established in September, 2008, and meets on a quarterly basis. The Forum, which is independently Chaired, provides the residents with a space to discuss issues of importance with Laois County Council and the other statutory and voluntary service providers. In January, 2009, the Forum

elected two members of the local community, Patrice Doheny-Dunne and Mary Burns, to represent their interests on various committees associated with the project. Aidan McCane, Tenant Liaison Officer, may be contacted on (057) 8680626 with queries about the Community Forum.

Laois County Council, in partnership with the Community, is commencing work on the Knockmay Community Building. The building will comprise a shop, a Community Crèche, a Health Clinic, Laois County Council offices and the Knockmay Community and Family Resource Centre. Construction of the building is expected to commence towards the end of 2009 and will take approximately 18 months.

The building will provide local delivery of services, improve the security of the area and enhance the physical environment. The building is jointly funded by Laois County Council, The Family Support Agency, Pobal, The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the H.S.E.



Further information about the project may be obtained from the Project Manager, Sarah Dunne, at (057) 8672580.

Portarlington Fire Station

The new Portarlington Fire Station was officially opened by An Cathaoirleach, James Daly M.C.C., on 25th June, 2009.

Portarlington Fire Station is one of eight stations which provide the fire brigade service for Laois County Fire & Rescue Service throughout County Laois as well as covering part of County Offaly adjoining Portarlington.



The construction of the station was funded by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Construction work started in December, 2007 and was completed in November, 2008 by contractors Joseph Doolan Ltd.

This new state of the art facility replaces the old fire station which was built in the 1950's. Included in this new facility are:

- 2 appliance bays
- A lecture room
- A drill yard with hydrants and underground storage tanks for hose drills.
- Drill tower for ladder and rescue drill
- Compressor for refilling breathing apparatus cylinders
- Drying facilities for protective clothing
- Station and toilet facilities

FIRE SAFETY AT HOME

Fires happen and unfortunately some can have fatal consequences. The majority of fire related deaths in Ireland occur in the home. Having a working smoke alarm in your home could save your life.

Please make sure that your home has a working smoke alarm and check it regularly.

SMOKE ALARMS SAVE LIVES

Rose of Tralee Regional Finals 2009

The Regional Finals of the Rose of Tralee 2009 took place on the June Bank Holiday weekend in Portlaoise. Roses representing counties from all over Ireland and their families and friends participated in the festival which was a great success with glorious weather throughout. On the Friday, a Cathaoirleach's reception took place on the Civic Plaza at Áras an Chontae to welcome the Roses, the Rose Committee and the International Rose of Tralee, Aoife Kelly, to County Laois. This year, for the first time, pupils from first class in National Schools all over Laois participated in the festival as 'Rosebuds' and were twinned with County Roses. The School of Music and the school choir from Scoil Mhuire Portlaoise performed during the Reception.



Roses and Rosebuds at Áras an chontae

Following the Reception, the Roses were brought on a tour to Emo Court and Gardens for a photo shoot and a guided tour of the stately house. During the Festival, the Roses twinned with pubs in Portlaoise. On the Saturday of the Festival, a Grand Parade took place in Portlaoise in conjunction with the Gordon Bennett Irish Classic Car Run. St. Joseph's Accordion Band led the parade of vintage and classic cars with Roses and Rosebuds through the streets of Portlaoise and back to Áras an Chonate. An open air concert with the Portlaoise Gospel Choir and activities for Families was held on the Civic Plaza. The Regional Finals took place in the Portlaoise Heritage Hotel on Saturday and Sunday night, hosted by Ray d'Arcy. The overall winners who competed in the International Finals were Waterford, Kilkenny, Tipperary, Sligo, Cavan and Armagh. The Regional Finals event has been secured for Portlaoise for the next three years

Laois International Golf Challenge 2009

The 2009 Laois International Golf Challenge took place from the 18th to the 21st May and attracted golfers from all over Europe, particularly from Northern Ireland, England, Wales and Sweden. The event ran very smoothly with all of the golf courses in Laois participating. There were individual prizes for each of the Golf Clubs during the week and overall prizes for



the Final and the runner up Day at Portlaoise Golf Club. The prizegiving ceremony was held in the Clubhouse of the Heritage Golf & Spa Resort at Killenard. The overall Prize winners this year were Warren Davies and Marc Hughes from Wales. The winners of the best International Player Prize were Ollie McNally and Hugh Casey from Northern Ireland.

