

LOCAL Wicklow Times

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GREYSTONES STUDIOS
Page 3



SOUTH BEACH FLOODING
Page 6



SOROOPTIMISTS
Page 12

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Wednesday 27th March 2024 First Floor, The Boulevard, Quinsborough Road, Bray. A98 R6D7. Tel: 01 - 2869111 E-mail: wicklowed@localtimes.ie www.wicklowtimes.net

'THANK YOU WICKLOW!'

Last Sunday history was made when a Wicklow man was selected as leader of a major political party. Minister Simon Harris took over the reins of Fine Gael and is now the 'Taoiseach in-waiting', and is expected to be ratified on 7th April when the Dáil reconvenes.

Speaking to *Wicklow Times*, Minister Harris told of his passion for Wicklow and the support the people had given him.

"To the people of Wicklow I say thank you. There are so many people who I have to thank, none more than the people of Wicklow. Thank you for trusting me as your public representative for the past 13 years. I have been

overwhelmed over the past few days with the messages of support and encouragement I have received from so many across the county. Wicklow means the world to me and I am so proud to be from it."

On becoming leader of Fine Gael, Minister Harris said "It is the absolute honour of my life to become leader of Fine Gael. On another day in March 13 years

ago, after the good people of Wicklow so generously put their trust in me for the first time to become their TD - I nervously got to my feet in Dáil Éireann and delivered my maiden speech.

"And on that day, I was honoured to nominate Enda Kenny as Taoiseach. Back then, I could never have imagined a week like last week. Never. The



Cllr Melanie Corrigan with newly elected leader of Fine Gael and incoming Taoiseach Simon Harris.



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resilient and incredibly diligent people of Wicklow have shaped me and my thinking over the years and will shape my leadership.

"As I step into my new role as Leader of Fine Gael I promise to repay the trust of people in Wicklow with hard work, with blood, sweat and tears - day in and day out, with responsibility, with humility and with civility.

"13 years ago, I quoted from the letter George Bernard Shaw sent to Michael Collins' sister Hannie upon the death of her beloved brother: 'It is time to hang out our brightest colours and move forward as a nation'. I chose those words because those were dark days; days when

hope was needed more than ever. Hope is after all one of Fine Gael's fundamental values and one of the basics I will never lose sight of as I set about my work.

"Since 2011 when Enda Kenny brought hope to a battered country, the people of Ireland soldiered together to rebuild Ireland's economy and reputation so that enterprise and opportunity could flourish once again.

"Since 2011 we have achieved so much: From unemployment to full employment; From a budget deficit to a budget surplus; A more equal Ireland; Progress on affordable childcare and universal health care.

Continued on page 9



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Much loved Bray tree saved by protection order

Deputy Steven Matthews' experience in Bray last Bank Holiday Weekend has underlined the importance of Tree Preservation Orders.

Deputy Matthews recounts, "Early on bank holiday Monday morning, I was out for a cycle when I got a call from a Bray resident about work being carried out on an old Oak tree in the Vevay area. This resident has been a great protector of this particular tree over the years and I had worked with residents to get a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) on this tree when I was a councillor.

"They called me to ask if I could help stop the work on the tree. I was able to dig out the TPO map for Bray and send it to them. The Gardai were informed and with the backing of a TPO and map the works were stopped. It



Steven Matthews TD

was a great result that stemmed from the existing documentation showing the protection of the tree. Without it, the works would have continued. "A TPO is about the only protection for trees in

carrying out any work on a protected tree. I have a piece of legislation going through the Oireachtas process that would make better TPOs and allow councillors to designate areas locally important for ecology (LIFE sites). The process is very slow but I hope it will eventually pass and offer better protection to trees in urban environments.

"When I worked to get the TPO for this old Vevay Oak many years ago, I didn't know when we would need to rely on it but that day arrived and similar situations are likely to arise for other much loved trees in Bray and other towns across Wicklow."

urban areas. We need more TPOs or other better protections for our urban trees. All trees need managing from time to time but a TPO means you need to obtain permission from the council before



Karen Boyle and her little pirate at the St. Patrick's Day parade in Wicklow Town.

Free weekly guided walks commencing on Easter Saturday

The weekly guided walk of the Wicklow Town Heritage Trail commences on Saturday 30th March.

The walk will commence from outside the Fáilte Ireland office in Fitzwilliam Square at 11am and will take approximately 2 hours to complete - enabling the participants to spend some time at each location.

