Editorial



Photo: Heike Thiele

WELCOME TO the 49th issue of the *Leitrim Guardian.* Congratulations to Hubert McHugh on becoming the 2017 *Leitrim Guardian Person of the Year*, a worthy recipient who is dedicated to serving his community. We wish him well in the year ahead in his role as ambassador for Leitrim and this journal. Our sincere thanks to Joe and Rosie Dolan who were excellent emissaries.

So 2016 has come and almost gone. It is wonderful that almost every town and village in Ireland has taken some time to engage in the centenary celebrations. I am guessing that those who fought and died in the name of Irish independence, back in 1916, had little or no idea of how our society would celebrate their memory, one hundred years on. However, in our celebrations of their lives and our commemoration of their deaths, we should ask ourselves, have we truly reflected on their aspirations for this society, their dreams of an Irish Republic, what it would constitute, and how we, as a society, can help fulfil those desires and dreams for which they gave the ultimate sacrifice.

We live in uncertain times. Political speeches are laced with tones of hatred, discrimination and aggression, without even a semblance of political correctness. Racism and anti-immigration cards are played, and have won the day, in two of the most powerful nations on this earth. We really have very short memories, or should I say, amnesia of convenience. Both of these nations have a very strong influence on Ireland and hold deep connections to our people. Many of our sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, including many from our own county, have departed their home place and started new livelihoods in those countries. Let us hope that our diaspora remain welcome. We need to be cognisant of the fact that it is just as easy to acquire a label, and become a victim of group-think, as it is to name call and create a label. It is not that long ago that the expression 'NINA', 'No Irish Need Apply', frequented advertisements overseas. We should remember how we feel about that when we look at the plight of the refugees, who are so desperate to flee their horrific circumstances, that they risk their lives, and the lives of their children. Ireland was the land of a thousand welcomes, every house put an extra spud in the pot in case of a surprise caller. Those with nothing, shared what little they had. We are known as a generous nation but let that be more than just sticking our hands in our pockets to ease our conscience, let us open our arms and take our fair share of refugees. Forget the fear and the racist anti-immigration rhetoric. We have benefited so much to date from the bright tapestry of cultures that now adorn our shores. Let us be the nation that shows the world, in honour of the welcome our forebearers received elsewhere in their times of destitution, how we too can help provide shelter, comfort and hope for the future, to our fellow human beings, who are in need.

Things are on the change economically throughout the country and the talk is, that a positive effect on Leitrim and the north west is not too far away. In fact, Carrick is bustling. We hear of many businesses starting to boom, committed to the region, with plans for expansion, looking forward to welcoming back those who were forced to leave to find financial security elsewhere. The benefits of such developments have not yet hit the rest of the county, some places are still struggling as the impact of the recession, which has settled firmly in their midst, shows no signs of shifting.

However, what we lack economically in Leitrim, we make up for in community spirit, quality of life together with great schools and affordable housing, essential ingredients for a content life. Tourism is on the increase. The recent bill to ban fracking as passed in the Dáil, will give comfort to many. Well done to the community of volunteers from across the region who worked tirelessly to achieve this goal.

As always, between our covers, we have stories from throughout the county, representing the great diversity that makes up our lives, from both the past and the present, here in Leitrim and from our diaspora.

Congratulations to all our literary award winners. We were pleasantly inundated with submissions. My sincere apologies to those whose work does not appear in this issue. I am so delighted to get all of them however, the space available within these pages permits the publication of a limited number of words. Please do keep submitting. After all this is your story, your legacy to the generations who come after and who might be keen to explore what was interesting to us at this time, in the space we call home. It is 'home' to many, both those residing within the county borders, and to many, many more who are living elsewhere. It is hard to get Leitrim out of your bones! I am very grateful to you all for your contributions. It is a privilege to be the curator of your stories.

Helen Keller said that *Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.* When one looks at all we achieve in this small county, one can be certain that we remain an optimistic and enthusiastic lot, who are prepared to fight for what is right. We are the creators of our future.

All is bright on the north western front!

Bláithín Gallagher

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We regret that some articles had to be held over due to pressure of space.

Front & back cover
Concept & Design
FIACHRA GALLAGHER LAWSON

Inside back cover
FIACHRA GALLAGHER LAWSON

This year the Leitrim Guardian is launched by Hubert McHugh

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