Gordon Bennett Irish Classic Car Run

The Gordon Bennett Irish Classic Car Run 2009 also took place over the June Bank Holiday weekend. Over 160 cars took part, mostly from overseas. A Cathaoirleach's Reception took place on Friday evening at Áras an Chontae to welcome all the visitors, particularly those from overseas, to County Laois. The participants drove the historic Gordon Bennett Route during the weekend as well as driving the Laois Heritage Trail. This year, the festival worked with the local Rose of Tralee Committee and helped in organising the Gala Parade on Saturday of the Bank Holiday weekend.



Magnet Festival, Portlaoise

The Magnet Festival is a new community driven festival which took place in Portlaoise over the August Bank Holiday weekend. A great variety of acts participated including The Sharon Shannon Big Band with Shane Mc Gowan, Damien Dempsey and Dessie O'Halloran, Michael English as well as Declan O'Rourke, The Wolfe Tones, Jack L, Liam O' Maonlai and a superb Country Music evening with artists such as Mike Denver, Ray Lynam and Damien Bowe. The festival was staged at different venues around Portlaoise, such as the Portlaoise Heritage Hotel, Sky Venue, the Dunamais Arts Centre, two street stages and the Portlaoise Leisure Centre.

Vincent Van Gogh Project

Stuart Dunne, actor and artist, better known as criminal Billy Meehan from RTE's Fair City, re-enacted the last 70 days of Vincent Van Gogh's life in the run up to the festival. His project 'VINCENT: Questioning the Method' was filmed in Portlaoise where Stuart painted a picture a day in his studio at 25 Church Street Portlaoise. The project reached its climax on 29th July when the character died. The following day, the start of the Magnet Festival, Stuart Dunne while in character, was waked in Grellan Delaneys Pub.

Other Events

Other events included Irish Farmers Markets, a fully guided Heritage Trail, a Family Intercultural Day, Interactive Street Theatre, Street Carnival, Street Sports, Salsa Dancing, Street Performers, Heritage Walks, Art Exhibitions and the famous Pig Race. For any information on any events and festivals, please contact Honor Deevy, Tourism Officer, Laois County Council. Tel: (057) 8664132, Email: hdeevy@laoiscoco.ie or visit www.laoistourism.ie

United Arab Emirates Visit to Abbeyleix Library

A delegation of journalists from the United Arab Emirates paid a visit to Abbeyleix Library on 12th July, 2009, as part of a week-long tour to promote Ireland as a tourist destination.

Ines Abassi, a Features Editor with "Sharazad", a Tunisian newspaper, Souha Abbas, an Editor with "Zahrat Al Khaleej", a Lebanese newspaper and Rola Khalid Ahmad, a journalist with "Al Khaleej", a Jordanian newspaper, were most impressed with the library, commenting on the amount of light in the building, the inspirational feel about the place and the appealing art gallery.

The visitors were accompanied by Jane Stokes, a Publicity Executive with Fáilte Ireland and Aiveen Ryan, Tourism Ireland's Representative to the Gulf States. They were shown around the library by Gerry Maher, County Librarian and Laura Brett, who is the Librarian in Abbeyleix.



Following the viewing, the group retired to Cafe Odhran for some light refreshments, where they were addressed by Mary White of the Tidy Towns Committee, who outlined the efforts being put into making Abbeyleix a quality town to visit."

Durrow Library



On 28th February, 2009, a group of 12 people gathered in Durrow Library for an Irish Class. However this was a class with a difference. The event was filmed by a crew from TG4 and was part of the celebrations being organized by Durrow Development Committee for the St. Patricks weekend Festival.

Mountmellick Library

Mountmellick library set up a Gardening Club this summer. David Hayden gave a talk on summer bedding and demonstrated how best to plant summer baskets and window boxes.

Due to the topicality of green issues these days many people have a great desire to successfully grow their own plants, fruits and vegetables and there was great interest in this event.