These weekly guided walks will continue right through the Summer until

the last Saturday in September.

Locals, Visitors and Tourists are all welcome to take part in what is a very informative walk detailing the rich history of Wicklow Town, from the landing of St. Patrick in 432 to the end of the Civil War in 1923.

The Trail covers 18 key sites of Historical interest

including the following:

- The story of local man Robert Halpin who laid the first Trans-Atlantic cable.
- The history of the Abbey Grounds and the Franciscan Abbey.
- The story of Billy Byrne and the 1798 rising in Wicklow Town
- The massacre of over 300 mainly women and

children in Melancholy Lane by Sir Charles Coote in 1641.

• The story of the Black Castle including details of some of the battles that took place over 6 centuries.

• The attempted landing by St. Patrick at Travilahawk Beach.

• The history relating to the Barrow Green, including stories of the secret burials that took place there.

On each of the storyboards located throughout the town, there is a QR code which enables participants to watch a video on their phone, telling them the story of each key location. The actors featured on the videos are members of the local dramatic society.

John Finlay, the Chairperson of the Wicklow Historical Society said that since the Heritage Trail commenced, 2 years ago, this new Tourist offering to the town has welcomed visitors from the 5 continents of the world. Many Irish Tourists and local residents have enjoyed and appreciated the rich and ancient heritage of Wicklow Town.

For further information on the Wicklow Town Heritage Trail, visit www.wicklowtown.ie.

event for Anam Cara, please contact them on info@anamcara.ie or 085 2888888.

Billy Bunny's Easter Egg Hunt

Arclight Drama Studio return to Whale Theatre in Greystones with their brand new family show. Billy Bunny is very excited. There's going to be an Easter Egg Hunt and Billy and his friends are attending! But, the evil and stinky Rotten Roger, who is a real bad egg, is planning to upset the festivities. Join Mother Goose, Bilda Bear, Wally Woodcutter, Fairy Frizzle and of course Billy as they try to put a stop to Rotten Roger's nasty plan. This performance is suitable for a young audience and is very interactive. Saturday 30th March at 11am (doors 10.30pm), 1.30pm (doors 1pm) and 4pm (doors 3.30pm). Tickets available at www.whaletheatre.ie or call the booking office on 01 2010550.

Hawkins Wood Easter Egg Hunt

Residents of Hawkins Wood, Greystones are organising an Easter Egg Hunt and Picnic event in Hawkins Wood. The event is scheduled to take place on 1st April at the common green in Hawkins Wood, starting at 12pm. It promises to be an exciting and fun-filled activity for families and children of all ages. Participants will have the opportunity to explore the beautiful surroundings of Hawkins Wood while searching for hidden treasures. Additionally, there will be a delightful picnic where attendees can enjoy delicious snacks and refreshments amidst the serene ambiance of nature.

Greystones Flower Club

The next meeting of Greystones Flower Club is this week on Tuesday 26th March, at 8pm in The Evangelical Church Hall, Hillside Road, Greystones. Guest Demonstrator is Ms Julia Tracy. Non Members welcome to attend.

Bereavement support

National charity, Anam Cara, who support bereaved parents across the country, will hold their Wicklow in-person meeting at The Parkview Hotel, Newtownmountkennedy at 7:15pm on Monday 25th March. All bereaved parents in the area are most welcome, regardless of the age of their child who has died or circumstances of death. There is no need to register, just turn up on the evening. For further information on their services or to hold a fundraising

Holy Rosary soup & sandwiches

Why not make a date for lunch on Wednesday March 27th at Kilian House Family Centre, Greystones, (from 12.15 to 2pm), and enjoy a choice of delicious food in a friendly atmosphere! Suggested donation €7. All proceeds go to local charities.

Family Fun Run

Fancy a fun day out for the whole family this Easter with face painting, goody bags, music and much, much more? Then make your way to the West Pier in Dun Laoghaire for Childline's inaugural Family Fun Run on Easter Saturday, March 30th. The course is a total of just 3km (1.5km out along the pier and then back), and is suitable for everyone, including parents with strollers, small children, teenagers and not forgetting grandparents. To register for the event and find out more, go to Childline Family Fun Run! Fundraising Event Ireland (idonate.ie). The event takes place between 10am and 12pm on the lower level of the West Pier and it's open to all combinations of families and all ages, although those under 16 must be accompanied by an older family member.

