

Mayo Day 2021

Saturday, May 1

Western People

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Western People
Women's
Mini Marathon



MAYO.IE





SATURDAY, 1st MAY 2021

CELEBRATING OUR PEOPLE AND PLACE AND SHOWCASING MAYO TO A WORLDWIDE AUDIENCE

A flagship TV programme at 9.30pm on Mayo Day evening on TG4 and the TG4 Player. Music and culture, conversation and craic with very special guests, and showcasing the incomparable beauty of our Atlantic county.



Matt Molloy



Laoise Kelly



Chantelle Padden



Billow Wood

MUSIC: Matt Molloy of The Chieftains, Laoise Kelly, Billow Wood, Lisa Canny and more.

Mayo County Council, in partnership with The Western People and The Irish Times presents

MAYO

A WORLD CLASS PLACE TO DO BUSINESS

a free business and enterprise event taking place online at 6.30pm on Thursday, April 29th. All are welcome, register now for your complimentary ticket at [irishtimes.com/MayoDay](https://www.irishtimes.com/MayoDay)

Le seacht mbliana anuas, tá glas agus dearg Mhaigh Eo ar foluain againn le bród; bród as ár gcontae, as ár muintir, as ár n-oidhreacht.

Lá Mhaigh Eo Facebook Page: Gaeilge Chontae Mhaigh Eo.

**CELEBRATING MAYO DAY, THE MAYO WAY
EVERYONE IS WELCOME - GET INVOLVED.**

Mayo Day 2021 will be fully online. Keep up to date on what's happening by visiting www.Mayo.ie and our social media.



This year's Mayo Day will be a 'magnificent seven'

By James Laffey, Editor

In a time of local lockdown and global uncertainty, this year's Mayo Day offers a reassuring and optimistic perspective on our county, its people, and the future. The second successive virtual Mayo Day promises to be a spectacular celebration of 'all things Mayo', attracting a national and international audience who will get to see at first hand the very best our county has to offer.

The *Western People* and our parent company, *The Irish Times*, are delighted to partner with Mayo County Council for the inaugural event of the Mayo Day weekend, an online economic forum, which takes place this Thursday evening, April 29. Some of the county's leading entrepreneurs - both established and up-and-coming - will take part in a panel discussion on the theme, 'Mayo: A World-Class Place To Do Business'.

The online conference could not come at a more opportune time. The Covid-19 pandemic has presented enormous challenges for businesses in rural Ireland but, equally, it has opened up new vistas of opportunity that seemed unimaginable just 15 months ago. The future of remote working, in particular, is very exciting and creates an entirely new dynamic for our rural towns and villages, one that has the potential to completely reim-

agine so-called peripheral communities.

The online conference also takes place against the backdrop of the launch of the Government's new strategy for rural Ireland, entitled *Our Rural Future*. The plan is one of the most exciting and encouraging policy documents to be published in many a long year, certainly as far as regional development is concerned. Consequently, it is really important that County Mayo places itself front and centre of a new national debate on our rural future. The virtual conference next Thursday is an important milestone in rural Ireland's journey out of the Covid pandemic and towards a brighter, more prosperous future.

Mayo Day itself, which takes place on Saturday, May 1, will once again bring families and friends from all over the globe together in a celebration of the place they call home. Last year's virtual events tapped into a real yearning for meaningful connections among Mayo people internationally as they grappled with the pandemic and, in particular, the physical distances that had suddenly become insurmountable due to travel restrictions. We are now at a stage where some family members have not been able to meet in person for more than a year so events like Mayo Day, where people from all over the globe can share a moment of celebration of their



The famous Crete Boom in Ballina Quay was lit in green and red to mark Mayo Day 2017.

Mayo roots, are really important in these difficult times. The TG4 television show, which is the flagship event for this year's Mayo Day, will be watched in every corner of the globe and, no doubt, a tear or two will be shed by those who would just love to be back in the place they will always call 'home'.

Mayo Day is now in its seventh year and one of the highlights of the weekend has traditionally been the Western People West of Ireland Women's Mini-Marathon, organised by Mayo Sports Partnership in association with

this newspaper. The event actually pre-dates Mayo Day by several years - in fact, this year is the 12th running of the mini-marathon - and we are delighted that it has successfully moved into the virtual space. Last year, a virtual race was organised at short notice and it attracted a fantastic response, so it was inevitable once lockdown restrictions were re-introduced in January that a second virtual mini-marathon would be organised for 2021. The response has been truly incredible. At the time of writing, almost 2,000 women from all over the globe

have registered to take part, and they will raise tens of thousands of badly-needed euros for many very worthy charities, which have been unable to organise public fundraisers during the past year.

In this souvenir magazine, the *Western People* gives our readers at home and abroad a taste of the fantastic weekend of events and entertainment that are all part of Mayo Day 2021. We hope it is a weekend where every Mayo person, wherever they are in the

world, will feel a little more connected to home and will take some time out of the never-ending cycle of gloomy national and international headlines to look with hope and confidence to a post-pandemic Mayo.

The main image on our front page depicts the fireworks display at Lough Lannagh in Castlebar on the inaugural Mayo Day in 2015. Picture: Michael McLaughlin



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'Showcasing all that is good about our people and place'

Since its inception in 2015, Mayo Day has become a firm fixture in the calendar for Mayo communities at home and all around the globe.

From modest beginnings, Mayo Day has evolved and grown in stature year on year, and it has firmly claimed the first Saturday in May as its own.

Mayo is unique amongst counties in claiming a day to be its own. An idea born in Mayo County Council, Mayo Day over the years has been a truly community-driven initiative, with hundreds of events and activities taking place across the county, the country and around the world over the last number of years.

Here's a quick recap of the Mayo Day journey during the last six years:

2015: AN IMMEDIATE IMPACT

The inaugural Mayo Day featured events and celebrations in Mayo communities from Belmullet to Boston and Killala to Kuala Lumpur, and it made a remarkable international impact in its first year.

Mayo people at home and abroad seized the opportunity to recognise their county, its people, its majestic landscape, its incredible history and culture showing Mayo is very definitely leading the way in county pride.

The highlight of Mayo Day 2015 was the 'Mayo Day Live' Broadcast live from the Royal Theatre in Castlebar, a two-hour television show produced by Irish TV and broadcast on Sky channel 191 between 8pm and 10pm. The show, a celebration of County Mayo, its heritage, its culture and its people, was a star-studded mix of performances, music and chat in a gala-style setting.

This was followed by fireworks lighting up the sky over Castlebar in the county colours, while in Westport, Spraoi on the Quay provided a family-friendly festival.

The 2015 visuals were superb – Niagara Falls lit up in green and red, paving the way for other major landmarks to follow suit. A gala dinner took place in Toronto, while the diaspora in Man-

chester quickly sold out their weekend of events including a Mayo exhibition and a Mayo Showcase of music and dance.

2016: A CONNECTED COUNTY

Following on the huge international success of 2015, focus shifted back to local shores and Mayo Day 2016 was held in conjunction with the biennial Mayo World Convention. 'Mayo: the Connected County' was the appropriate theme.

Taking place in the Broadhaven Bay Hotel, it was a combination of promotional, networking and informative events, culminating in a gala evening.

Hosted by The Mayo Association of Dublin and Mayo County Council, the convention gave the network of Mayo associations scattered around the world an opportunity to connect, network and strengthen ties with each other. Irish TV broadcasted a one-hour live show following the gala dinner.

The green and red lighting campaign continued apace around the globe while at home, towns and villages threw themselves into organising events of all types. Westport held a Bike Buffet, the Men's Shed hosted set and Céili dancing while the Clew Bay Pipe Band led a merry dance from the Octagon on the Piper's Trail. Poetry, music and storytelling spilled from the town's cafes all day long.

Bangor Erris organised a hugely popular Mayo Day Treasure Hunt, Clare Island hosted an adventure race and not to be outdone, Inishturk held a Community Futures launch with a locally hand-crafted sea currach and film documentary. Newport youths hosted a traditional music session. Achill featured our native language with Ceiliuradh La Mhaigh in Oilean Acla with Cluiche Peil Gaelach idir na caillini oga and Cluiche Sacar idir na gasur oga while Scoil Acla held a music evening in Teach Gielty.

Teach Greannai Community Centre Corrán Búí, Ros Dumhach, celebrated Mayo past and present with displays of domestic antiques, exhibits by an award-winning local photographer, music from local musicians and the local national school children's choir, as well as premium Mayo food.

2017: THE FRENCH CONNECTION

2017 saw another leap forward laying down a real online marker with the Mayo Day film which went viral over the weekend reaching 1.4 million people. High quality, emotive content delivered a powerful



sense of Mayo, expressing Mayo Day in stunning visuals. As one of the national papers put it, 'Stunningly polished and emotive ... will send shivers down your spine'.

Mayo Day 2017 celebrated our special 'Mayo-French Connection', with a flagship Year of the French 1798 battle re-enactment in the streets of Castlebar, attended by over 5,000 people, a family day on the Mall in Castlebar, the L'Arbre de la Liberté Conference in GMT and events, attended by the French Ambassador, at Moore Hall.

Some 10,000 people attended other events and activities across the county with everything from music and musings to fireworks and folklore. A live outdoor concert in Ballina's Military Quarter and a multi-cultural festival in Ballyhaunis involved entire communities. Mayo Day was on everyone's lips, truly claiming the day for the county.

2018: MADE OF MAYO

In 2018, the flagship 'Made of Mayo' event took place in Ballinrobe racecourse which was transformed into a celebration of 'all things Mayo' with free entry for all.

Creative talent of all sorts was showcased and the three Gaeltacht regions combined for their Bliaín na Gaeilge event, bringing all aspects of Irish culture to the fore. Everyone in the family was catered for and young people, in particular, had all sorts of activities to take part in. Making pizzas and make-up artists jostled for attention with the Connacht Rugby Hub and Mayo GAA footballers. The food marquee really stamped

its mark on the festival too, showcasing the strength and variety of artisan producers in the county.

Around the world, iconic structures and monuments lit up boldly in green and red, with the resulting images bolstering an ever-stronger online presence.

2019: THE MAYO WORD

The theme of Mayo Day 2019 was 'The Mayo Word', representing communities, creativity and a strong connection to pride of place, both in Mayo and around the globe.

The flagship event moved to the glorious grounds of the National Museum of Ireland – Country Life, Turlough.

Bigger than ever, the festival celebrated everything to do with Mayo, including all of the attractions from 2018 and adding many more. In keeping with the theme, the Neighbourhood Marquee featured new Mayo citizens from Burma, Africa, Russia, Syria and Palestine sharing their cultures.

Gaeilge Mhaigh Eo had live music, sean-nós dancing, a book launch and exhibitions as well as a competition for a newly-composed song in Irish with County Mayo as the theme. Some 200 children took part in activities and workshops while the Made of Mayo craft, design and food showcase was rapidly burgeoning.

The finest musical talents played to record crowds, while birds of prey soared over Men's Sheds, Mayo Fire Service, the Civil Defence and Glenhest travelling cottage. New greening elements included a free shuttle bus, a focus on access via the Green-

way and mobile hydrations to encourage a plastic-free festival.

Mayo Day 2019 coincided with 'The Big Hello' a new National Community Weekend initiative. The 'Mayo Hello' took the format of 38 communities and groups around the country taking on the Mayo Day theme in their event.

Overseas celebrations continued to build and a special commemorative event at the Irish Hunger Memorial in Battery Park, Manhattan drew massive international attention. The new Wild Atlantic Way video attracted huge attention while the Twitter hashtag #MayoDay accrued 16.16 impressions.

Numbers involved in Mayo Day continued growing with 15 to 20,000 attending events in Mayo with a staggering social media reach of 2.07 million people.

2020: VIRTUAL MAYO DAY

The sixth Mayo Day took on an entirely new form as Covid-19 restrictions demanded an alternative approach.

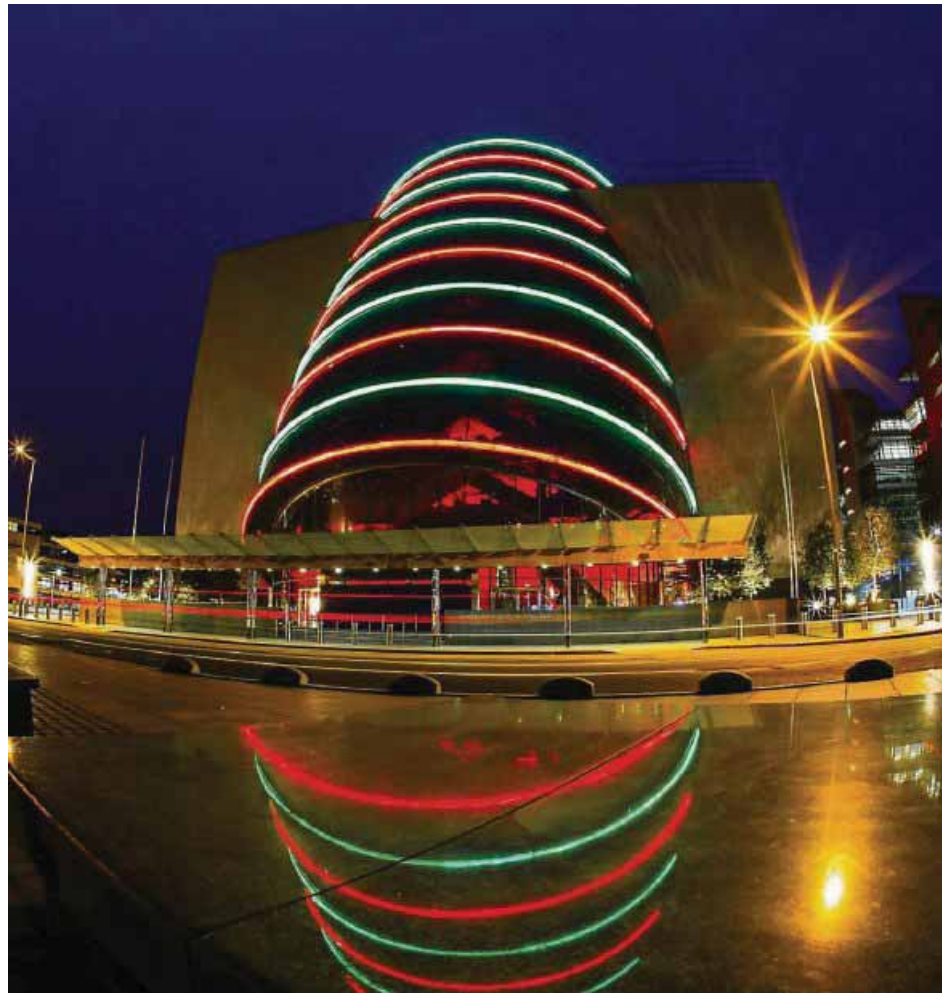
Undaunted by the challenge, Virtual Mayo Day was born. Key to the decision to run with Mayo Day 2020 was ensuring that Mayo people worldwide would have an opportunity to get involved and that the traction and following built up over the previous five years were not lost. Virtual Mayo Day was a resounding success, ultimately winning 'Festival of the Year' at the 2020 Chambers Ireland Excel-



2015: The team from Kellys of Newport get into the Mayo Day spirit.