Other events in the Libraries

Bookclubs, storytelling, computer classes, games' clubs, art and craft sessions and other events continue to be a big attraction and are proving to be very successful throughout the county libraries. School visits have become a very popular and regular event in all the libraries and play a vital role in the promotion of our services to the public, both educationally and socially. June saw the 'Abbeyfest' festival take place in Abbeyleix with the library being at the centre of many events and activities. These included a Creative Dance Demo, Storytime with Susan, Irish History Live, Face Painting and a Puppet Show.

Biodiversity Week 2009

Biodiversity week, from 17th to 24th May, was celebrated in style in Laois in 2009, with a range of fun wildlife events for all the family. The National Parks and Wildlife Service organised a special dawn bat watching event at Emo Court, courtesy of the Office of Public Works, on 22nd May, 2009 at 4.30 a.m. The Dower House at Emo contains a Soprano Pipistrelle roost of over 300 bats.

A Dawn Watch was held, to show people the bats gathering at dawn to swarm before re-entering the roost. This was a unique opportunity for the public to experience this great wildlife spectacle.

Bat experts from Scott Cawley and Associates and National Parks and Wildlife Service staff were on hand to provide information and answer questions about the bats.

Richard Jack of Coillte led a guided walk at Glenbarrow in the Slieve Blooms on 22nd May, while Laois County Council and Knockmay Family Resource Centre hosted an afternoon of wildlife fun on the same day. This was aimed at Families and Young Children and was very well attended.

The annual Dawn Chorus walk was held at Brittas Lake in Clonaslee, with thanks as always to Coillte, on Sunday 24th May at 4.00 a.m.

The following Members were elected to Laois County Council. At the AGM of the Council held on 19th June, Cllr James Daly was elected as Cathaoirleach and Cllr Martin Phelan was elected as Leas Cathaoirleach.

At the AGM of Portlaoise Town Council, Cllr Kathleen O'Brien was elected as Mayor and Cllr Jeremiah Lodge was elected as Deputy Mayor. At the AGM of Mountmellick Town Council, Cllr Rosemary Whelan was elected as Cathaoirleach and Cllr Ollie Payne was elected as Leas Cathaoirleach.

Borris in Ossory Electoral Area



John Joe Fennelly (F.F.)



Michael Lalor (F.G.)



John King (F.G.)



Brendan Phelan (F.F.)



John Bonham (F.G.)



Martin Phelan (F.G.)

Emo Electoral Area



Ray Cribbin (F.F.)



Paul Mitchell (Non Party)



Tom Mulhall (F.G.)



James Deegan (F.G.)

Mountmellick Electoral Area



David Goodwin (F.G.)



Patrick Bracken (F.F.)



Patrick Bowe (Labour)



Seamus McDonald (F.F.)

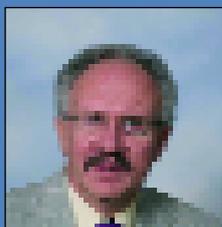
Luggacurren Electoral Area



James Daly (F.G.)



John Robert Moran (F.G.)



Padraig Fleming (F.F.)



Ben Brennan (Non Party)

Local Elections
were held on
Friday, 5th
June, 2009.

Portlaoise Electoral Area



William Aird (F.G.)



Brian Stanley (Sinn Féin)



Mary Sweeney (F.G.)



Jeremiah Lodge (F.F.)



Kathleen O'Brien (F.G.)



Rotimi Adebari (Non Party)



Catherine Fitzgerald (F.F.)

Portarlinton Recycling Centre



Portarlinton Recycling Centre was officially opened on 25th June, 2009, by An Cathaoirleach James Daly M.C.C. This Recycling Centre was 75% funded by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and is an objective of the Regional Waste Management Plan 2005 – 2010 for County Laois, where it is hoped to provide a total of 3 Recycling Facilities in the lifetime of the plan.

This facility was constructed by Noel Regan & Sons (Plant

Hire) Ltd., and is being run by AES, who successfully obtained the service contract for a 2 year period.

The importance of recycling and managing our waste in a sustainable fashion is increasingly important. It is imperative for Laois County Council to provide such high quality facilities to allow householders recycle as much material as possible. We are already at 36% recycling regionally and the provision of additional facilities like this one will improve on this rate. There is a €3.00 charge to use this facility.

