

Man of the Year 1979

Raymond Laird Drumshanbo



Raymond Laird and his wife, Betty, with, from left, Sandra, Roger, Gary, Shirley

(Picture: John Keaney).

RAYMOND LAIRD, manufacturer of Bo-Peep and Lairds Irish jams and marmalades, Drumshanbo, has been elected Leitrim Man of the Year.

Raymond joined the Company of the jam factory in 1943 after completing his education at Portora Royal School, Enniskillen. It was then still a small venture. His father, Caleb S. Laird, had opened the factory in 1935 with five on the payroll. Now there are 80, over 100 during the three-month run up to Christmas.

Raymond's great grandfather settled in Drumshanbo in the middle of the 18th century. He was a Scot. He started a leather business. His son opened a grocery. In 1902, his son, and Raymond's father, bought an old mill for sawing timber. He later switched to generating electricity, using the mill race which is still there. The Lairds continued to supply electricity to Drumshanbo until the late 1940s.

Business is in the blood. During the 1960s — "when I had boundless energy" — Raymond owned eight or nine different businesses, a supermarket in Drogheda, a guest house, a drapery business etc. He disposed of them all when he installed modern machinery in the jam factory in 1969. He is about to install the latest machinery, with increased production, but with no loss of jobs. He is now ranked third in jam manufacturing in Ireland, after Chivers and Lambie Brothers.

After the Frankfurt Food Fair, 1971, Lairds started to expand their export business. Now they export large quantities to Middle East countries. They have also broken into the lucrative North American market where the trade name is Lairds Irish, a name soon to be given to all jams manufactured at Drumshanbo. Lairds won the National Export Award in 1972.

Raymond and his wife, Betty, have four children, Gary, Sandra, Shirley, and Roger. Gary is now a director of the company, and shares his father's insatiable interest in the business. Raymond is away from home quite a lot on business, so he enjoys home life all the more. His cattle is his one hobby now. He plays an occasional game of golf in Rosses Point. When he was younger he was a well-known rally driver and trials competitor. He represented Ireland for four years in the R.A.C. Rally.

Raymond is a Methodist. Their chapel celebrated its centenary in 1960. "John Wesley told us to be 'a friend to all and a foe to none'," he says, "and it's a piece of advice that I and my father have always tried to follow." The proof is there; Raymond has a first class and loyal work force. He is a highly respected man in the Drumshanbo community; he is the elected chairman of Drumshanbo Development Association.

Leitrim people have expressed the debt they owe to the Laird family down the years by electing Raymond Leitrim Man of the Year. We now extend our congratulations to him.