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<p>Brian Robinson B.B.L.S., L.L.M. State Solicitor Eilish Bradshaw B.A., L.L.B., L.L.M.</p>	<p>Clare-Ann Temple L.L.B. Ciara O'Sullivan B.B.L.S., (Euro) Hannah Stockwell-Quinn B.C.L., L.L.M.</p>
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Concerns over Greystones film studios delay



Jennifer Whitmore TD

Jennifer Whitmore TD last week raised in The Dail the delay in the build of the Greystones Media Campus and called on the Government to provide an update on the development.

Deputy Whitmore asked the Taoiseach for an update on the project in the Dail during Questions on Promised Legislation. Leo Varadkar responded with a commitment to get an update in writing for Deputy

Whitmore from the Minister for Finance in writing.

Deputy Whitmore said, after the interaction in the Dail: "Today in the chamber, I asked the Taoiseach about the Greystones media campus. This €300 million project will be Ireland's largest production facility. It is a joint venture between John Sisk & Son Ltd and the Irish Strategic Investment Fund, ISIF. This was a welcome development for Greystones; however, there have been delays in the delivery of the campus, which is a cause for concern for locals in Greystones.

"The first phase of the campus was to open in 2024. The diggers were on

site and cleared a few trees, but there has been no activity there for at least nine months. I want an update on the project and when we can expect it to open. I have also asked if it can be outlined what kind of safeguards the ISIF has put in place to ensure that the development will happen when it is due to do so.

"This centre will make a valuable contribution to the local economy and create jobs in the locality, which is very welcome. After so many months of uncertainty, we need to get clarity from the government on this. I will continue to pursue this and get answers from the government on this matter for Greystones."



Alannah and Andrew Kinsella at the St. Patrick's Day parade in Rathdrum

Consultation event to be held for N81 Improvement Schemes

Wicklow County Council is progressing the development of the N81 Improvement Schemes, namely the N81 Whitestown Lower project and N81 Hangman's Bend and Tuckmill project in conjunction with Kildare National Roads Office, Transport Infrastructure Ireland and the Department of Transport.

These projects aim to address road deficiencies contributing to the poor road safety record on the network over the last 15 years. The project team are progressing the planning and design of the project in accordance with the TII Project

Management Guidelines. The project is currently at Option Selection Stage (Phase 2).

Public Display Event

The public, stakeholders and interested parties are invited to attend and

view information at this Options Selection stage for the N81 Improvement Scheme. This non-statutory consultation event also provides an opportunity for feedback and observations to be submitted regarding the process and conclu-

sions reached to date, which may inform the further development of the scheme in the next phases.

The public display event will be held in the Inis Fail Germaines, Main Street, Baltinglass, on Wednesday, 27th March 2024, between 14:00pm and 20:00pm.

Members of the Project Team will be available to provide guidance and to answer questions.

The public display documents will also be available to view on the project website (www.N81whitestownandtuckmill.ie) from 14:00 noon on Wednesday, 27th March 2024.

Submissions will be accepted via the online feedback form available on the project website www.N81whitestownandtuckmill.ie or by post marked as N81 Improvement Scheme Whites-

town Lower and Hangman's Bends submission addressed to the Senior Executive Office, Transportation, Infrastructure Development and Emergency Services Department, Wicklow County Council, County Buildings, White-gates, Wicklow Town, A67 FW96. Submissions will be accepted from Wednesday, 27th March 2024 and must be received on or before Friday 26th

April 2024.

Wicklow County Council values the opinion of the community on this project and welcomes feedback and submissions from the public and interested parties. The knowledge gained from the engagement will be considered by the project team as part of the next stages of the development of the scheme.

Cathaoirleach of Wicklow County Council,

Cllr Aoife Flynn Kennedy, stated: "Wicklow County Council values the opinion of the community on this project and welcomes feedback and submissions from the public and interested parties."

Chief Executive, Emer O'Gorman, added: "The knowledge gained from the engagement will be considered by the project team as part of the next stages of the development of the scheme."

Local groups call on all Wicklow election candidates to sign anti-racism protocol

On 21st March, International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, six groups from County Wicklow came together to ask all candidates standing for election to Wicklow County Council in June to sign the national Anti Racism Election Protocol.

Speaking on the matter Emer O'Neill said "Bray For Love, Wicklow Welcomes, Enniskerry Welcomes, African Irish Society of Co Wicklow, United Against Racism Wicklow and Wicklow Travellers Group are all coming together jointly to ask all County Wicklow local election candidates to sign up to the national Anti Racism Election Protocol.