2015: The concept of Mayo Day immediately captured the public imagination.



2015: The Convention Centre in Dublin was one of the iconic landmarks to be lit in green and red for Mayo Day.



2015: One of the highlights of the inaugural Mayo Day was the sight of the Niagra Falls lit up in gree and red.



2017: The third Mayo Day scaled new heights at its launch in Claremorris.



2017: Huge crowds attended the Races of Castlebar Renactment on Mayo Day.



2016: The second Mayo Day saw the Mayo World Convention coming to Belmullet. Picture: Henry Wills



lence in Local Government Awards.
 The website www.mayo.ie was the Mayo Day stage and the home of the live broadcast, Global Voices. It was a celebratory combination of chat, interviews, music and messages of hope and solidarity from well-known personalities with Mayo connections. Performances by some of Mayo's most talented musicians and singers were true highlights.
 One popular section was 'A Minute for Mayo', a series of messages from national and international leaders.
 A new video 'Oceans Apart' was launched to huge critical acclaim. Interweaving voices of Mayo people thousands of miles from home, the film offers a poignant reflection of 2020 Ireland. Exploring the realities of life for people dur-

ing the lockdown and for those who have emigrated, it looked at the hardships and tensions experienced by those who leave and those who stay. The emigration effect on families has a deeply rooted place within the fabric of west of Ireland life.
 Mayo Day 2020 had the strongest online showing to date with the hashtag #MayoDay reaching over 13 million people. It began trending at number one in Ireland by 12.30 on Saturday and remained in the top 5 on Twitter for the day.
 Virtual Mayo Day captured the imagination and hearts of the Global Diaspora and locals alike and the attention of the wider
2021 AND BEYOND
 This year marks another virtual Mayo Day as Covid restrictions continue to keep the country in lockdown. However, an exciting programme of events has been planned

(details are published throughout this magazine) and there is already enormous enthusiasm among Mayo people all over the globe for Mayo Day 2021.
 Catherine Mc Connell, Director of Services, Mayo County Council, says the Mayo Day concept is "a key pillar of Mayo County Council's Diaspora Strategy."
 "The opportunity to connect and engage with the Global Mayo Diaspora on a dedicated day in the year provides a significant opportunity for us. The concept has grown year on year into a very recognisable Mayo brand, locally, nationally and internationally.
 "Now in its seventh year and despite a global pandemic, Mayo Day celebrations in 2020 and again in 2021 have pivoted using technology and new platforms to garner maximum reach. At a time when so many of our Mayo Diaspora have been unable to visit the coun-



2017: A re-enactment of the Battle of Castlebar, better known as the Races of Castlebar, was the highlight of the third Mayo Day. Picture: Michael McLaughlin



2019: Mayo Day came to New York when a very special event was held at the Irish Hunger Memorial.



2018: Gwen and Fred Thompson from Leenaune with their Mayo Monsters at the Made of Mayo event in Ballinrobe Racecourse.



2019: The fifth annual Mayo Day saw the launch of a vintage GAA jersey which was worn by the county's senior footballers in their championship tie in New York. Pictured modeling the new jersey on the shores of Lough Lannagh were, from left: Diarmaid O'Connor, Paddy Durcan, Lee Keegan and David Drake. Picture: Michael McLaughlin



2019: Musician Lisa Canny performing at The Mayo Word celebrations at The National Museum Of Ireland, Turlough House. Picture: Michael McLaughlin

ty, Mayo Day provides an opportunity to showcase all that is good about our people and place and keep that all important connection strong and to the fore."

Speaking of the Success of Mayo Day over the last number of years, Martina Hughes Head of Communications at Mayo County Council said Mayo Day is a national award-winning campaign that connects with our Mayo people around the globe.

"It is a unique initiative, in that we are the first county that celebrates the achievements of our people, our rich

heritage, culture and community spirit on one dedicated day. If you are from Mayo, have visited Mayo, or like many people have a *grá* for Mayo, Mayo Day connects us all on this one special day.

"The Mayo Day initiative has grown at pace over the years into something that is really remarkable and provides us with an opportunity to present Mayo to a global audience and amplify a clear message of that pride and passion of the green and red of Mayo people irrespective of where they are located in the world



2016: Children from Culmore NS, Swinford celebrating Mayo Day.



2018: Made of Mayo at Ballinrobe Racecourse proved a hugely popular family attraction for the fourth Mayo Day. Picture: Michael McLaughlin



2019: Ava Duffy, Castlebar with her grandfather Noel Gallagher from Ballintubber enjoying the Birds of Prey demonstration with Jason Deacy at Mayo Day celebrations in the Museum of Country Life, Turlough Park. Picture: Michael McLaughlin



2020: Presenter Liam Horan interviewing former President of Ireland Mary Robinson as part of the Virtual Mayo Day celebrations.

'Think Mayo' as a place to live, work, and do business

By Keith Bourke

Mayo's economic success stories and the county's rich potential will be considered and explored as part of this year's Mayo Day.

In 2021, the celebration of all things Mayo takes a deep dive into the county's footing as a world-class place to do business. A marquee event in the

Mayo Day calendar will see two stellar panels gather on Thursday next, April 29, for a special virtual evening that will discuss the county's economic past, present, and exciting future. The event is being organised in conjunction with the *Western People* and *The Irish Times*.

John Magee, Acting Director of Economic Development and Community Engagement

at Mayo County Council, said it felt timely to shine a light on Mayo's dynamic business community and the economic

possibilities for the county, as part of this year's Mayo Day. "We decided this year to take the opportunity, on foot

of the Mayo Day celebrations, which are now well established, to celebrate and bring some focus on Mayo as a place where world-class businesses are located and are growing. It is about highlighting Mayo as a place that people can live and work, can start and grow world-classes businesses.

"This has been an incredibly tough year for many businesses in Mayo. The hospitality, tourism and retail sectors, in particular, have been massively impacted. But there has also been a high degree of both innovation and resilience."

John believes Mayo can stand proud thanks to the business environment it has already fostered and created but said there is much more to come.

"Mayo is starting from a position of strength. We already have globally significant businesses here, in the form of Allergan, Ballina Beverages, Baxter Healthcare, Hollister, Fort Wayne Metals and others. We make the world's Botox and have one of the largest Coca-Cola concentrate plants anywhere in the world.

"We manufacture incredibly high value-added products across a range of industries and have a very significant local GDP. This is a testament to a quality workforce, one that is highly skilled and can compete on the global stage. This talent base allows us to attract new companies like Meissner Filtration Products and we continue to work closely with IDA Ireland to pitch Mayo as a location of choice."

Mayo needs to shout from the rooftops about what it has achieved and what it has to offer.

"We should celebrate what we are doing here, not just in the context of our FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) sector but also in the context of an emerging and resilient indigenous business sector, and most excitingly of all Mayo is a place where there is creativity, and energy, and high-quality start-ups across the technology, manufacturing and creative industry spheres. There is a sort of Meitheal spirit around supporting start-ups in Mayo that you might not necessarily get in other places," he said.

"It's important that we put our hand up and be confident about what we have to offer now. What we are trying to do is change the narrative around the county."

A wide range of factors, from an appreciation of our excellent Quality of Life to our existing employers to our outstanding natural environment, means that what was once 'To Hell or to Connacht' has been replaced by 'It has to be Mayo!' and the remote working revolution could have far-reaching benefits for the county.

"Mayo stands on the cusp of a very exciting future in my opinion. A place where our quality of life, our attractiveness as a place to live, our dramatic scenery, is unique. That can enable us to drive home the competitive and comparative advantage this county has relative to many other places.

"Many of our existing em-



Mayo's Local Enterprise Office has been providing business supports since 2014.



Pictured at Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur competition in 2019 were, from left: Peter Hynes, the then Chief Executive, Mayo County Council; John Magee, the then Head of Enterprise of Local Enterprise Office, Mayo; Sean McGarry of ShowerGem; Minister Heather Humphreys; Brendan Maloney of Skillko; the then Cathaoirleach of Mayo County Council Brendan Mulroy; and Elaine Moyles, Local Enterprise Office Mayo



Pictured at the event in Kiltonan Castle in 2018 were, from left: Catherine McConnell, Director of Services, Mayo Co Council; John Magee, the then Head of Mayo LEO; Anne Conlon, President, Network Mayo.

ployers are growing their workforce here and we have an emerging, creative and innovative start-up sector that is building the next generation of significant employers. The virtual event we are running on April 29 will capture a sense of that," said John.

While many believe remote working could spell the death-knell for the traditional office, John is taking a different perspective.

"The office is not dead, and neither are cities. Both have a lot to offer, but for the first time, people now have an opportunity to make a choice about where they spend their time and it's not an either/or. People now realise they can have a job with an international company or one based in Dublin or Galway, but they can still live in Mayo and have a blended experience. Never before have there been so many opportunities in that regard," he added.

Mayo County Council and its Local Enterprise Office (LEO) has positioned itself as a place of support and advice for all manner of economic activity.

"We have a very strong record and a suite of supports available. People approach the LEO with anything from an idea right through to looking at what is possible by way of

venture capital funding and we will provide that helping hand, that partnership approach all the way through. We have the expertise to make the connections that many businesses need. Our Mentor Mayo initiative, for example, connects a range of highly experienced local business people with those starting out and those that wish to take their business to the next level. This is a voluntary initiative and reflects that Meitheal spirit I mentioned earlier.

"And I believe people now appreciate how the County Council, through the Local Enterprise Office, is somewhere you go to have a conversation about your business, about improving competitiveness, about trying to drive innovation, somewhere that can help people take that business to export. We want to help business to think big, to think international, to have high expectations of themselves. It's only by driving that culture change will businesses have the confidence to go and do it."

The Government's ambitious plan for rural Ireland which was unveiled last month appears to offer exciting opportunities for Mayo. The local authority is not blind to the challenges that must be overcome to allow the

county to realise its full potential but is confident that a rural county like Mayo has a hugely exciting future.

"The roll-out of broadband and digital connectivity is going to take away one of the big barriers when it comes to doing business in rural Ireland. The revitalisation of our towns and villages is certainly a challenge for the next 10 years but is also the key to unlocking the county's future. Placemaking and the creation of a vibrant and attractive place to live remains the key enabler in all of this."

The ball has already started rolling on developments that will provide top-class spaces for businesses and remote workers to thrive and flourish.

"In Ballina, the Innovation Quarter at the former Military Barracks will provide 20,000 sq ft of enterprise, innovation and creative space. The Leeson Centre in Westport has already established a strong track record of helping start-ups grow and scale, giving a positive indication of the need for further such developments in the town.

"In Castlebar, the Urban Regeneration Development Funding announced a month ago will reimagine the Imperial Hotel as a hub and centre of innovation. In Swinford, the



John Magee, Acting Director of Economic Development and Community Engagement at Mayo County Council, hosting a Brexit Workshop.

oldest courthouse is being reimaged as a digital hub."

The incredible talent that Mayo has often exported elsewhere now has the opportunity to return home.

"Every company needs talent, and attracting and retaining good people is a major priority for companies that wish to expand and grow. The impacts of the pandemic have unanchored people in a certain sense from having to be in

commuter distance of Dublin, Galway, or Cork, and moving home to Mayo to live and work is now a realistic possibility," says John. "Mayo has the highest proportion of students of any county in the country that progress to third-level education but unfortunately the statistics are not so positive when we focus on how many of these students decide to return to Mayo to live permanently, with Mayo being the second

oldest county per median age in the country.

"We now have an opportunity to attract people back home as location becomes way less important in a post-pandemic world where people no longer have to be tied to a certain physical distance from their employer. That enables them to think differently about their county. Our pitch now to people is "Think Mayo."

To celebrate the seventh year of Mayo Day, Mayo County Council, in partnership with the Western People and The Irish Times, is hosting a special virtual seminar on Thursday, April 29. The event will examine the strong fundamentals of Mayo's economy, look at local resilience, and how to move forward with confidence and conviction. The virtual seminar will feature two panels which will see six different business people reflect on the diverse and exciting nature of the Mayo economy. The first panel discussion will focus on established businesses and **KEITH BOURKE** profiles the three participants.

Mayo: A fantastic place to

Ciarán Hancock will chair the discussion

Ciarán Hancock, Business Editor with The Irish Times, will lead the discussion on how established businesses in Mayo have worked through the challenges of Covid-19 and the outlook of business leaders in the county.

Ciarán is one of the most authoritative voices in busi-

ness journalism in Ireland and hosts the weekly Inside Business Podcast, which has built up a huge following.

The virtual, free event takes place on Thursday next, commencing at 6.45pm. Tickets can be obtained from Eventbrite, just search 'The Irish Times Mayo Day Event'.



Ciarán Hancock, Irish Times Business Editor.

History and heritage vital to one of Ireland's iconic brands

The romance and history of Foxford Woollen Mills won the heart of Joe Queenan while he was involved in the receivership process of the business.

Following a stint in London, the Lahardane man joined the accountancy firm Bourke, Gilroy, Gannon in Ballina and in August 1987, Rory Quinn, a partner in that firm, happened to be appointed as receiver of Foxford Woollen Mills. The Mills fell into receivership in 1987, a victim of recession and the lure of low-cost manufacturing in overseas markets.

Joe's focus changed from doing the accounts of sole traders and small companies to spending all his time in Foxford Woollen Mills working on the receivership process. He was smitten by the history and heritage of the business. With the expertise of Wexford Textiles owner Tom O'Mahony, Joe secured investment to acquire the Mills himself and has been Managing Director of the business ever since.

"I like business but I never liked accountancy. I always wanted to get into the cut and thrust of day-to-day business, I fell in love with the history and the heritage and the story of Foxford Woollen Mills," said Joe.

They have been weaving blankets and throws in Foxford since 1892 when the Mill was originally established by Catholic nun Sister Mary Joseph Arsenius to provide a

sustainable income for locals.

"It was incredible really a woman coming to a town that was on its knees, a woman who had no knowledge of business, a woman who was 50 years of age. She was a real pioneer," explains Joe.

"When I started out what I protected the most was the heritage of the place and ensuring the business survived. Whatever that took to do we did," he added.