Laois County Council is fully committed to the development and upgrading of recycling facilities throughout the county.



By Gum!

Laois County Council has teamed up again this year with the national Gum Litter Taskforce Campaign to change attitudes and behaviour among a minority of gum users who dispose of chewing gum irresponsibly – an activity which is subject to a litter fine of €150!



This year's launch had additional support from Portlaoise Tidy Towns and pupils and teachers from Scoil Mhuire and the Sacred Heart NS in Portlaoise. Both schools have an excellent track record in the Green Schools programme and were delighted to get involved in this worthwhile initiative. As part of the mid campaign boost, all primary school students were invited to participate in an Internet Scavenger Hunt, on this campaign, on Laois County Council's website.



Green News from Green Schools

There are now 42 Green Flags awarded in County Laois - more than 50% of all schools have now received this prestigious award!

This is a fantastic achievement for all the schools, teachers, pupils and parents that are involved. Congratulations if you, your children or grandchildren are involved.



Paws for thought



Did you know that when your dog does its business – it's your business!

Under the Litter Pollution Act 1997 - 2003, dog owners are legally obliged to clean up after their pets if they go to the toilet in public places e.g. on the street, in a park.

If you do not clean up after your pet, you are liable to receive an on-the-spot fine of €150, which if it is not paid, means you can be brought to Court, which can lead to a prosecution with a much larger penalty.

Comhairle na nÓg 2008

Comhairle na nÓg was held on 13th November, 2008 in Portlaoise College. Approximately 180 fifth year and transition year students from eleven of the twelve secondary schools in Laois, along with pupils from Youth Reach in Mountmellick, participated on the day, assisted by a number of facilitators.

There were three themes discussed – “The Importance of Sport & Physical Activity”; “Substance Abuse” and “Funding Our Education System”.

The students participated in a regional event early in 2009, with colleagues from Offaly, Longford and Westmeath in preparation for the National Dáil na nÓg event in February, 2009.



Students from Laois, John Delaney, Jennifer McDermot, Laura Birch and Jim Gibbons at the National Dáil na nÓg which took place on 20th February, 2009 in Croke Park, Dublin.

- Laois Dyslexia Support Group
- Raheen Panto Society
- Portarlinton Community Development Association
- Portarlinton After School Project
- Clonaslee Community Development Association
- St. Tighearnach’s National School
- Mountmellick Youth Development Centre
- South East Laois Arts Network
- Laois/Offaly Families for Autism
- Spink Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann



Launch of Community Forum website

Laois Community Forum launched its own website on 15th April, 2009. The website provides information to community groups and the public at large on the Forum’s background, role, membership, meetings, etc. More importantly, Community Groups can now access information on various community activities and events and funding allocations. The Forum is delighted to be online with information available to everyone, but in particular for the 500 community and voluntary groups registered with the Forum. The community and voluntary sector has a real input into issues affecting them and their area. Everyone is encouraged to get involved and to check out the new website www.laoiscommunityforum.ie.

Celebrating Older Persons Day

Following the success of last year’s “Celebrating Older Persons Day”, Laois Community Forum, Laois Partnership and Laois Sports Partnership organised another “Celebrating Older People Day” which was held on 30th June, 2009, in the Parish Centre, Portlaoise.

This event was well attended by approximately 50 people, representing various groups from around the county. A number of presentations were made by:-

- Health Service Executive
- Laois Sports Partnership
- Muintir na Tire
- Services to Elderly People Portlaoise (STEPP)

A number of workshops were also held including “Go for Life Workshop” by Laois Sports Partnership, “Music by Laois School of Music”, “Accessing the World Wide Web” by Laois Partnership and Arts/Crafts by Patricia Bennett, local artist.

Information from Laois Library Services, Money & Budgeting – M.A.B.S., Citizens Information and Carer’s Association provided participants with lots of relevant and useful information.



Members of Laois Community Forum and Mr Declan Byrne and Ms Ann Carroll, Laois County Council, at the launch of the Forum’s website.

Community Forum Youth Grants Scheme

On 24th June, 2009, Laois Community Forum awarded grants to successful community groups.

