

# AN OASIS OF GREAT ENTERPRISE

JETWASH INTERNATIONAL, CARRIGALLEN, CO LEITRIM

Dr Michael L O'Rourke

ENTERPRISE IS above all a quality of the individual. An enterprising person is one who sees an opportunity and at the same time identifies the resources needed to satisfy that opportunity and is capable of taking initiatives quickly to bring the two together. The traits of the enterprising individual are the capacity to see the opportunity where others miss it, the courage to seize it, the energy to pursue it and the tenacity to keep on through the difficulties that are inevitable in any new venture. Basic to all these in the individual is self-confidence and a belief in one's own judgement and ability. Enterprise is characterized by a sense of adventure. There's a keenness to explore and to exploit new opportunities and a readiness to take risks in doing so. The primary concern is not to avoid mistakes but to achieve success.

My guest in this interview for *The Leitrim Guardian* is Mervyn Richardson, Managing Director of Jetwash International. On this most pleasant occasion at company headquarters, I can see many of the above attributes of the entrepreneur in Mervyn's personality type. Engaging and highly focused, he is working as hard as ever after many successful decades in business, and is looking forward to further growth and expansion over coming years.

We are here on this Autumn morning in a landscape of great beauty, with idyllic lakes and undulating valleys nestling all around us. Carrigallen in gaelic means "beautiful rock". Mervyn grew up on a substantial farm a short distance away and obviously loved these years learning the hard graft of a young farmer full of enterprise and energy. He saw other possibilities, however, as an offshoot of his early pig farming activities and set about sowing the seeds of a small enterprise, manufacturing water pack and power washing products for farmers throughout the country. He reflects:

"At the age of eight or nine, I was always fascinated with the energy of water, connecting pipes around the house; my dad was mechanically minded. He had the house wired

and the houses of our neighbours before rural electrification arrived in our area. I also liked engineering and metalwork at school and I suppose it was inevitable that from all those influences, water hydrology would become a consuming passion. I started business at the house in 1977 and moved to this vacant IDA unit here in Cloncorick in 1987. I had sourced the market and I saw what people needed. Source, design and offer were my first motto. Power washing was really then in its infancy at 700 PSI's; to-day, the standard system is 3,000 PSI's".

To-day, Jetwash International employs 77 people with tentacles in many markets all over Ireland including Northern Ireland, Scotland, England, Wales, and Germany. Mervyn is high in his praise of a wonderful and loyal staff, some of whom are with the company for 15 to 20 years while a number are with the company for over thirty years. Expansion is steady and continuous with the incorporation of his two sons, Clifford and Keith, who are now involved with Jetwash International. An enterprise of this size is an oasis in any small rural community giving worthwhile employment, hope and further possibility, feeding into other businesses, schools and church communities.

Having some familiarity with the literature on entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial intelligence, the words which appear again and again are "a sense of adventure, exploration and a readiness to take risks". The work of theorists, Elizabeth Chell, Brian Tracy, Ivor Kenny, Tom Peters and Robert Waterman, are worthy of consideration in any discussion of these personality traits. Ivor Kenny calls up the notion of a good self-concept and a good self-esteem remarking that the "entrepreneur starts out life early with a sense of his or her own worth and that usually is provided by parents". Sigmund Freud believed that you start with a great advantage in life if you have a mother who believes in you. Certainly, in my talking to people who have succeeded in business enterprises, I am struck by the fact



*Mervyn Richardson*

that someone in their lives gave them the sense that they had an ability. Sometimes, it was an exemplary hard-working parent or parents. It might have been a wonderful teacher who exemplified enthusiasm, focus and hard work for whatever role you adopt in life. Peters and Waterman point to some key attributes that many successful entrepreneurial people seem to have and they point to a "substantial tolerance for failure and an unremitting perseverance". F W Woolworth, founder of the Woolworth's Empire, had this advice: "If you fail the first time, change address, put up prices and start again". In more recent times, Elizabeth Chell, in her celebrated text, *Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, points to a number of factors which indicate whether the individual has the human potential for enterprise. She considers the following characteristics: "self-confidence, optimists by nature who see the glass at least half-full, plenty of drive and energy, high interpersonal effectiveness, Independent minded, a risk-taking attitude, and good people skills, otherwise known as empathy. Spending time in the company of Mervyn Richardson, it is distinctly in evidence that many of these qualities are embodied in abundance in this very pleasant personality.