Joe and his team restructured the Mills from a vertical operation to a weaving and finishing one and today, as well as the original Mills where blankets, throws and scarves are still crafted, Foxford hosts a luxury and contemporary homewares store, a café, and a visitor centre, as well as a store in Westport, and concessions in Arnotts in Dublin. It has also embraced the online market. Foxford products are exported to the USA, Europe, Asia, and Australia and are distributed to selected retail outlets within Ireland. The company now employs 70 people and spans the manufacturing, retail, food, and tourism sectors.

Joe cites the establishment of the visitor centre in Foxford as a turning point for the business.

"That really started us on the journey towards a more consumer-driven business and really developing the brand. It gave us a real plat-



Joe Queenan has managed to marry tradition and modernity at Foxford Woollen Mills.

form," said Joe.

Covid-19 has presented significant challenges for Foxford Woollen Mills but the company tackled those difficulties head-on.

"Digitally the pandemic has created or accelerated huge changes for our business that

will be with us I think forever. It has also put Irish brands and products back into focus again. The credit crash of 2010 did that as well. We grew through the credit crash believe it or not.

"Irish people during lockdown have put on the green

shirt and have been really supportive towards a lot of Irish companies. They went online, bought Irish and allowed companies like us to survive. If I was told 18 months ago that we would be closed for six or seven months of the year and we would still

be solvent I wouldn't have believed it," said Joe.

He is firmly convinced that Mayo is a great place to do business.

"It's a fantastic county with a huge diaspora. There is a fantastic pool of talent here too," said Joe.

do business

Michael engineers real success story

Michael O'Donnell's work has taken him to locations all over the globe but the 'West is Best' for the proud Killala man.

"If I never crossed to the east side of the Shannon again, it wouldn't bother me in the slightest. The quality of life in the west of Ireland is something else; you couldn't get it anywhere else in the world," said Michael, who is the managing director of Fort Wayne Metals Ireland.

The company's Irish base is in Castlebar and has seen exciting growth and expansion in recent years.

His first foray into what was to become a long engineering career began in his native Killala under the tutelage of the late, great Seán Hannick at Killala Precision Engineering.

"I loved working there, it was a badge of honour to work for KPC, there was a very characteristic smell from the coolant and you'd almost want that smell coming off your clothes when you went into the local as a young fella," Michael recalls with fondness.

Recruited out of college to work for De Beers Industrial

Diamond Division in Shannon, the lure of home brought Michael back and he joined GenCorp-Henniges Elastomers in Ballina.

It proved to be a steep learning curve for Michael as the car components company pulled the plug on its Irish operations in 2001 resulting in the loss of more than 200 jobs.

"I joined GenCorp as Engineering Manager, then took over as Operations Manager and eventually became General Manager. I spent 14 years there until 2001 when I had to shut it down. Suffice it to say it made a man out of the boy!" remarks Michael. "It was a massive learning curve for me, mainly in people management and leadership. No sooner had I joined the company than the mantra changed to 'cost-cutting, cost-cutting and cost-cutting' and we did our level best to avert the inevitable," he added.

Fort Wayne Metals soon came calling for Michael. He was attracted to the ethos of the company which he recognised from his days with Killala Precision Engineering.



Michael O'Donnell has presided over a remarkable expansion at Fort Wayne Metals in Castlebar.

The company is a manufacturer of precision medical wire and components for cardiovascular and neurostimulation devices.

It has grown to become one of the biggest success stories of the local economy. In 2019, the firm opened a new facility and is currently at the forefront of producing Nitinol wires and components. This special alloy has revolution-

ised medical procedures because of its super-elastic properties.

"More recently we have joined forces with I-Form, part of Science Federation Ireland (SFI) to undertake research into the 3D Printing of Nitinol for medical devices and other applications. We have two PhD students based at I-Form and our Product Development Manager Declan

Bourke is undertaking research there also. We expect 3D Printing of Nitinol to be a game-changer just as it has become in the titanium implants industry," said Michael.

Fort Wayne Metals Ireland currently has 115 employees at its Castlebar facility and more than 10 of the staff previously worked with Michael in GenCorp.

He believes the targeting of privately held companies like Fort Wayne Metals and Meissner is key to sustainable economic growth in the west of Ireland.

"The success of these companies would suggest targeting private companies is a good model for the IDA to follow in order to attract industry to the regions," said the managing director.



Maureen Walsh moved from Boston to Claremorris in 1999 to take charge of DeCare Dental Insurance.

DeCare is keeping a smile on the face of Mayo's economy

Maureen Walsh made the move from Boston to Claremorris in 1999 to establish DeCare Dental Insurance Ireland.

She has led DeCare Dental Insurance Ireland from the start-up stage to become Ireland's only specialist dental and vision benefits insurer and oral health company. Over 100 people are now employed at DeCare's Irish headquarters in Claremorris and they work with over 400 Irish companies. They are a subsidiary of DeCare Dental LLC which boasts over nine million members worldwide.

Maureen has seen Irish people develop a much greater interest in oral health and protecting their smile.

"I moved here 21 years ago when there was no private dental insurance in Ireland at all. We have seen so many changes over the past number of years. People are using dental insurance more than ever, they are retaining their dental insurance but we are still working to raise awareness.

"Even though we are here 21 years, it is still an emerging market in Ireland. But if you look now at the number of people who have private dental insurance in Ireland it has grown significantly. In the past five years we estimate

that the number of people with private dental insurance in Ireland has doubled," explains Maureen.

Despite the pandemic, the company has continued to flourish.

"Our business has grown both on the Irish side and the US side. We are putting that down to a number of dynamics. Number one, the costs are escalating. Covid has brought new costs to dental practices, that underpins a bigger need for insurance. With company's employees working from home more than ever before, they are looking at every single way they can keep their employees healthy and happy and benefits are among the ways they are doing that, be it dental, vision, or wellness," said Maureen.

De Care Dental Ireland was founded by Maureen's father, Claremorris native and former Mayo footballer Michael Walsh, who won county senior titles with his local club and wore the Green and Red jersey at senior level. His daughter has spearheaded the company from her dad's birthplace.

"I have always loved Ireland and have had a hugely special connection with Ireland and Mayo because of my Dad," said Maureen.

"Claremorris was very different to Boston as you can imagine," Maureen remarks, laughing. "But I was made feel so welcome here from the very beginning and that was amazing. People would have known my Dad and DeCare coming here was a really big thing. They were so good to me.

"Claremorris has changed a lot since 1999 but what remains the same is the people and their nature," she added.

The DeCare Ireland boss has witnessed significant strides being made when it comes to doing business in Mayo.

"While the region has challenges, there is no question about that, you also have to look at what we have here. Look at the tremendous talent we have, look at what we have as a place to live.

"We still have a lot of work to do in terms of infrastructure, but Mayo is a completely different place from when we first came here.

"People are recognising Mayo globally as a great place to visit, work, do business, and raise a family. I think what Mayo and Claremorris has done over the last number of years is put itself in a very strong position. Mayo has not stood still," Maureen commented.

To celebrate the seventh year of Mayo Day, Mayo County Council, in partnership with the Western People and The Irish Times, is hosting a special virtual seminar on Thursday, April 29. The event will examine the strong fundamentals of Mayo's economy, look at local resilience, and how to move forward with confidence and conviction. The virtual seminar will feature two panels which will see six different business people reflect on the diverse and exciting nature of the Mayo economy. The second discussion will focus on the new generation of entrepreneurs from Mayo who are making their mark globally. **KEITH BOURKE** profiles the three participants.

Mayo entrepreneurs take

Claremorris native to chair second panel

BreakingNews.ie Editor Michael McAleer will host a discussion on how a new generation of entrepreneurs and smaller businesses are contributing to a county highly regarded for its innovation, creativity, and willingness to take on the world.

Claremorris-born journalist Michael was ap-

pointed editor of BreakingNews.ie last year.

The news website is part of *The Irish Times* media group.

The virtual, free event takes place on Thursday next, commencing at 6.45pm. Tickets can be obtained from Eventbrite, just search 'The Irish Times Mayo Day Event'.



Michael McAleer, Editor BreakingNews.ie

'A creative business can thrive from anywhere'

"As long as you're always thinking on a global level a creative business can thrive from anywhere," says international visual artist Tracy Sweeney.

The Castlebar woman is absolutely convinced that Mayo forms the perfect backdrop for home-grown artwork with a globally appreciative audience.

"My sense of being a Mayo person is hugely important; the instinct for survival in a place that for many in Europe was the edge of the known world."

Married to renowned goldsmith and jewellery designer Nigel O'Reilly, when Tracy is not in the studio creating commissions for museums and private global clients, she works as Creative Director at Nigel O'Reilly Jewellery. Each role complements the other.

"My background in visual arts, photography, visual discourse and curating has had a huge influence on our company direction coupled with Nigel's skill in engineering and design. An inspired education spurs your creative output and company trajectory in ways you never thought possible. Our market is very niche and we nurture it with strategic relationships in areas of luxury fashion, high jewellery, design and media representation".

Developing these relationships has been key to Tracy and Nigel's success, having recently been featured in *The New York Times*, *Forbes*, and *The Financial Times*. O'Reilly's works have also been worn by celebrities such as Julianne Moore and Saoirse Ronan. Their works have been chosen by Sotheby's of New York for auction to great success, alongside a list of multiple awards in both fine art and design fields.

"There is no such thing as mediocrity in the world of high-jewellery or art," explains Tracy. "We may be based in Mayo, but by creating works with precision, superior raw materials and produced to the highest level of craftsmanship, clients worldwide are assured by a solid reputation and belief at the core of what you create," said the award-winning artist.

Tracy's father ran an agricultural supplies business just outside Castlebar and she believes he imbued her with an enterprising streak.

"There were people in college that as long as they were producing art that was fine for them, they didn't mind where they lived or what they were doing but I was always like 'No, I am going to leave here and I am going to make art and I am going to sell art and make a living out of it'."

"I think a lot of that stems from growing up in the family business and working behind the counter at nine years old and dealing with people."

Tracy had a single-minded determination to prove that there was a business in her art.

"My father was like 'Don't do it. There's no consistency with it, you're going to be



Tracy Sweeney: So many people think a creative job is not going to pay the bills but you only have to look at the world around you to realise that is not the case.

struggling to make a pound every week." It was only years later when I had an exhibition in Stockholm and he came over to it and he looked around and realised that I had sold practically everything in the exhibition. He put his two hands on my shoulders and said 'I can't believe you did it!'

"Art is an actual career and so many people think a creative job is not going to pay the

bills but you only have to look at the world around you to realise that is not the case," she stated.

The last year has seen a shift in Tracy's client base.

"There are definitely more people looking for art and they are buying it online. Most of my clients this year have been from Ireland whereas prior to that most of my clients were in England, Sweden, and as far

away as Hong Kong."

She believes creativity and the world of enterprise and business should complement each other.

"Anybody with a creative mind is going to think outside the box and because of that, there is definitely a niche for that person in fields of production, manufacturing, or art and design. There are so many areas that a person with that

kind of mind can hone in on. It has actually been proven that a creative brain has more persistence with a job, you stick at things for longer until you get it right.

"What I tell our two boys at home, even though they are only small, is no matter what job you go for there is a place for them in that field as long as they can think outside the box."

on the world

Internet came at just the right time

Crossmolina native John Mullen has helped grow IT service provider Version 1 into a company with 1,400 employees in Ireland, the UK, and India, and annual revenue in excess of €140 million.

In 1996, the Computer Science graduate left behind a job with the ESB to co-found the company.

"It was definitely risky at the time. I had a young family and a mortgage and the ESB was definitely a home game for me as my Dad had worked in the ESB for years in Bellacorick. I was very happy there but I just had a hankering to do something for myself," said John.

Fortunately for John, the company got off the ground at just the right time.

"Then we got lucky and the Internet came along!" John says, laughing. "You were talking about the start of the Celtic Tiger which nobody really saw coming and the start of the internet which nobody really saw coming so we caught a couple of really good waves there," he added.

John has been involved in driving the growth of Version 1, originally as Technical Director, then in Business Development,

and most recently as Innovation Director and now Chair. Version 1 specialises in international management consulting, software asset management, software development, cloud computing, and outsourcing.

Relationships with customers based on trust and loyalty saw the company through economic challenges.

"The dot.com bubble was tricky enough for the IT industry because it coincided with the whole Y2K thing and there was a mini-bloodbath around the whole IT industry around the early 2000s. But at the time we were too small really to be massively impacted by it.

"The recession in 2009 was pretty hard and we were much more linked into the fate of the economy. We had just gone over employing 200 people at the time. That did hit very hard but one of the things that we learned at the time and what stood to us was the good long-term recurring contracts with good customers. They were loyal to us and us to them which was so important and that got us through that time. There was a period there when nobody in the country was buying a television let



Crossmolina native John Mullen, Director, Version 1 pictured in 2008 with Derek Alexander, Software Asset Management Consultant, Version 1.

alone software," remarks John.

As well as being involved in one of the world's most competitive and fast-moving industries, John is also passionate about mentoring and investing in start-ups, particularly in the West of Ireland.

Starting a company like Version 1 in Mayo 25 years ago would have been practically unthinkable, but John is ecstatic that this is no longer the case for aspiring entrepreneurs.

"When we set up the business 25 years ago you just had

no choice but to be absolutely beside your customers and I wore out several pairs of shoes from Loftus' in Crossmolina walking the pavements of Dublin 1 and Dublin 2 drumming up business. There was no other way of doing it at that time. That whole idea of working

anywhere but an office was just pie in the sky" said John. "The landscape has changed so much now in terms of physical and electronic connectivity that it is absolutely possible now to build something like this from Mayo," he added.



Brendan Maloney operates SkillKo from Westport.

'You no longer need to be based in Dublin or Galway'

Westport entrepreneur Brendan Maloney has packed more into a seven-year business career than many would in a lifetime.

Brendan is the founder of Westport-based Skillko, a training, safety and compliance management company with a complete training management solution that helps businesses ensure they have a trained workforce and aids training providers looking to grow their business.

The 33-year old began his working life as a health and safety contractor but was always attracted to the idea of having his own business.

"It was something I always wanted to do. I wanted to build my own thing and have my own business," said Brendan.

Skillko is the third business he has established and the company has 12 staff based in Westport, Dublin, and Portugal.

"I set up my first business in 2015, Westbel Limited, building utility networks across the UK and employed up to 250 people. I successfully exited the Westbel business in 2018 and co-founded Skillko in September 2018 after two years of research.

"We are a self-funded SaaS (Software as a Service) business.

"We are growing organically and proud that 45% of our sales come from customer referrals," said Brendan.