Pride of Place 2009

Following on from the major successes achieved by Portlaoise Parish Centre and Mountmellick Voluntary Housing Association in the All Island 2008 Pride of Place Competition, Laois will be represented by four community groups from Camross, Rossmore/Killeshin, Donaghmore Workhouse and Portlaoise in this years competition.

Now in its seventh year, it is hosted by Co-Operation Ireland under its Local Authority Programme, in conjunction with

Councils in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The aim of the Pride of Place Competition is to recognise initiatives taken by local communities 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. In 2008, over 100 entries representing cities, towns and villages throughout the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland were nominated by their local authorities to take part in the competition.

Judging of this year's Pride of Place competition took place on 8th & 9th July, 2009 and results will be announced in November, 2009. Laois representatives in the 2009 competition are:

**Population Category 1: 0 - 200 population
Camross Village**

As Camross celebrates the 100th year of their National School and the 150th anniversary of Camross G.A.A., along with hosting the Laois Fleadh 2009, the community of Camross have entered the Pride of Place competition to showcase this hive of activity at the foot of the Slieve Blooms.

The people of Camross are very proud of their people, their long standing and successful GAA tradition, their music and dancing, their heritage and their new community centre and youth café, all set against the beautiful backdrop of the Slieve Bloom Mountains.



**Housing Estates Category
Riverview Portlaoise**

Riverview Housing Estate is a local authority estate with 18 apartments. The residents moved into their new homes in October 2002. It is a unique housing estate in that the majority of the residents are Senior Citizens. The estate itself is one of the most attractive areas to live with a beautifully landscaped communal garden and fabulous flowers in bloom every year. The residents themselves maintain and enjoy the benefits of a very productive vegetable garden at the rear of the estate. The hard work of the residents has been recognized locally as the estate has won Best Estate in the Laois County Council Tidy Estates Competition in the years 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007.



**Population Category 2: 200 - 500 population
Rossmore/Killeshin**

Rossmore/Killeshin Development Association (RKDA) displays community spirit at its best with their community hall, dancing boards and their recently installed childrens playground. They showcased in the competition their numerous activities and fundraising community events, from Summer BBQ's, Halloween Parties, Christmas functions, Mock Wedding and their weekly dancing at the crossroads event with outdoor music on Sunday afternoons.



**Heritage Category
Donaghmore Workhouse & Agricultural Museum**

Donaghmore Workhouse & Agricultural Museum is a unique attraction in County Laois, and aims to tell the story of the families who lived and died within the Famine Workhouse walls before, during and after the Great Famine. The Museum uses guided and self-guided tours combined with various exhibits and pageants to explain the socio-economic conditions which led to the establishment of this and other Workhouses.

Visitors to the Museum will also enjoy an agricultural collection made up of a wide range of artefacts donated by local people, ranging from farm implements, household items and hand tools located in one of the two buildings that make up the Donaghmore Workhouse & Agricultural Museum. The committee are very proud of such a valuable and authentic asset in the South Laois region and are delighted to bring it to a national audience through the Pride of Place competition.



Fusion Intercultural Family Day

The 2009 Fusion Intercultural Family Day took place on 1st August in Portlaoise Leisure Centre. This event is organized jointly by Laois County Council, Laois Partnership and Laois Sports Partnership. A large number of families attended the event, children were treated to a host of fun activities including games, dance, arts and crafts, face painting, hair braiding, free swimming sessions and bouncing castles.

In keeping with the intercultural theme, African bands performed for the visitors at the Leisure Centre. Ethnic groups from nine different nationalities cooked and supplied the food on the day.

Laois Local Drugs Network

To assist the work of the Midland Regional Drugs Task Force, a Local Drugs Network Committee has been established in the county. The committee will work to raise awareness of combating substance abuse within the county with a multi agency approach.

The committee have put together a work programme for 2009 and have received funding from the Midland Regional Drugs Task Force to implement the actions in the plan.

Arts News

Laois School of Music Durrow

A new centre of The Laois School of Music opened in Durrow in November, 2008. Based in the Old Boys School, the centre offers tuition in Piano, Group Keyboards, Guitar and Kindermusic and has almost 50 pupils to date. The initiative has been widely welcomed in the Durrow area and has received tremendous support, in particular from Durrow Development Forum and Laois Partnership, who recently funded the purchase of a new piano.