Jetwash International have developed a most impressive portfolio at the forefront of

pig husbandry and are a market leader in the development and infrastructure of the modern day pig and cattle farm. Some of the products manufactured in this vast array of engineering and agricultural equipment include: Feeders, Piglet Feeders, Weaner Feeders, Drinkers, Floor Slats, Heat Pads, Farrowing Crates, Rescue Decks, Ventilation Systems, Penning Systems, PVC Pipes and Fittings, Prefab Panels and Portable Cabins. Steel Fabrications, Roof Insulations, Meal Silos, Power Washing Systems, Pumps, Hydraulic Slurry Agitation, Heat and Air Equipment.

A specialist unit led by Clifford Richardson drives innovative design systems and the construction of a turnkey development. The creative energy, self-confidence and single-mindedness of its captain, Mervyn, will no doubt safely navigate any choppy waters in business over the next decade. He reminds me: "we are continuing to build further on our successes so far. We are always looking for new products and new markets. We must grow with our customers and see where they wish to go. They are innovating all of the time with new ideas and we must keep pace with these developments. Our plant technology must change too and we have installed the very latest laser technology for cutting stainless steel. Continuous training of staff is another important consideration for us in driving growth and development." I did discover to my surprise that Mervyn does take time out for a few of his favourite hobbies and interests: "I like to keep an interest in farming and I enjoy vintage tractors and cars". His prize purchase was a De Lorean car when the company went into receivership over 30 years ago. However, the entrepreneur in him saw another opportunity while buying the car; he bought up substantial quantities of stainless steel sheets at the De Lorean factory in Belfast to make pig troughs. The entrepreneur is always focused!

This is a wonderful success story in the regeneration of a small town and hinterland. I hold great respect and regard for enterprising people who create jobs in our communities far from large centres of population. They are the oases of these communities and they deserve our full and proper recognition. It has been a pleasure conducting this interview with a gentleman of great charm, organisation and self-belief. *A proud Leitrim man, Mervyn Richardson, we salute you!*

## ‘ONE SMALL STEP’

Peter Gordon

In 1957 the noted Aughavas Gaelic Footballer Willie McKiernan, returned home from New York. When in New York he played for the Leitrim/ New York team. At that time there were just two teams contesting the Leitrim hurling championship—Manorhamilton and Carrick on Shannon. Willie said it was high time to put a stop to this duopoly. He organised a team of players mainly from the Cloone area—Paddy Solan, Patsy, Martin and Mick Doherty, John Charlie Bohan, Charlie Mitchell, John Joe Donohoe, a few Gardai from Dromod and Eddie Courtney and myself from Mohill. As we had no Club jerseys Willie borrowed the jerseys of the Aughavas Club. Consequently, we called the team Aughavas. Willie was the only player from Aughavas. Willie sent a message to the Secretary of the County Board that he had a team ready to compete in the championship. The Secretary, the great Tommy O’Riordan was delighted with this news as he had spent his life in Leitrim spreading the gospel of hurling. The final of that year was arranged for the park in Mohill, now called ‘The Philly McGuinness Park’. The first half of the game was played at a frenetic pace. We were glad to get the breather at half time. The mentors made a few changes. Eddie Courtney was transferred to the forwards and I was put in goals. This was a shock to me as I had never played there before that. I do not recall much about the play in this half except that Carrick did NOT score any goals. This had less to do with my goal keeping skills (if any!) and more to do with the exceptional defending of the Aughavas backs.

At full time the referee announced that the game finished in a draw. We thought we had won by a point. Enter John Maguire, a reporter from the 'Anglo Celt' weekly newspaper, stage left. He had logged every score and scorer. He went through the details with the Referee and it transpired that the Ref had omitted one of our points. We were declared the champions for the first, and possibly the last time, Aughavas will appear on the roll of county champions.

I like to think that winning that championship for a South Leitrim club inspired the founding of a new hurling club in 1964 called St Finbar's by Pat Lynch and a few local enthusiasts. This new club won five championships in the 1960's—64, 65, 66, 68 and 69. Three players played for both clubs—Paddy Solan, Patsy Doherty and myself.

*As Neil Armstrong did NOT say ‘One small step for Willie McKiernan, one giant step for Leitrim hurling!’*