Brendan saw first-hand the pitfalls and challenges faced by companies and clients struggling to juggle the different elements surrounding training, certification, and record-keeping for both direct staff and contractors.

"Skillko is a training compliance management platform.

"It eliminates up to 80% of training administration within an organisation and ensures 100% compliance," explains Brendan.

"It follows on to a marketplace where training providers set up on the system and they can offer their training courses to the businesses that we offer on the platform."

In the second half of this year, the company hopes to launch 'Skillko Learn.' This will streamline and digitise the induction process for the new staff of a company and the new development will also see the roll-out of a learning management system for the

construction and utilities sector.

After nine years in the UK, Brendan and his wife were anxious to return home.

"Especially with start-ups, I knew I would be working every hour of the day and I would rather do that in a place where you would have the support of your family and friends around you. We have two small boys as well," explains Brendan.

He said attracting talent in Mayo has never been an issue for Skillko.

"We have an excellent team here in our Westport office. I have been pleasantly surprised by the number of people who are in this space in Westport and Mayo. When we advertise for positions the standard of some of the applications gives you great confidence," said the entrepreneur.

Brendan is a keen advocate for the benefits of doing business here in Mayo.

"People can come here, set up a start-up, set up a business, move a business. You don't need to be based in Dublin or Galway anymore and with the infrastructure that is coming into Mayo now it's only going to get better."

Flagship TG4 show will attract global audience

Date for your diary: Mayo Day: Ár bPobal, Our People on Saturday, May 1, 9.30pm, TG4

Join Eibhlín Ní Chonghaile and Dáithí Gallagher in a one-hour flagship programme broadcast on Mayo Day, May 1, on TG4 at 9.30pm, and on the TG4 Player worldwide to celebrate all things Mayo.

The programme, entitled *Mayo Day: Ár bPobal, Our People*, will feature the best of Mayo music and culture, conversation and craic, and showcase the beauty of this Atlantic county. Guest appearances are expected from the Mayo diaspora in every corner of the planet and even beyond, with aeronautical engineer Norah Patten due to drop by.

The presenters will also chat with photographer Fergus Sweeney about Blacksod Lighthouse and continue to head along The Lost Valley and sample local produce on the Gourmet Greenway. The standard of musical performances will be exceptional with Matt Molloy of The Chieftains, Laoise Kelly, Billow Wood, Chantelle Padden, Lisa Canny, Emer Mayock, Tom Doherty and family and more.

There are over 3.5 million people from all over the world with Mayo connections. Some

of them will recount their lives abroad. The show will hear from Andrew Walsh, professional chef from Breaffy who runs three restaurants in Singapore. Dr Lisa Ní Chuinneagáin is a flight doctor from Ballina and located in the UK. Mary O'Halloran from Foxford brings some tales from the city that never sleeps where she owns Irish pub Mary O's.

The hugely successful Mayo Day celebrates its seventh year on Saturday next, May 1, with an outstanding programme of events to be viewed from around the globe. The Mayo Day Festival is virtual again this year, but this has brought unexpected opportunities and expanded the reach of the celebration. It's a unique occasion as Mayo remains the only county with its own name day, celebrating achievements, heritage and culture, diaspora and community spirit.

The emphasis is on People and Place and taking this opportunity to showcase the best of Mayo.

Martina Hughes, Head of Communications, Mayo County Council, outlined: "Now in its seventh year, Mayo Day has been a fantastic initiative that has highlighted the unique people and place that is our county. While we celebrate another Mayo Day in Covid times, we are delighted to have this opportunity to collaborate with TG4 in delivering *Mayo Day: Ár bPobal, Our People*, a TV programme

that showcases the very best of our county and its people at home and away. This Mayo Day show is sure to bring Mayo people across the globe together in spirit and hopefully once travel allows, an opportunity to visit the county again."

Proinsias Ní Ghráinne, Commissioning Editor, TG4 said: "TG4 is delighted to partner with Mayo Day to bring this astounding wealth of talent all from the county of the Green and Red to audiences throughout Ireland and the globe via the TG4 player. We are especially excited to support the composition of a new tune to the traditional Irish music repertoire by Laoise Kelly, the current Gramdam Ceoil TG4 recipient and trust that 'The Mayo Fling' will be played near and far for generations to come."

TG4 brings this previously streamed day of celebrations to new platforms supported by Mayo County Council and produced by Riverside for TG4 and Mayo County Council.

Catherine McConnell, Director of Services at Mayo County Council, confirmed: "One of the original and ongoing aims of Mayo Day is to promote Mayo nationally and internationally as a positive location for business and tourism and to further enhance the image of Mayo as a progressive county at the heart of the Wild Atlantic Way."

"We are delighted to have had the opportunity to work with TG4 on this flagship event for 2021. Our key audience is, of course, Mayo people around the world and through the TG4 Player and its availability worldwide, this platform works really well. I would like to acknowledge our partners at Tourism Ireland,

Fáilte Ireland and Creative Ireland in supporting this project."

The musicians taking part in this programme are:

BILLOW WOOD

Billow Wood, create modern magic with their original fusion of folk, traditional Irish music and indie pop rock. Members, Brid O'Donnell, Ciara O'Donnell, Harry Lawlor and Mark O'Donnell are all multi-instrumentalist and vocalist. They have performed across the globe, including headlining their own US tour in 2019.

DAVID AND KIERAN MUNNELLY

Having lived in different countries and through a global pandemic this is the first time in many years that brothers David and Kieran Munnelly will perform together. The Munnellys have a flair to their music that is rare to come across. The box player and flautist play their musical instruments to their fullest international sense.

CHANTELLE PADDEN

Hailing from Belmullet, this Country star is on the rise. Chantelle has recently appeared on the latest season of ITV's hit series *The Voice UK*. She was on team Olly Murs but just missed out on the live shows having been beaten in the battle round.

LISA CANNY

Hailing from Mayo but now living in London, Lisa has

mixed her traditional musical roots with contemporary modern pop and hip-hop music. The seven-time All-Ireland harp and banjo winner has toured Ireland, UK, America, Canada and Europe. Her new track 'Medicine' will be exclusively performed on Mayo Day.

Tom Doherty and a Chlann Tom Doherty comes from a musical family in Foxford. He started to learn the accordion from Martin Donoghue when he was four years old. Tom won his first All-Ireland on the concertina. He also has an All-Ireland title on the Melodeon. He has since progressed to become a professional musician and music teacher. He has toured extensively in Ireland and Europe and the US. Tom's music is featured on numerous television recordings and CDs. His four daughters join him to perform on Mayo Day on TG4.

LAOISE KELLY AND MATT MOLLOY

TG4 Gramdam Ceoil recipient Laoise Kelly has composed a new piece of music in honour of Mayo Day called 'Fling Mhaigh Eo'. Laoise lives on Achill Island. She performs with her good friend Matt Molloy of The Chieftains who also now calls Mayo 'home'.

INTRODUCING THE PRESENTERS

Dáithí Gallagher
Hailing from Achill Island, Dáithí Gallagher lives and breathes all things Mayo. Dáithí



Lisa Canny has built up a huge international following.



Chantelle Padden is one of the rising stars of Country music.



Music legend Matt Molloy will perform with Laoise Kelly on the show. Dáithí Gallagher

Laoise Kelly will perform with Matt Molloy on the TG4 show.

thí is heavily involved in promoting the culture and language in Mayo. He is also a musician and is part of a band called 'Pitch Slapped' and is involved in musicals in the county. Dáithí and his friend Chris Duffy exploded onto the scene with their hit song 'Mayo For Sam' in 2013.

Eibhlín Ní Chonghaile
Although from Connemara,

Eibhlín Ní Chonghaile is now an adopted Mayo woman, having moved and settled in Ballina ten years ago. The journalist and presenter has graced our airways for the last 21 years on RTE, TG4, Sky News Ireland and RTE Raidió na Gaeltachta. She has three children and she says she will soon have to give in and buy Mayo jerseys for them!



The Doherty family will feature on the TG4 show.



Eibhlín Ní Chonghaile

Down Syndrome Ireland West Regional Centre



Based on the Kilkelly Road, Swinford, Co. Mayo F12 K685

This property was bequeathed to Down Syndrome Ireland by a gentleman Mr. Máirt Campbell who had a dream of turning his home into a centre for people with Down Syndrome in the West of Ireland. The centre will support over 300 babies, children, adults and their families across Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim and Roscommon. In the centre we will be able to cater for subsidised therapies such as Speech Therapy, Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, educational courses/seminars for parents, guardians, teachers, SNA's, promote independent living, workshops for employment skills and lots more.



Beside the centre there will be a playground created for the community, all persons with disabilities and their families. This will be the first of its kind outside of Dublin and a place where every child can play with their friends.

now becoming a reality. Thank you to each individual that is taking part in the West of Ireland Mini Marathon, for every person that sponsored a person, thank you from each and everyone of us, it means a great deal.



www.downsyndromeirelandwest.ie

Idonate link for Mini Marathon: idonate.ie/event/2785_west-of-ireland-mini-marthon.html

Idonate link generally: idonate.ie/5812_down-syndrome-ireland-west-regional-centre.html

SWINFORD PLAYGROUND

- 1. ABILITY TRAMPOLINE
- 2. ABILITY ROUNDABOUT
- 3. 3.1m HIGH, 1m WIDE HILL SLIDE
- 4. SOPRANO PENTATONIC
- 5. SAMBAS
- 6. ABILITY SWING
- 7. WATER PLAY UNIT WITH WATER PUMP

Looking for information? Please call Nichola Gilmartin on 083 318 4075 or info@downsyndromeirelandwest.ie



MAYO DAY 2021 WOMENS VIRTUAL 10K

Mayo.ie
Western People
Women's
Mini Marathon

'MAYO DAY' WEEKEND 1ST - 3RD MAY
You can still register for the event up until April 31st.

However, due to demand, options are as follows :
T-shirt only (please note a wait time 3-4 weeks)

THE EVENT ONLY — €15 (€10 of which goes to charity)

Add results to MyRunResults.com from 1st to 3rd May

Western People



Mini-Marathon goes virtual for 2021



Pauline Casey from Lanesboro and Diane Mullooly from Strokestown pictured at the West of Ireland Women's Mini-Marathon in Castlebar in 2018. This year's Mini-Marathon will be a virtual event due to Covid-19 restrictions but that hasn't stopped women from around Mayo, Ireland, and the wider world from getting involved. Picture: Frank Dolan

WELCOME,

On behalf of Mayo Sports Partnership (MSP) we would like to welcome you all to the 2021 virtual Mayo.ie Western People West of Ireland Women's Mini-Marathon, which takes place over the May Bank Holiday weekend.

This event also forms one of the topline initiatives in this year's Mayo Day celebrations on Saturday, May 1.

Our main goal in the Partnership is to have more people enjoying more sports, promoting health and wellbeing in our communities and improving people's quality of life.

The Covid-19 Pandemic has impacted on every aspect of all of our lives, with sport and physical activity, events and programmes no different.

However, we have learned of new ways to provide oppor-

tunities to partake in sport while being apart.

This has proven to be extremely successful for the Partnership with 1,200 people participating in the virtual 10k Your Way event on the May Bank Holiday last year.

As we write, there are approximately 2,000 participants registered for this year's event, with women from all across Ireland and the world looking to get involved.

We are really happy that so many charities will benefit from the event as we recognise that they have also experienced challenging financial situations.

The West of Ireland Women's Mini Marathon continues to be a high-quality event which has acted as a focus for thousands of women over the years.

Our 'It's For Girls' teenage

initiative also continues to be successful, with 400 students from schools across the region signed up this year, along with 700 primary school children ready to go for the Mini-Mini 2k Fun Run.

We here in Mayo Sports Partnership are delighted to be the main organiser of all these initiatives and to work closely with our partners in the Western People and Mayo.ie.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our Sports Partnership / Mayo County Council staff who have learned how to adapt to this challenging and ever-changing environment.

While the many volunteers and partner organisations are unable to help us with the running of a physical event this year, we do hope to work with you all again in 2022.

On a final note, we are really looking forward to seeing all your photos and stories on our social media platforms, through email and in the Western People.

It is inspiring and uplifting to see the various causes and frontline heroes being recognised. Be safe and please continue to abide by Covid-19 HSE guidelines.

*Cllr Michael Loftus,
Chairman, Mayo Sports
Partnership Board
Charlie Lambert,
Mayo Sports Partnership
Coordinator*

A MESSAGE FROM CATHERINE MCCONNELL, DIRECTOR OF SERVICES AT MAYO COUNTY COUNCIL:

The Mayo.ie Western People Women's Mini-Mara-

thon has been central to Mayo Day activities since the festival's inception in 2015.

Over the years, we have welcomed thousands of women from across the region and beyond for this really worthwhile event.

While we have all had to adapt to a new way of delivering events over the last 12 months, the interest and engagement with the Mini-Marathon just shows how important this event is, both in terms of people taking part but also for the many charities right around the county that benefit.