It is hoped to develop further Outreach Centres from the Laois School of Music around the county.

In other LSM news, the School Orchestra took part in the Irish Association of Youth Orchestra Festival in the National Concert Hall in February, 2009. A Family Day was held in the Dunamais Arts Centre on 2nd May and included workshops in Kindermusic, Singing and Percussion along with a Lunchtime concert by the Orpheus Orchestra, the Adult Ensemble and the Flute Choir.

The School of Music re-opened for the 9th year of tuition in September, 2009. For further information contact Co-ordinator Nuala Kelly at (057) 8674345.

Laois Youth Theatre



Workshops for LYT culminated in a "Family Fun Day" event to coincide with the Dunamais Arts Centre 10th Birthday celebrations on 6th June, 2009. Over 60 members of Laois Youth Theatre participated, aged between 7 and 17.

The all-day event included stunning end of year performances from Rathdowney, Portarlinton, Mountrath and Stradbally Youth Theatres, including a wacky play based on songs by Tom Chapin; a play about the precious gift of friendship; a spooky piece about the Spiddal Gaeltacht and a fishy tale about changing your luck.

The Youth Theatre co-ordinators, in between producing live theatre shows, entertained families with their storytelling skills in the Gallery space, while members of Portlaoise Youth Theatre busied themselves face-painting in the Dunamais foyer. Louise Donlon, manager of the Dunamais Arts Centre presented Achievement Certificates and a t-shirt to each of the Youth Theatre members.

Leaves

The Leaves Literary Festival, in association with the Dunamais Arts Centre, was held on 18th and 19th September, 2009.

The Festival featured as part of the Sunday Miscellany Radio 1 programme and writers for the event included Laois native Pat Boran. The festival was a mixture of readings, workshops for adults and children, an anthology launch and an event at Emo Court.

Summer Arts Workshops

The Summer Arts Programme included a total of 18 different week long workshops designed for children and young people.



The programme took place over the summer period at various locations throughout the county - Luggacurren, Abbeyleix, Portlaoise, Portarlinton, Mountrath and Mountmellick.

The children enjoyed such diverse workshops as Art, Pottery, Creative Writing, Drama, Dance and Kindermusic with experienced tutors.

Bealtaine Festival Events – in association with Age and Opportunity

May, 2009 was a very busy month with Bealtaine Festival Events taking place. The programme included storytelling sessions with Liz Weir, performances of a Scottish and Irish Music



and Dance Show with John Davidson and Aishling Walsh and performances by the Laois ICA Choir for the patients, outpatients and staff of Abbeyleix Hospital and Day Care Centre, St. Brigids' Hospital Shaen and St Vincent's Hospital, Mountmellick.

The Laois School of Music Orpheus Orchestra performed for the active retirement group 50 Plus in the Parish Centre, Portlaoise, and Creative Writing workshops were held with writer Jean O'Brien for members of the Ballinakill Active Retirement Group.

In June last the Health and Safety Authority published their 2008 Annual Report and Statistics Report - here is a flavour of some of the key findings:

- The number of work related deaths was 57 compared to 67 in 2007.
- There were 6 non-worker fatalities, 4 of these were children.
- Over a third of work related deaths occurred in agriculture even though it employs just 6% of the workforce.
- 7,658 non-fatal accidents were reported
- The most common accident triggers remain manual handling and slips, trips and falls.
- HSA carried out 16,009 inspections.
- 14% of inspections resulted in enforcement action.
- 54% of inspections resulted in written advice and guidance.
- In 2008 fines totalling over €2.5 million were imposed for breaches of health and safety law.

The vast majority of fatal accidents could easily be prevented by implementing good safety practices in the workplace.

Taking a few simple steps such as planning the work activity, not taking shortcuts, maintaining and using the correct plant and equipment etc. can greatly reduce the risk of accidents.

During last August, the Health & Safety Authority stated that almost 60% of farmers had not completed a Farm Safety Code of Practice and they called on farmers to take "personal responsibility" for their safety.