I am delighted to be taking part again this year and we all look forward to a time when Castlebar will be bustling with eager participants again. In the interim, I would like to take this opportunity to wish ladies all around the county,

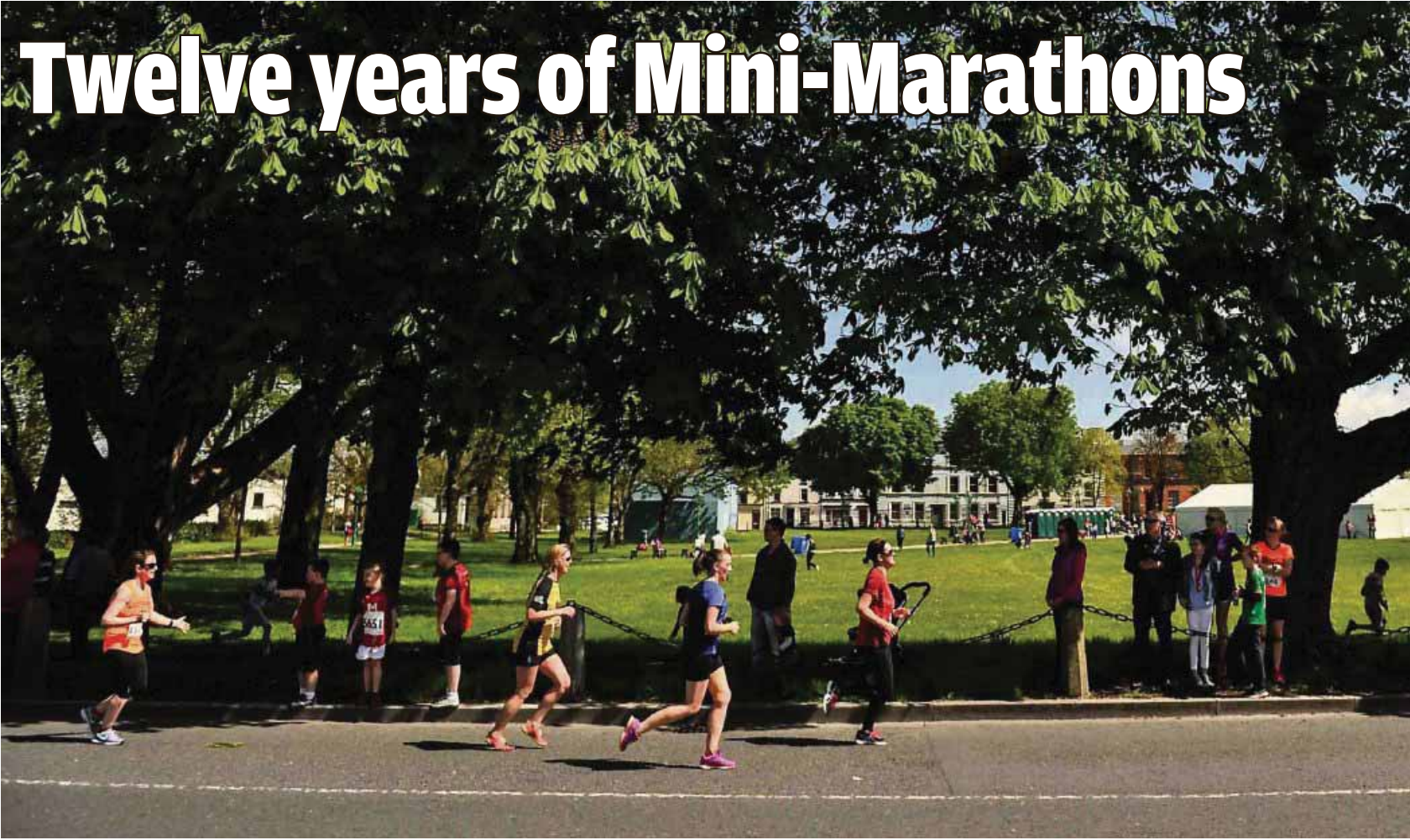
the country and further afield the best of luck in their virtual 10K for Mayo Day.

NOTE TO ENTRANTS

Please note, registration for the 2021 West of Ireland Women's Mini-Marathon will remain open right up until April 30. However, due to demand, participants who enter this week will not receive their special Mini-Marathon tee-shirt and 'Your Hero' sticker before the race. This has been reflected in a reduction in the registration fee from €20 to €15. €10 of the fee will still go to a charity of the entrant's choice.

Alternatively, entrants can choose to pay the full €20 fee, in which case their tee-shirt and race medal will be sent to them when stocks are renewed in approximately three to four weeks' time.

Twelve years of Mini-Marathons



Since the inaugural race in 2010, the West of Ireland Women's Mini-Marathon has raised millions of euros for local charities and seen some of the best female runners in Ireland in action on the streets of Castlebar

By Mark Higgins

Sunday, May 2, 2010: On a breezy but bright afternoon, over 3,000 women from around Mayo and the West of Ireland congregate on The Mall in Castlebar to take part in the inaugural *Western People* West of Ireland Women's Mini-Marathon.

'Lucy battles the breeze to take top prize' ran the headline across the *Western People* two days later, after Sligo woman Lucy Brennan became the first winner of the Mini-Marathon, covering the 10k in an excellent time of 37.57 and finishing a full minute ahead of second-placed Catherine Conway.

Such was the calibre of ath-

lete in that inaugural race that as many as 50 runners managed to complete the distance in under 51 minutes.

Breege Blehin McHale from Moygownagh, who finished fourth overall, said after the race: "My time was down quite a bit for the first half but then it was much improved in the second half. Running into the wind made it a bit tricky but I'm pleased to have finished in the places and I've really enjoyed the day."

"The turn-out has been fantastic and I hope it will now become an annual event."

Breege was right on that count. Eleven years on, and despite recessions, pandemics and all the rest of it, the Mini-Marathon abides. This year's event unfortunately won't be able to take over The Mall as it

usually would but even though the race is taking place in a virtual space this year, the spirit of the Mini-Marathon endures.

■ **2011:** A year later, just a couple of days after a billion-odd people tuned in to watch the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton in London, the crowd had swelled to over 4,000 people for the second installment of the Mini-Marathon. Mayo's newly installed Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, gave the welcoming address and fired the metaphorical starting gun at 12 noon.

The 2011 winner was Collette Tuohy of Mayo AC in a time of 39.27. Collette would go on to become a regular among the top finishers at the Mini-Marathon over the following decade.

The event was also hailed for the impact it had on local charities, at a time when the economic consequences of the crash were still being felt. The inaugural Mini-Marathon had raised an estimated half a million euro in 2010 but the 2011 edition surpassed that figure considerably.

■ **2012:** 12 months later, in the 2012 edition of the Mini-Marathon, Colette Tuohy retained her crown as champion and took almost a full minute off her winning time from the previous year by flying home in a time of 38.29. Dervilla Holmes from Moygownagh and Angela O'Connor completed the top three.

Colette had been a recipient of a Western People Sports Star award the previous February as part of the Mayo AC team and had warmed up for the Mini-Marathon by win-

ning the women's race at the Athenry 5k a week earlier.

Hollymount legend Frank 'The Motivator' Fahey had once again taken the runners through their pre-race warm-up before the special guest on the day, Minister Michael Ring, sent them on their way around the county town. Over 50 different charities were represented among the participants.

■ **2013:** The 2013 Mini-Marathon was to prove the biggest and best yet, with Irish sporting hero and Olympic medalist Sonia O'Sullivan among the participants to line up at the start line. The race was won by another Cork Olympian, Lizzie Lee, who would go on to represent Ireland in the marathon at the Rio Olympics three years later. Lizzie came home in a time of 37.32 to set a new record for the event.

Colette Tuohy, meanwhile, made it a third podium finish in a row by taking bronze, behind European cross-country medalist Rosemary Ryan in second. Among the other big names to compete were Mayo ladies footballers Cora Staunton, Fiona McHale and Marie Corbett.

■ **2014:** The 2014 Mini-Marathon was held on a very Super Sunday indeed: at almost the same time as the starter's pistol was being fired on The Mall, the Mayo footballers were beginning the Connacht championship campaign nearly 5,000km away in Gaelic Park in the Bronx.

James Horan's men easily got the better of New York while Ballina woman Sinead Roche was the first across the line in Castlebar, coming home in 38.42 in the colours of

Mullingar Harriers. Colette Tuohy kept her podium streak going with a silver medal and Patricia McCosker was third. Irish Olympian Olive Loughnane was the guest of honour at the event and also took part in the 10k herself.

2014 was also the first year of the 'Mini-Mini', the accompanying race for national school children. The Mini-Mini proved a huge hit with kids and parents alike with over 500 runners taking part. It has since become an integral part of the Mini-Marathon programme.

■ **2015:** 2015 saw the Mini-Marathon team up for the first time with the newly inaugurated Mayo Day, the celebration of all that makes Mayo and its people unique. The Bank Holiday weekend proved an exceptionally busy one in Castlebar, with the Mini-Marathon and Mayo Day happening in tandem with the Pink Ribbons Charity Cycle and the opening of the new Castlebar to Turlough Greenway.

Lizzie Lee returned to claim back her crown as champion, covering the 10k in an absolutely blistering time of 35.35, setting a new course record in the process. She was followed home by a trio of Mayo athletes with Norah Newcombe second, Regina Casey third and Colette Tuohy in fourth. Sonia O'Sullivan also returned to take part in the event.

■ **2016:** The 2016 Mini-Marathon married with the ongoing 1916 commemorations



The top three finishers in the 2019 West of Ireland Women's Mini Marathon, from left: Edel Reilly (second), Norah Pieterse (first) and Isobel Oakes (third). Picture: Tomás Greally



The picturesque scene at The Mall in Castlebar, the home of the Mini-Marathon since its inaugural staging in 2010. Picture: Tomas Greally



Two Cork women, Sonia O'Sullivan and Lizzie Lee, pictured after Lee's victory in the 2015 Mini-Marathon.



Irish athletics legend Sonia O'Sullivan greets participants before the start of the 2018 Mini-Marathon.



Breege Blehin-McHale stops her watch as she completes the 2012 West of Ireland Women's Mini-Marathon.



Action from the 2018 Mini-Marathon as a determined nun rounds the final bend and heads for the finish line.



Ciara O'Donnell, Maureen Healy, Nicole Healy, Caroline Keogh, Caroline O'Donnell and Brona O'Donnell from Porturlin in North Mayo at the start of the West of Ireland Women's Mini-Marathon in 2019.

Picture: Tom Greally



and Castlebar was decked out in its finery to mark the centenary of the Easter Rising, Mayo Day, and the Mini-Marathon. The Mini-Mini was set at 1,916 metres in tribute. There was also the small matter of the homecoming celebrations for the Mayo under-21 footballers, who had won the All-Ireland with a victory over Cork in Ennis the evening before the event. A busy day in town, all told.

The race was won by Sinead Diver, a remarkable story in her own right — a native of Belmullet who emigrated to Australia and only took up running after getting married and becoming a mum. She won in 35.27, breaking the existing course record and setting a new one which still stands today.

Speaking after the race — remarkably, her first-ever competitive run on Irish soil — Sinead described it as one of the best moments of her life. ■ 2017: Conditions were far from ideal for the 2017 staging

of the Mini-Marathon, with a stiff easterly wind and low temperatures posing challenges to the runners. But over 2,000 women took to the streets of Castlebar nonetheless, eager to celebrate Mayo Day and take part in the 10k.

The race was won by Laura O'Shaughnessy, a native of Loughrea and member of Dundrum South Dublin AC, in a time of 35.41, while Jake O'Brien from Ballyvary was the winner of the Mini-Mini.

■ 2018: Weather conditions 12 months later could hardly have been more different; the 2018 Mini-Marathon was staged in glorious sunshine in Castlebar, with entrants in the main event once again topping 2,000. After a second-place finish two years earlier, Regina Casey finally added her name to the list of Mini-Marathon winners as she came home in 37.41, an impressive time given the day's heat.

Sonia O'Sullivan was once again among the participants, making her third appearance in the Mini-Marathon, while Mayo TD Lisa Chambers was the special guest and official

starter. 2018 also saw the It's For Girls initiative, which encourages secondary-school girls in Mayo to get involved with the event, really pick up steam, with ten different schools signing up.

■ 2019: The Mini-Marathon marked its tenth birthday in 2019, on the same weekend that the Mayo footballers returned to New York and the entire county shone Green and Red for Mayo Day.

By the time ten Mini-Marathons had been run, the event had seen 25,000 participants take part and over €1.5 million raised for local charities. The 2019 race was won by Ballina native Norah Newcombe-Pieterse in a time of 37.38.

■ 2020-2021: Unfortunately, the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic meant the race was forced to move into the virtual space in 2020, and to remain there for the 2021 staging. But just because we can't be there in person, the spirit of the Mini-Marathon will remain undimmed, and we live in hope that we will all be back at The Mall, ready to go on the 'B' of the bang, come the May Bank Holiday of 2022.



Carol Quinn, Caroline Regan and Bernadette Quinn from Ballyhaunis at the Mini-Marathon in 2016.

Picture: Frank Dolan



The winners of the 2018 West of Ireland Women's Mini-Marathon. From left: Maeve Gallagher (Swinford and St Joseph's Secondary School, Castlebar, third), Regina Casey (Galway City Harriers, winner) and Sinead Whitelaw (Mullingar Harriers, second). Picture: Tomás Greally



Runners warming up with Mickey and Minnie Mouse before the 2017 Mini-Marathon.



The top three finishers in the 2017 Mini-Marathon, from left: Catherine Conway (third) Laura O'Shaughnessy (first) and Sara Doohan (second).



Keelin Kavanagh and Evie Shinozaco, both aged five, ran the Mini-Mini in 2016. The race for national school kids has become a key part of the Mini-Marathon since it was first run in 2014. Picture: Tom Greally

Tips and advice for the Mini-Marathon

With less than a week remaining until the Mini-Marathon, the bulk of your training is already done. Don't overwork yourself over the coming days — some light workouts to keep the muscles fresh and the body limber will be plenty. Make sure you get lots of rest in the days before the run and aim to get a good long night's sleep the night before race day.

Hydration is also vitally important. Remember to drink plenty of water at regular intervals in the days before the race, not just on the morning of the run.

Buying a good pair of running shoes is essential. You don't need the most expensive pair in the shop but a good pair with adequate cushioning will help keep injuries at bay and increase comfort.

Think feel and fit, not fashion, and remember sizes differ across brands. It is a good idea to talk to your local running shop for recommen-

dations on the right shoe for your foot and running style.

A good supportive sports bra is essential. This should fit properly and not be too stretched out.

Runners are vulnerable road users and should always wear bright colours, reflective belts and high-viz vests when going out on the road. This is particularly important this year when the Mini-Marathon is being held virtually and where runners are participating on public roads.

Always be conscious of nearby traffic. While some runners like to listen to music while they run, this can be dangerous on busy roads as you may not hear traffic approaching.

Take your time; don't be afraid to start off slowly and progress gradually.

Running with a group can be a big help. There is safety and support in numbers and you are more likely to stick to your pace.

GET INVOLVED ONLINE

With this year's Mini-Marathon being a virtual event, organisers are keen for participants to make full use of social media platforms to share their involvement in Mayo Day and the Mini-Marathon.

Runners are being asked to post their times to myrunresults.ie after they complete their 10k run, jog or walk.

They are also encouraged to use the hashtags #woimm and #mayoday to share pictures, videos and stories, whether running alone, as part of a group of friends or co-workers.

Mayo people around the country and around the world are being asked to 'Show Your Pride for Mayo Day' by donning the Green and Red and connecting with home via social media over the Bank Holiday weekend.

In this year more than most, it is important to foster and

renew the connections that exist between the county and its people, whether they're in Swinford or Sydney, Ballina or Baltimore, Claremorris or Christchurch.

Down Syndrome Ireland Mayo Branch

All of our members wish the very best to the participants of the **Mini Marathon**, fundraising on our behalf

We are the **Mayo Branch of Down Syndrome Ireland**; here to support the people of Mayo who have Down Syndrome and their families.

We provide support with therapies, classes, educational talks, activities and events throughout the year; for children and adults who have Down Syndrome, and their families.

We also provide a **ParentLink** service in which two of our parents have been trained to provide a link, support, listening ear and confidentiality to new parents, whose baby has been diagnosed with Down Syndrome.

For enquires please contact
 Email: mayotreasurer@downsyndrome.ie
 Phone: 083 318 4075



Erris native Sinead Diver winner of the West of Ireland Women's Mini Marathon in 2016, pictured with her mother Bridie, father Eddie, and sister Grainne after the race. Picture: Tomás Greally

Mini-Marathon helping keep dream of Daisy Lodge at Cong alive

Among the numerous charities set to benefit from this year's virtual West of Ireland Mini-Marathon on the May Bank Holiday weekend is the Cancer Fund for Children.

The Fund was established in Northern Ireland over 40 years ago, with the mission of providing support for children diagnosed with cancer and their families.

The charity employs a team of Cancer Support Specialists, whose role is to help, guide and support families at home and in their communities.

In 2016, the Fund opened the doors of their brand-new, state-of-the-art facility at Newcastle in Co Down at the foot of the Mourne Mountains, called Daisy Lodge. Local boy and global golfing superstar Rory McIlroy was among the main financial backers of the project.

Daisy Lodge serves as a re-

treat and a respite for children undergoing cancer treatment, the parents and their siblings, to get away from the stresses and worries of treatment for a few days and enjoy the therapeutic treatments on offer.

"So we would get a call from Crumlin Children's Hospital, for example, saying that Tommy has just finished his treatment. He's been in Crumlin for two or three months and hasn't seen his siblings, because he's isolated for treatment," explains Belinda Kearns, the Relationship Manager for the Cancer Fund for Children.

Daisy Lodge has been a victim of its own success in some ways; it has garnered such a glowing reputation for the services it provides to children with cancer and their families, that demand for places at the Lodge has far exceeded supply.



Golfing superstar Rory McIlroy made a significant donation to the development of the Daisy Lodge at Cong for the Cancer Fund for Children. Picture: INPHO/Oisín Keniry

"We're the only one that does something like this in Ireland, and the demand for the service is crazy. For every one family that we accommodate, there are another seven that we just can't," offered Belinda.

So the idea was born to build a second Daisy Lodge, this time in the Republic. A site was identified in Cong, just opposite the entrance to the Lodge at Ashford Castle. McIlroy, who famously held his wedding in the castle, again put up the funds to purchase the 33-acre site.

There remains fundraising work to do before the Daisy Lodge at Cong can become a reality, however.

"We need to raise €12.5million to build the lodge," said Belinda. "We have full planning permission, the design stage has been completed, and now the fundraising appeal has been launched."

Like almost every charity, the Cancer Fund for Children has taken a hit over the last 13 months due to the pandemic. But plans are still very much in place for the Lodge on the Mayo-Galway border. Belinda outlines that tender approval is expected before the end of 2022 and that works are due to begin on the project in 2023.

Covid has undeniably had an effect but community support, manifested through events like the Mini-Marathon, is ensuring that the Daisy Lodge project remains very much alive.

"We have been massively hit," said Belinda.

"But the support from the Cong community, and Connacht overall, has been overwhelming. Everybody has rallied together. Any walks that were taking place, and fundraising opportunities, they've just come together and done it for us."

Public support vital for Cancer Care West

One of the new elements of this year's West of Ireland Women's Mini-Marathon has been the introduction of the 'Your Way, Your Hero, Your Say' motto.

'Your Say' means that participants in the Mini-Marathon have been given the choice of which charity will benefit from their registration donation.

A list of 18 registered charities is available to entrants on the registration portal, and participants are free to support the charity closest to their own hearts.

Unsurprisingly, one of the charities to draw the most support has been Cancer Care West. Orla Cunniffe, Community Fundraiser with Cancer Care West, outlined the services her organisation provides and explained why events like the Mini-Marathon are so important, particularly this year.

"We're a registered charity and we provide community-based practical and emotional support services to anybody whose life has been affected by a cancer diagnosis," said Orla.

"That can be a patient or a family member. It's not just the patient that we look after. We provide those services throughout the west and north-west of Ireland, so we go all the way up to Donegal and down to Clare."

Cancer Care West runs a 33-room residential facility, Inis Aoihbhinn, on the grounds of University Hospital Galway which provides accommodation to patients from around the western region undergoing cancer treatment, allowing them to stay in Galway, free-of-charge, rather than having to travel up and down every day.

"Outside of Covid, we would allow a family member or friend to stay with the patient if they need it," explained Orla. "That's all a little bit difficult at the moment. We've had to limit the number of family members that we allow

to stay. But there will be some patients that will need someone to stay with them, so we do allow it, but we try not to encourage it at the moment."

In spite of the pandemic, the care and support of patients and their families remain Cancer Care West's top priorities.

"Generally patients tend to stay with us for six to eight weeks through their treatment," continued Orla. "Last year we accommodated about 330 patients through that service, and provided about 8,500 bed nights for patients and their family members."

In addition to Inis Aoihbhinn, Cancer Care West also operates regional support centres in Galway and Letterkenny, which provide professional, practical, psychological and emotional support to patients and their families, both during their cancer treatment and beyond.

"The centres are staffed by clinical counselling psychologists, oncology nurses, a number of professionals like that," said Orla.

"Those centres offer counselling, peer-networking and practical classes. We're doing webinars at the moment because we're not allowed to all be in the same room because of Covid, so there's a lot of on-line stuff happening at the moment. That's all free-of-charge to anybody who needs those services."

Covid-19 has had a huge impact on both the provision of services for Cancer Care West and on their capacity to fundraise.

Almost all of the big fundraising events upon which the charity relies year-on-year have been cancelled, with Orla estimating that over 90 per cent of the usual fundraising activity has been cancelled over the last 13 months.

"Some of them we have tried to do online, in virtual runs and swims, and we have been able to do a certain of those but obviously it hasn't

Cancer Care West have launched a new fundraising initiative — Do Your Best for Cancer Care West.

“It’s the public, the community, that basically allows us to do what we do. That’s why events like the Mini-Marathon are hugely important to us. It’s the community that keeps us going

been as impactful as it would be to actually have the event take place in person,” she offered.

“We’ve been plodding away with what we have, and I suppose we’re in the same boat as every other charity as well at the moment. Everyone is trying to do something virtually.

“We’ve been lucky in that through Covid, we’ve been

able to continue to run the majority of our services remotely. We haven’t had to actually cut anything, but we haven’t been able to take the numbers that we would normally take. A lot more is done online now, rather than face-to-face.

“Money is obviously an issue. It’s the public, the community, that basically allows

us to do what we do. That’s why events like the Mini-Marathon are hugely important to us. It’s the community that keeps us going.”

In that spirit, Cancer Care West has this week launched a new initiative, Do Your Best for Cancer Care West, which encourages members of the public to take on their own challenges and gather sponsorship to support the charity. The challenges can be anything from a 5km walk to a 200km cycle; the idea is simply to do your best.

“Since before Christmas we’ve been trying to push people to just go out and do their 5k or whatever in their own time. Now we’re asking people to register with us. They can choose to do whatever they want. 2k is going to be a massive distance for one person, where for another person it might be 20k,” said Orla.

“It’s aimed at everybody and anybody. When you register you simply choose the distance you want to run, walk, crawl, whatever. They get a personalised donation page and they can get support from their families and friends as well.

“It’s a way to get some funds in for us but also a way to help people get healthy, get out there and get moving because I think we’re all suffering from a little bit of cabin fever at the moment.”

Cancer Care West has already enlisted the support of Galway native and *Operation Transformation* leader Paul Devaney in the Do Your Best campaign.

They are also appealing to companies and businesses in the western region to get involved, by using the challenge as a way of uniting employees while working at home, at the same time as raising vital funds for Cancer Care West and boosting your own physical and mental wellbeing in the process.

Visit cancercarewest.ie to learn more or to sign up.

Norah embracing the 'Your Hero' philosophy

By Mark Higgins

Ballina native Norah Pieterse remains the reigning champion of the West of Ireland Women's Mini-Marathon, at least in its traditional, in-person format. Norah (née Newcombe) broke the tape at the 2019 Mini-Marathon in Castlebar, covering the 10k in a blistering 37.39 in the colours of Mayo AC, a full 83 seconds ahead of the second-place finisher.

Little were any of us to know on that sunny Bank Holiday Sunday two years ago just how drastically life would have changed 24 months on. The 2021 Mini-Marathon will be a virtual event, just as the 2020 edition was, as Covid-19 restrictions continue to make in-person gatherings impossible.

The ongoing vaccine rollout at least gives hope that by 2022 we will be able to congregate on The Mall again, but for now, participants in the Mini-Marathon will have to make do with the highways and byways of their own localities.

But the defending champion is undeterred. Norah won't be chasing down any personal bests this weekend (she and her husband Elmer are expecting their second child, a sibling for Sophia, in September) but she is embracing the 'Your Hero' aspect of this year's event, which encourages participants to run in honour of someone they consider their personal hero.

For Norah, that hero is her six-year-old nephew Alfie, and the charity she is supporting is the Mayo Branch of Down Syndrome Ireland.

"When they said that this year's theme was 'Your Hero' I said there is nobody else!" said Norah this week.

"I didn't have to rack my brain — Alfie is just so special."

Alfie is the son of Norah's brother Noel Newcombe. The family live in Loughrea, where Alfie is enrolled in



Alfie Newcombe pictured with his dad Noel (a native of Ballina) and his mum Ciara.

mainstream school at St Ita's NS.

"His school was closed, and it was hard," said Norah. "Someone with special needs, they need their routine and they need to be doing the same things. He had an SNA coming to him once a week, but they're all happy now that he's back in school."

"Alfie has such a positive outlook on life, he takes things

in his stride with an infectious smile, it's impossible not to feel uplifted by his kind nature."

Like his aunt, Alfie is a keen sportsperson. He is part of the Special Olympics' Young Athletes Programme in Galway and was recently selected to be an ambassador for the Can't Stop Now campaign, a fundraising appeal to support the continuing work of Special

Olympics Ireland through the lockdown.

Norah explained how important being a part of the Special Olympics movement has been for Alfie.

"The programme exposes children to a wide variety of play activities in a supportive and fun environment where everyone has the opportunity to succeed. The benefits go beyond sports, setting these

children up with skills that allow them to thrive in life and hopefully stay active into adulthood," she said.

Alfie is a dab hand at most sports but one of his favourites is golf, and he is a regular down on the driving range at Loughrea with his grandad Murphy. Both of them were delighted with the courses reopening this week.

Down Syndrome Ireland, one of the 18 charities set to benefit from this year's Mini-Marathon, does incredible work around the country in supporting people with Down Syndrome. They are involved in projects including art and movement groups, drama classes and Learn to Cycle programmes, to name but a few. A recent programme on RTÉ One highlighted the group's exhibition, 'Our Hands' in the Ballina Arts Centre.

"I chose to fundraise for DS Mayo because I know how important it is to provide support and social opportunities for children and adults with Down Syndrome," explained Norah.

"Many charity organisations have been hit hard by Covid-19 and it is vitally important that we continue to support them so they can carry on the good work and support heroes like Alfie, because we all can do with a hero like Alfie."

Norah is one of the best-known and most successful runners of the local scene and has competed at national level wearing the Green and Red of Mayo AC. Her competitive running has been disrupted

by Covid but she was able to compete in some events during the Level 3 lockdown last autumn.

"Towards the end of last year, a lot of races resumed with maybe 200 people. Athletics Ireland put on a national event at Santry, a closed-door meet, but we were just grateful for the chance to go up and race. Once your race was done, you had to leave again, so it was very different."

For the time being, she's happy enough to stay fit with some jogging.

"I would love to see races resume and everyone able to get back out there but from a personal perspective it's not affecting me too much."

Norah works as a personal trainer and instructor in The Gym in Ballina. Like gyms across the country, their doors have been shut since New Years, and there is still no clear picture of when they will be allowed to reopen. Norah and her colleagues have been doing some virtual classes to keep their members engaged but they are eager to hear a date for when the gyms can properly return.

"We don't know," she said. "We'd be hoping for the summer, but who knows?"

In the meantime, the reigning Mini-Marathon champion is busy getting ready to (virtually) defend her crown. Norah is embracing the 'Your Hero' mindset of his year's event, proudly running to honour her remarkable nephew and to raise important funds for Down Syndrome Ireland, who do such valuable work in our communities.



Norah Pieterse pictured after winning the 2019 West of Ireland Women's Mini-Marathon with her husband Elmer and their daughter Sophia.

It's For Girls supporting women in sport

The West of Ireland Women's Mini-Marathon is now into its twelfth year of existence, and since the first race was staged on The Mall in Castlebar all the way back in 2010, the Mini-Marathon has aimed to promote women in sport, and particularly to encourage young women to remain active and engaged with sport through their student years.

It remains an unfortunate fact that drop-off rate amongst teenage girls across a wide spectrum of sports is considerably higher than it is amongst their male peers. A report commissioned by Sport Ireland and released in March 2021 found that by the age of 13 to 15, a high percentage of girls have already labelled themselves as "not sporty" and are living by this label, with few attempts to counter it.

Director of Participation and Ethics with Sport Ireland, Dr Una May, said: "Evidence shows that participation levels plummet during adolescence with just 7 percent of girls aged 14-15 meeting the recommended physical activity levels. We also know that girls who are active in their teenage years and develop a love of sport are much more likely to establish a life-long relationship with sport and exercise into adulthood."

According to the research, which was undertaken by Women in Sport UK, the most significant barrier which prevents teenage girls from taking part in sport and physical activity is the feeling of not being good enough to join in.

The research showed that teenage girls in Ireland have a narrow and often negative experience of a small number of traditional (and dominant) team sports, and believe this is all that sport is and can be. Girls associate 'sportiness' with team and contact sports, so girls who are interested in exercise often do not feel targeted with sporting initiatives.

The report also found that there aren't enough opportunities for girls to take part and have carefree fun with friends



Elmer Pieterse of Mayo Sports Partnership presents the It's For Girls award to the students of St Joseph's Secondary School in Castlebar in 2019. Picture: Tomás Grealley

while being active. This was a common feature between teenage girls in urban and rural areas: despite the physical contrasts in rural and urban living, the research found that the underlying wants and needs of teenage girls are often similar.

They feel there is a lack of social space for teens where they feel welcomed, wanted and included. They feel there are limited opportunities to try new things, learn new skills, and ultimately feel good about themselves.

Speaking at the launch of the report, Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Catherine Martin TD commented: "To

see the motivations and attitudes of this group of young girls so clearly outlined is insightful. For the first time we have a true understanding of what is causing teenage girls in Ireland to drop out of sport, or what is preventing them from getting involved in the first place.