The Authority stated that they will now begin to prosecute farmers and that the "softly softly approach" was over. Farming consistently accounts for a third of all workplace deaths annually and up to 1,800 serious injuries take place in the sector each year.

Teagasc will provide 100 half-day courses around the country to assist farmers to complete the Farm Safety Code. Farmers should contact their local Teagasc office for details.

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 home - so the message clearly is to Put Safety First by simply Thinking and Acting Safely at all times.

Register of Electors

The Draft Register of Electors 2010/2011 is published on 1st November. It is your responsibility to ensure that you are included on the Register.

REMEMBER

IF YOU ARE NOT REGISTERED YOU CAN'T VOTE

You can check if you are included on the current Register at your local Post Office, Garda Station, Health Centre or Library, at www.checktheregister.ie or by contacting the Corporate Affairs Department

If you are not included on the Register you can make a claim for inclusion on the 2010/2011 Register up to 25th November, 2009.

To qualify for inclusion you must be 18 years of age or reach 18 years by 15th February, 2010, be ordinarily resident on 1st September, 2009, at the address at which you wish to be registered and ensure that you are not registered as an elector at any other address.

Application forms are available at your local Post Office, Garda Station, Health Centre or Library or on request from Corporate Affairs Department at (057) 8664247 or (057) 8664105, by e-mail to register@laoiscoco.ie or by fax to (057) 8622313.

Special voting arrangements apply in the case of Electors who are ordinarily resident in a hospital or nursing home and 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 due to circumstances of occupation/education can also apply for inclusion on the Postal Voters list.

Application forms for inclusion on the Postal and Special voters lists are also available from Corporate Affairs and must be completed and returned on or before 25th November, 2009.

Online Services

www.laois.ie

Did you know that you can avail of many On-line services on Laois County Council's website?

These include:

- **Planning On-line** - View planning applications and their associated documents.
- **Check the Register of Electors** to see if you are registered to vote.
- **Renew and browse for Library books** online. The libraries also provide a range of free on-line reference services.
- **View Laois County Council Publications.**
- **View our Latest News.**
- **A range of application forms** for many services are available to download.
- **Credit Card Payments On-line** – Renew your Motor Tax, Top up your Landfill keyfob, Pay Traffic fines, Litter fines and Fire Charges, Purchase a Composter and/or Trailer Cover.

Access to these On-line services is available at all Council Libraries and at the Council Area Offices, details of which are listed below. Please contact the relevant Area Office for details of opening hours.

Courthouse, **Borris-in-Ossory** Tel: (0505) 41123
Sleaty Road, **Graigucullen** Tel: (059) 9165960
1 Park Lane, **Portarlington** Tel: (057) 8636533

AFFORDABLE HOMES

PRICES REDUCED - INCOME LIMITS RAISED



For the last number of years Laois County Council has been providing quality homes at Affordable prices throughout the county. While the aim of the scheme has always been to provide homes below market prices, the recent reduction in house prices on the open market has had a knock-on effect on affordable homes. Houses that were already competitively priced have had sale prices further reduced in line with market conditions.

As a result of this shift in the market, eligibility criteria has been adjusted with income limits increased and applications can now be assessed on a case by case basis. Interested parties are advised to contact our sales team for further information. The scheme is aimed primarily at first time buyers however exceptional circumstances (e.g. separation / divorce) will be taken into account.

Laois County Council's sale prices on our Affordable Homes have been greatly reduced in a number of our developments and with only a 3% deposit required taking that first step on the property ladder may be easier that you think.

Our Affordable Homes Sales Team is currently selling quality homes at various locations throughout the county:

Portlaoise

Esker Hills	€160,000
Maryborough Village	€155,000
Clonroosk Abbey	€160 - 170,000
Oakleaf Crescent	€99,000

Mountrath

Kiln Lane	€155,000
Rush Hall	€150,000

Portarlinton

Canal Court	€155,900
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Abbeyleix

Slí na n'Óir, Balladine	€150,000
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A limited number of properties are also available at other locations in Laois and all properties are available for immediate viewing by approved applicants.

The Council may even be able to offer the necessary finance to purchase your new home. However you must have sufficient income to meet your mortgage repayments.

PLEASE CONTACT THE SALES TEAM AT (057) 8664088