"Sport and physical activity can be a powerful force in a person's life and we are now armed with the knowledge to reframe sport for teenage girls and to make it a positive and powerful force in their lives. My vision for women in sport is that of one where women have an equal opportunity to achieve their full potential while enjoying a lifelong in-

volvement in sport.

"It is encouraging to see the research today which supports this commitment with in-depth research and tangible communication strategies that can be adopted to really encourage our teenage girls to engage and re-engage with sport."

Based on the findings of the report, Sport Ireland has established 8 Principles for Success to engage and connect with teenage girls and to support them to embrace sport and physical activity into their lives. These are:
 ■ No judgement: Taking away the pressure to win and perform and giving freedom to simply play.

- Invoke excitement: Bringing a sense of adventure and discovery.
- Clear emotional reward: Reframing achievement outside of just winning and losing.
- Open eyes to what is there: Redefining what's available outside of the 'traditional' competitive sports.
- Build on existing habits: Tapping into existing behaviours in other spheres.
- Give girls a voice and a choice: Allowing girls to feel empowered and in control.
- Champion what's in it for them: Highlight the benefits outside of just health.
- Expand image of what 'sporty' looks like: Create relatable role models who can inspire.

The It's For Girls initiative, which has been a part of the Mini-Marathon programme for the last five years, is based upon those core principles of participation, non-competitiveness and changing perceptions among teenage girls about what sport can mean.

This year, part of the It's For Girls programme has been Teens Target 30 — teenage girls around Mayo are being asked to target 30 minutes of running, jogging, walking or any other physical activity per day in the build-up to taking part in the Mini-Marathon over the Bank Holiday weekend.

Schools around the county have also got on board with the It's For Girls initiative, and while Covid restrictions have undoubtedly posed challenges for teachers and students, the response to the initiative in spite of the pandemic has been terrific.

Irish girls with an interest in sport have rarely had as many role models to look up to and emulate across a wide range of sports, be it Rachael Blackmore, Beibhinn Parsons, Ellen Keane, Katie Taylor, Katie McCabe, Ciara Mageean, the list goes on.

Closer to home, the Mayo ladies footballers continue to compete at the highest level, while the likes of Cora Staunton, Sarah Rowe, Aileen Gilroy and Grace and Niamh Kelly have recently excelled at an international level playing in the AFLW. Rachel Kearns is the top scorer in the Women's National League. Belmullet native Sinead Diver is set to represent Australia at the Tokyo Olympics.

Initiatives like the 20x20 Women in Sport have helped to change perceptions around women in sport in recent years, promoting greater visibility and media coverage across print, TV, radio and online platforms for women in sport.

There remains a long way to go but with events like the Mini-Marathon playing a small but significant role, the changes can continue to flow.



Irish Paralympic swimmer Ellen Keane in action at the Irish National Team Trials at the National Aquatic Centre in Dublin last week. Picture: INPHO/Bryan Keane



Rachael Blackmore pictured with Somptueux after their win at Fairyhouse earlier this month. Picture: INPHO/Caroline Norris



The students of St Mary's Secondary School in Ballina who are taking part in this year's West of Ireland Women's Mini-Marathon.

St Mary's students are taking on the challenge

By Mark Higgins

The last year has seen school sports effectively grind to a halt. Even now, with schools tentatively reopening for the last few weeks of the term, organised sport within Irish secondary schools is pretty much a non-runner.

While it might be an unavoidable consequence of the pandemic and the lockdowns, the absence of organised sport amongst teenagers has been sorely felt. But events like the West of Ireland Women's Mini-Marathon, and its partnering It's For Girls initiative, are helping secondary-school girls around the county to remain physically active by giving them a fixed target toward which to work.

St Mary's Secondary School in Ballina is taking part in the It's For Girls initiative for the very first time this year. One of the driving forces behind the event is Shauna Kearney, a PE teacher in the school.

Shauna said that she identified the Mini-Marathon as an ideal way to keep her students active and engaged while they were learning from home.

"Obviously they've been missing out on a lot of PE with the break from school and remote learning," said Shauna this week.

"So I thought it would be a nice idea. Because it's encouraging the girls to get active but it's not forcing them to necessarily run it; it allows them to do whatever physical activity suits them but also encourages them to be active.

"That's why I said I'd promote it in the school. It's a

really nice idea and it'll give them something they'll be able to look forward to and work towards, through the school.

"Obviously with Covid there has been no team sports going on, and there hasn't been any opportunity this year for the girls to represent themselves through the school.

"I thought it would be nice for the girls who are into running or those who just wanted to improve their fitness a little, to give themselves a target of being able to do the virtual 10k," she continued.

Shauna, along with her fellow PE teachers Ciaran Allen and Annette Leonard, has assembled a group of 18 girls from Second Years to Sixth Years to take part in the It's For Girls 10k this weekend.

Training has not been as easy as normal, but Shauna has been able to keep her students focused and moving through their training regimens over the last couple of months to get them ready to run. She has been conducting training over Teams, working through specifically designed eight-week training plans tailored for girls who want to run, jog or walk the distance, depending on what feels comfortable to them.

"It would be ideal if you could take them after school once a week and try to train them up, but we obviously can't do that with Covid," she offered.

As a PE teacher in a girls' secondary school, Shauna knows better than most how easily teenage girls can drop away from organised sport, particularly given the lock-

down and the relative absence of sporting outlets for much of the last year.

She said initiatives like the It's For Girls and the Mini-Marathon are important because they give girls a target to aim for and encourage them to stay active. She's also putting her money where her mouth is and preparing to take on the 10k herself.

"It is known that there's such a high dropout rate in team sport, but I think the main point of emphasis for anyone, not just girls, is to keep physically active throughout your whole life," she said.

"Competitive sport is great but there is such importance and benefit from regularly participating in physical activity, whether that's just going for a walk, a cycle, a jog, whatever you're into.

"That's why I like the Mini-Marathon so much, because I know it's not competitive — it's about trying to encourage the girls to become active. When they get to that stage in life, around the age of 15-plus, it's really important for them to figure out what physical activity they enjoy.

"This year, Ciaran organised a pilates instructor to come in for the Sixth Years. That was something they wanted and we felt they would enjoy because it's a slower-paced form of exercise.

"It just helps to relieve their stress and to show some of them that you don't necessarily have to be kicking a football or running 10 kilometres to be physically active; there are so many different ways to do it. It's so important to promote movement."



Supporting children with disabilities in Mayo

ÁIRC comprises of parents who themselves have children with disabilities. We started out wanting to know how we could make life easier and more fun for our children. Originally, we set up as the parent group alongside the new Mayo Early Intervention Services in 2009. We slowly came away from Mayo Early Intervention service and became our own charity ÁIRC, Supporting Children with Disabilities in Mayo, in which we then extended the age from 0 to school age leave which can be 18 or 19 years old.



We are a voluntary charity and we do not receive any government grants at all, so all monies we receive are from fundraisers. This Mini Marathon is the most important fundraiser for us and we would like to thank all those who are doing it this year for us. It means so much. Covid has crippled our fundraising efforts this year, and the generosity of those who have chosen us as their charity for this event is so humbling.

THANK YOU ALL AGAIN FROM THE BOTTOM OF OUR HEARTS X X

We have a small committee, we find it very hard to give our spare time to fundraise, so it is the public really that help us out, and it shows through this event.

Telephone: 087 3427145 Email: aircmayo@yahoo.ie
Web: www.aircmayo.ie Facebook: www.facebook.com/aircmay

Charity number: CHY 20016

Mayo natives overseas ready for Mini-Marathon

By Mark Higgins

The ongoing Level 5 restrictions mean that the festivities and carnival atmosphere that the West of Ireland Women's Mini-marathon and the simultaneous Mayo Day celebrations usually bring to the streets of Castlebar over the Bank Holiday weekend will unfortunately be absent in 2021. But every crisis presents an opportunity and the virtual nature of this year's event has enabled organisers to reach out to the huge and vibrant Mayo diaspora around the world and to encourage people of Mayo extraction in the four corners of the globe to get involved.

Mayo Day is an annual celebration of 'Mayo-ness' across Mayo communities worldwide. Mayo people at home and abroad are encouraged to celebrate all that is good about their county. Communities, families and businesses are invited to come together over the course of the May Bank Holiday weekend to celebrate who we are and where we come from, and to express their pride in their home county.

That connection to home has arguably never been more important than over the last 12 months, as the pandemic and the consequent travel restrictions have denied Mayo people overseas the opportunity to return home to see loved ones, family and friends.

And while it looks as if those members of the diaspora will have to wait a little while longer before international travel returns to normal, they can certainly use the Mayo Day weekend and the West of Ireland Mini-Marathon as an opportunity to reconnect with home, while raising vital funds for numerous charities and improving their own fitness levels in the process.

One Mayo native doing just that is Leanne Rochford, from Crossmolina. Leanne is the daughter of Carmel and Eugene Rochford and the sister

of former Mayo senior manager Stephen Rochford. She is currently living in Wiesbaden, to the west of Frankfurt, where she works in validation for the medical device company Abbott.

She had been working in Longford when the opportunity arose last June to transfer to Germany. At the time it looked as if the worst of the pandemic might have been behind us, but that turned out to be a false dawn.

"When I left Ireland everything was opening up again!" said Leanne this week. "All the restrictions were easing, everyone was really optimistic, all the cases were going down. I thought I'd be able to get home for a visit in September, it would be no big deal. But obviously, international travel wasn't allowed after that."

She did manage to make it back to North Mayo at Christmas after going through the self-isolation and testing protocols. But with Germany still battling high case numbers, restrictions are still tight.

"On the one hand, a lot of things haven't been open, we haven't been able to do a lot of things," offered Leanne. "But on the other hand I've been able to go for a lot of hikes and cycles, and I've gotten to practice my German with my co-workers. I'm working about 50/50 between home and on-site."

"So it would have been great to be able to experience more of German culture, but I'm still lucky in what I can do. It's not all bad."

Leanne comes from a sporting family and played hockey and tag-rugby while in college in Ireland. When she moved to Germany she joined up with the local GAA club, the Frankfurt Sarsfields.

"It was great to find that community, even though you're away from home. It's nice to be able to connect with people," she said of the club.

"It's all on ice for now. We have a Whatsapp group which



Getting ready to take part in the 2021 virtual West of Ireland Women's Mini-Marathon in Abu Dhabi is Mairead Doodey from Co Clare.

is relatively active, just checking in to make sure everyone is doing well or to say if there's anything going on.

"I let them all know that the Mini-Marathon was happening!"

"Taking part in this year's Mini-Marathon allows Leanne and other Mayo natives overseas the oppor-

tunity to connect with home while travel restrictions and the pandemic are preventing them from visiting as they normally would.

"I've spent Mayo Day in Mayo before and it's really lovely, just to have a day to celebrate. But you kind of take it for granted when you live there because you can enjoy

the beauty and being part of your community," explained Leanne.

"When you're away from home and you can't do that, it's a really nice way to still feel connected, to feel like you're still part of that community. And if I can raise a bit of money as well, happy days!" Leanne is running to raise

funds for the Mayo-Roscommon Hospice.

For the time being she has no set plans for how long she'll stay in Germany. She has yet to fully experience all that the country has to offer so there are no immediate plans to come home, but she does see herself eventually returning to Ireland.

"It's open-ended for now but I definitely plan to come home to Ireland at some point. With corona and lockdown, I don't want to move back to Ireland before I've had a chance to properly experience life in Germany. So it'll depend really on what happens with corona," said Leanne.

Mayo.ie and the County Council have a jam-packed programme of events planned over the course of the Mayo Day weekend.

Mayo.ie is asking members of the public to get involved and show their support and pride in their county via social media, by posting their pictures and videos of their own Mayo Day celebrations in the green and red using the hashtag #MayoDay.

Plans are also afoot for the launch of the Home to Mayo initiative, which is part of the Global Irish Festival Series from Fáilte Ireland and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The initiative aims to create a global hub for the 3.5 million people worldwide with the green and red of Mayo in their veins and to tell the story of Mayo and its diaspora.



Lorraine Gibbons from Louisburgh is participating in the 2021 West of Ireland Women's Mini-Marathon in Dubai.



Margaret King from Philadelphia is one of the members of the Mayo diaspora ready to compete in this year's virtual Mini-Marathon this weekend.

Frontline star Martina has gone above and beyond

By Mark Higgins

When the history of the Covid-19 pandemic in Ireland is eventually written, there will be plenty of debate about the choices and decisions of the policy-makers but none whatsoever about the identities of the story's heroes.

They have been the frontline workers, the doctors, nurses and caregivers who have gone above and beyond the call of duty time and time again over the last 14 months to care for the most vulnerable in our society, oftentimes at huge risk to their own health and wellbeing.

This year's Mini-Marathon is aiming to pay some small tribute to the frontline workers with the 'Your Hero' initiative, which encourages each participant to run bearing the name of a frontline worker who has answered the call over the course of the pandemic.

One such worker is Martina Houlihan. Martina, a native of Kiltimagh, works as a carer for Home Instead Senior Care in Castlebar and is taking part in the Mini-Marathon herself.

She described the last year as the busiest and most challenging she has faced in her career.

"At the start, things were so uncertain. We had elderly clients who were at risk of the virus but they still needed to be cared for.

"The clients would be afraid of you coming in too, in case you could transmit the virus to them. You'd be wearing the enhanced personal protective equipment going in but it was still very difficult."

Martina and her colleagues were in constant training, learning the correct use of new forms of PPE, the new protocols being devised for them to carry out their work, and being made aware of the risks and dangers associated with simply going about their jobs.

She has nothing but praise for her employers for the lengths they went to, to make her and her colleagues feel as safe as possible.

"The office was great," she said. "Anything we needed, any question or query we wanted an answer to, they did everything they could to help us."

Even still, it has been a hugely demanding year for care workers like Martina. Aside from the extra work that goes into applying PPE and maintaining as much social distance as possible, there are the challenges

posed by Covid after-care, when patients who have had the virus return home but still require a higher degree of assistance than normal.

"I've never been busier than I have been over the last year," she states.

In a way, the nucleus of her decision to take part in the Mini-Marathon comes from that hectic work schedule. Martina took up walking after Christmas as a means of clearing her head and de-stressing from work, and as she gradually settled into a routine, she decided to set herself the challenge of completing the 10k.

She has also taken the liberty of signing up her mum, Christina Durkin, to take part with her, although she opted not to let her know until her name was already down.

"I told her I'd signed her up for the 10k. She said: 'You've done WHAT?' laughed Martina.

The pair are going to complete their Mini-Marathons around their native Kiltimagh this weekend, heading up around the bog roads outside the town before finishing up on Main Street.

"I only hope it stays dry," Martina said "I did a walk for the rugby club back in March and I got absolutely soaked!"



Frontline workers and mother and daughter pair, Helen and Sophie Healy, pictured at Castleturvin Nursing Home in Athenry, are taking part in the West of Ireland Mini-Marathon this weekend.

Olivia ready to run to raise vital funds

By Paul O'Malley

A Miss Ireland finalist, college student and an all-round sporting enthusiast will be among the participants taking part in the 2021 virtual West of Ireland Women's Mini-Marathon on May Bank Holiday weekend to fundraise for a local cause that seeks to help sick children from all over Ireland.

Olivia Barrett, 21, from Claremorris, will be taking part in the event in order to fundraise for the Cancer Fund for Children and the Daisy Lodge, a therapeutic facility that is planned to be built in Cong.

The Cancer Fund for Children supports children and young people who are diagnosed with cancer or living with a parent diagnosed with cancer. They offer support in the home, community, on hospital wards, and at the current Daisy Lodge in Newcastle, Co Down, with plans to expand services in the south of Ireland with the provision of the facility in Cong.

Olivia told the *Western People* that this is a cause she has a great interest in supporting and she has also named the Cancer Fund for Children as her 'Beauty with a Purpose' charity partner for the Miss Ireland final in July.

"The fundraising manager told me that there was no facility in the Republic of Ireland for children with cancer and it was sad to think of the number of families who are going through this diagnosis," said Olivia.

"I wanted to create awareness for Daisy Lodge because it is a facility that is close to my own home area of Claremorris. Charities

have found it hard to operate with the Covid-19 pandemic putting a stop to a lot of their fundraising activities and it is important that causes like the Cancer Fund for Children don't get forgotten about."

Olivia is a keen sportsperson and at 21, boasts an impressive sporting CV, having played soccer and GAA for Kiltimagh/Knock United and Claremorris respectively. She has represented Mayo in both sports and the Connacht team in soccer as well.

In addition, she secured a place on the Irish Women's Australian Rules team.

The Mini-Marathon poses a challenge to all competitors but Olivia is well prepared given her sporting background and previous charity endeavors.

"I did a fundraiser for the Daisy Lodge in October. I organised a collective 500km fundraiser run and jog. I set my own target of covering 100k over the three days and I managed to run and cycle that over those three days," she said.

"I said to myself, I'll just do it and then I can rest after that but my legs were completely dead! But it was fantastic to be able to raise €2,500 for Daisy Lodge in the process."

Olivia will take part in the Mini-Marathon in Limerick, where she is a student in her third year studying Criminal Justice at the University of Limerick. She said she will run into the city from UL and back, hopefully taking in the view of the River Shannon along the way.

"I'm really looking forward to taking part in the Mini-Marathon and I'm hoping now we get the good weather for it," Olivia said.



Miss Ireland finalist Olivia Barrett is helping to raise funds for Daisy Lodge, the planned cancer care facility in Cong.



Western Care Association

Your Mayo Charity

On behalf of Western Care Association I would like to thank the participants who have chosen Western Care as their Charity of choice in 2021 for the West of Ireland Mini Marathon.

Thank you to the people of Mayo and beyond for your generosity to Western Care over the last year in particular. Your support has helped us greatly during the most difficult and challenging times!

Teresa Ward

Fundraising & Development Manager

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Mary's heels were made for walking!

By Paul O'Malley

The leader of a community walking group in South Mayo will be taking on the challenge of the Mini-Marathon – wearing her high heels!

Mary McHugh from Kilmaine is a leader of the GortJordan Walkers and is taking part in the Mini-Marathon in order to fundraise for the Daisy Lodge in Cong, a planned therapeutic facility for children who have cancer.

Mary, who celebrated her 50th birthday yesterday (Monday), took part in the Mini-Marathon when she was 40 and 45. This year on her third outing in the event, she said wanted to do something a little bit different.

"With this lockdown, we all got so used to hanging around in tracksuits and runners with no option to get dressed up. I have a wardrobe full of high heels and wanted to make use of them for the Mini-Marathon, to do something different," said Mary.

Mary said that heels have great power and that in her part-time role as a weight-loss consultant, she said she finds people always get great joy in knowing that no matter how their weight may change, their shoe size predominantly doesn't.

"Wearing heels makes me and all women really feel like a million dollars. They are fantastic and can really lift a woman up. They really lift me up anyway because I'm only five foot!"



Mary McHugh from Kilmaine is taking on the Mini-Marathon in her high heels.

She is fundraising for the Cancer Fund for Children, a charity whose cause really resonated with Mary.

"Daisy Lodge will be such a welcome facility to Mayo and the West of Ireland. I live near Cong and the people there are just the best and will welcome Daisy Lodge with open arms to their beautiful village," she said.

"One story that resonated with me was that of April Banks and her family from Dublin. April battled neuroblastoma as a baby and a stroke caused by a brain tumour in 2019. A facility like Daisy Lodge would help this family escape and spend time away in a peaceful environment and I'm so glad to be able to give them this support."

Mary said she has received tremendous support from her husband Frank and her teenage kids Dylan and Gina. Mary asked that if you see her out walking in her heels over the weekend in the Cong area, give her a big wave and a cheer to support the Daisy Lodge campaign.



Moyne College is a co-educational, multicultural and student-centered post-primary school Ballina Co. Mayo. | Phone: 096 21472 | Email: info@moynecollege.ie

Principal: Siobhan Towey

"We are delighted to be taking part in this year's West of Ireland Women's Mini Marathon"

We are very proud to see so many of our students taking part. Our students understand and recognise the importance of physical exercise to their mental health. Regular exercise can have a profoundly positive impact on depression and anxiety. It also relieves stress, improves memory, helps you sleep better, and boosts your overall mood. Moyne College actively promotes positive Mental Health and Wellbeing and this is why we have chosen Mayo Mental Health Association as our chosen charity.



Students from 1st-6th year who are taking part in this year's West of Ireland Mini Marathon, along with their PE teacher Ms Cuffe and HSCL Ms Lavelle

Moyne College Parents Run/Walk Group

We would also like to say best wishes to the parents of our run/walk group who are taking part (Andrea People, Mary Le Roux, Bridget Cawley, Regina Devlin, Maeve O Grady, Victoria Tomlinson and Nichola Gilmartin). We value the role our parents play in education and see the importance in building positive relationships with our parents. Our parents run/walk group is intended as a way of supporting and encouraging each other to get out and about and start clocking up the miles. It is also an effective way of communicating with parents about various run/walk activities and initiatives planned by the school. We are looking forward to post Covid when our group can meet up and run/walk together.

"Well done to everyone involved and we wish all our participants all the best in their virtual 10k"



Women of the West are ready to run as Mini-Marathon goes virtual



Janette Slattery of the Ballinrobe Sports Hub, and Mini-Marathon co-ordinator, is ready to race.



2019 Mini-Marathon winner Norah Pieterse is preparing to defend her crown in this year's virtual Mini-Marathon.



Deirdre Donnelly of the Mayo Sports Partnership is taking part in the West of Ireland Women's Mini-Marathon this weekend.



Swinford's athletic star Michaela Walsh is taking part in the 2021 Women's Mini-Marathon.



Bianca from South Africa, a resident of the Direct Provision Centre in Ballyhaunis, is taking part in the Mini-Marathon.



Tracy Cunnane from the Ballyhaunis Sports Hub is getting ready to take part in this year's Women's Mini-Marathon.

Packed programme for Mayo Sports Partnership

Mayo Sports Partnership



Comhpháirtíocht Spóirt Mhaigh Eo

In spite of the enormous challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic and the rolling lockdowns over the last year, the Mayo Sports Partnership has been able to keep as many programmes and initiatives as possible open and available to the people of Mayo.

Now, with restrictions beginning to ease and a renewed sense of optimism that better days might be on the horizon, the MSP has put in place a robust and varied programme of events throughout the summer, which is designed to cater for people of every sporting ability and interest, young and old, in every corner of Mayo.

Here is a small example of the initiatives on offer through the MSP in the coming months.

ADVENTURE BEGINS IN BALLINA

The Ballina Adventure Hub is an exciting new initiative designed to promote participation in outdoor and adventure sports in North Mayo.

2021 will be the first year of the initiative and the Hub will be delivering programs in activities such as stand-up paddle-boarding, kayaking, mountain biking and orienteering.

Special emphasis will be placed on developing local leaders, engaging with disadvantaged youth and creating accessible opportunities for disabled participants.

Programs this season will include paddle-sports instructor training, MTB intro and leader programs, outdoor first

aid and 'Come and Try It' days for kayaking and SUP.

For more information and to stay up to date with programs please visit Ballina Adventure Hub on Facebook or email ballinaadventurehub@gmail.com.

OUTDOOR FITNESS IN BALLYHAUNIS

Children's outdoor fitness classes are returning to Friary Field in Ballyhaunis. The four-week programme will begin from May 14. Contact Tracy in the Ballyhaunis Sports Hub on 087-4479227 for more information.

A course in Nordic Walking for adults, an activity which is performed with specially-designed walking poles, is planned for the Friary Grounds as part of the Active 55s programme. Dates to be confirmed, expressions of interest to Tracy Cunnane.

A Gaelic4Girls programme, being run in conjunction with Ballyhaunis LGFA, begins on May 31. Gaelic4Girls is aimed at girls aged 7 to 13 who are not already registered with a club. This is an eight-week programme with the goal to integrate into the existing teams in the club. Contact Tracy Cunnane for more information.

Cycle safety classes for children are also planned, dates are to be confirmed.

Ballyhaunis Fitness Beginners Outdoors, an inclusive exercise course for beginners and those returning to exercise, will also be starting in the Friary Grounds in the coming weeks.



The Mayo Sports Partnership and Ballina Adventure Hub are running kayak and paddle-board lessons at the Quay this summer.

NEW ORIENTEERING LEAGUE IN MAYO

Orienteering is one of the few sports which can be enjoyed all year round, by all ages, from eight to 80. Orienteering is a navigational sport suitable for participants of all abilities.

The overall benefits of partaking in sport such as orienteering are huge, not only for physical health, but also for mental health. Orienteering is not only a sport that challenges you to run but also to think, to plot a path on the move.

Similar to a treasure hunt, you must use a map to navigate a set course in search of controls that will be set out in a particular sequence. The objective is to hit each control in the correct order and in as fast a time as possible.

The Mayo Sports Partnership is hosting a Mayo Orienteering League, which will begin from June as Covid restrictions begin to lift. The league will centre around Castlebar to begin with and more venues will be added as weeks go on.

For more information, follow Mayo Orienteering, Castlebar Adventure Hub or Mayo Sports Partnership for updates and announcements.

TRY A TRI

The 'Try a Tri' initiative is a partnership between the Sports Partnership, Triathlon Ireland and the triathlon clubs of Mayo. The programme to get up to 100 women to train for and complete their first triathlon.

On past occasions, this initiative has been pool-based, but

this year we are moving to the open water at Bertra, outside Westport.

This is a woman-only event aimed at increasing female participation through Women in Sport funding. The women will participate in three disciplines - swimming, cycling and running. All the distances are modified to make the event more achievable for beginners.

BALLINROBE'S MAGNETIC HUB

One can only be attracted to the energy, location and views from within this community hub known as 'The Green'. With proper research, the right people and support, this gem within the rural town of Ballinrobe in South Mayo is a shining example of how a rural sports hub really works, and within and by the commu-

nity continues to develop, even in the midst of a pandemic.

The development of an athletics track, which has just commenced, is the physical completion of the Ballinrobe and surrounding areas community sports hub known locally as The Green. The Green currently consists of an outdoor gym, playground, soccer and rugby pitches, lit walkways and the Bowers segment of the Robe river, which is used for outdoor water activities.

The development is supported and developed by the Lake District Athletics Club, the rugby and soccer clubs, the Town Park Committee, Ballinrobe Sports Hub, Mayo Sports Partnerships, Sport Ireland, Dormant Accounts, the local council and NGB's,



Mayo Sports Partnership are launching a new Mayo Orienteering League, beginning in June.



Competitors set off from The Mall in the 2019 Mini-Mini, the event for national school children which has become a beloved part of the Mini-Marathon.



Members of the Ballinrobe community pictured at the South Mayo town's Community Sports Hub in 2019. A new athletics track is the latest development at 'The Green'.

local community, sporting organisations and businesses.

To learn more contact Janette Slattery, Ballinrobe Sports Hub Coordinator on ballinrobesportshub@gmail.com or at 087-6091463.

INCLUSION A TOP PRIORITY

Mayo Sports Partnerships employs a Sports Inclusion Disability Officer (SIDO) to oversee the management of our projects and aim to increase participation of people with disabilities in sport, fitness and physical activity throughout the county.

The project involves the provision of sports programming for people with disabili-

ties in a variety of settings. These include the participation of people with disabilities in sport and physical activity through targeted activities such as Boccia, Wheelchair Hurling, Road Bowling, Learn to Cycle, etc.

Making local clubs inclusive is a huge priority of the programme and is this is evident in examples such as Westport United's Soccer For All and Moy Davitts' GAA For All initiatives.

Ray McNamara is the Sports Inclusion Disability Officer (SIDO) with the Mayo Sports Partnership. He can be contacted at rmcnamara@mayococo.ie or on 087-6973093.

Mayo Sports Partnership is inviting older adults living in Mayo to participate in a unique project to evaluate the benefits of Activator poles.

Activator poles are specially designed walking aids that are particularly suitable for older adults with low fitness levels. People who suffer from balance concerns or mobility issues, conditions such as arthritis, Parkinson's Disease, multiple sclerosis, etc, or are recovering from hip or knee surgery are encouraged to get involved.

If you are interested in taking part please contact Ray McNamara or Cathal Brady at cbrady@mayococo.ie.

THE MAYO SPORTS PARTNERSHIP TEAM:

Charlie Lambert - Sports Coordinator; Padraig Durcan - Office Administrator; Ray McNamara - Sports Disability Development Officer; Deirdre Donnelly - Community Sports Development Officer; Janette Slattery - Ballinrobe Sports Hub Coordinator; Tracy Cunnane - Ballyhaunis Sports Hub Coordinator; Jarlath McHale - Castlebar Urban Adventure Hub Coordinator; David Horkan - Ballina Urban Adventure Hub Coordinator; Cathal Brady - Aspire Graduate Intern.



Crossing the line together in the eighth annual Western People West of Ireland Women's Mini Marathon in 2017. Picture: Tomás Greally



The runners set off in the 2016 Mini-Marathon.



Runners warming up before the start of the 2016 Mini-Marathon. Picture: Frank Dolan

Picture: Tomás Greally

Western People

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