"We know that people in Co Wicklow care deeply about our communities. We know communities across Wicklow have welcomed new neighbours with kindness, generosity and compassion.

We know that newcomers to our communities in County Wicklow are involved in building new houses for us, driving us to school and work and nursing our families.

"During this local election campaign we are concerned that immigration might become a central talking point and overshadow many real issues of housing, local facilities, health and transport. We know that people who are genuinely anxious about our communities across County Wicklow want to raise these issues during election time. We believe it is important to raise these issues respectfully and

we think we should be able to have those conversations without scape-goating minority groups.

"We are publicly calling on all County Wicklow local election candidates to keep this election clean. Honest and genuine conversations about immigration do not involve exaggerations or fear-mongering about minority groups. We publicly call on all candidates for Wicklow County Council to sign up to the Irish Network Against Racism Anti Racism Election Protocol. A public event will be held in April to do this." concluded O'Neill

 <p>An Roinn Cosanta Department of Defence</p>	 <p>An Roinn Cosanta Department of Defence</p>
<p>ARMY RIFLE RANGES</p> <p>WARNING</p> <p>If you are walking in the countryside do not walk onto any of the Military Firing Ranges as you could be in GREAT DANGER at all times from unexploded shells and other dangerous ammunition RED FLAGS indicate LIVE FIRING Watch out for the warning signs AND TAKE CARE!</p>	<p>RAONTA RAIDHFILÍ AN AIRM</p> <p>FOLÁIREAMH</p> <p>Má bhíonn tú ag siúl faoin tuath, ná siúil isteach i gceann ar bith de na Raonta Lámhaigh Míleata mar d'fhéadfá a bheith i nDEARG-BHAOL i gcónaí de bharr sliogáin neamhphléasctha agus armlón contúirteach eile Is ionann BRATACHA DEARGA agus BEO-LÁMHACH Bí ag faire do na comharthaí foláirimh AGUS BÍ AR d'AIRDEALL!</p>



Damien, Daisie Mae and Sarah Hogan at the St. Patrick's Day parade in Aghrim.

Matthews welcomes improved West Wicklow 885 bus service

Steven Matthews TD has welcomed the new improved frequency of the 885 bus service from Baltinglass to Naas via Dunlavin, Stratford and Blessington.

The new improved service which started earlier this month has six return journeys per day. Deputy Matthews said "I have a path beaten to the door of the NTA and Minister for Transport in my efforts to provide better public transport for Wicklow. So many residents from Baltinglass and Dunlavin asked me to provide a better bus service and I am delighted that we have done so. This service was introduced a few months ago, has been very warmly welcomed and I am glad that we now expand it to 6 return journey a day starting at 07:30 from Baltinglass which will also facilitate school going users.

"One of my priorities has been to provide parts of Wicklow which have been always neglected in terms of services with

better public transport options. The local link bus services now serve parts of Wicklow that never had a bus and last year, countrywide we introduced a new or improved service every week. I have greater ambition for Wicklow and I am making progress on a new bus service for Laragh/Roundwood to Bray Railway Station and for a local loop type service for Wicklow Town.

"My ongoing work to deliver the DART service to Wicklow Town is an absolute game changer for residents in the Wicklow district. That project is going very well with design consultants progressing detailed options and designs to bring it to planning permission stage if required. I am confident of delivering the DART to Wicklow



Deputy Matthews in Dunlavin

Town and as long as I represent the people of Wicklow they will get better public transport; Wicklow Town, Kilcoole and possibly Newcastle

will have a DART service in the coming years, Roundwood will have a new bus and the current Local Link services 885, 183 will be improved as

will the N11 bus routes 131 133 and further services to serve the new Park & Rides being built," concluded Deputy Matthews.

Timmins calls for new Local Link Bus Stop

€500,000 announced for Bus Stop funding by Wicklow County Council

Following news that €500,000 will be available from Wicklow County Council for the funding of more bus stops, Cathaoirleach of the Baltinglass Municipal District Councillor Edward Timmins is calling for an extra local link bus stop on the Naas Road in Blessington.

Speaking from Blessington following the announcement, Councillor Timmins stated: "I have been talking to residents at length in this area in recent months who must walk for twenty to thirty minutes to reach their nearest bus stop. Today's news from Wicklow Council of €500,000 in funding for bus stops means we now have the opportunity for a new bus stop on the Naas road which will greatly alleviate added pressures for Blessington residents travelling to Naas and Sallins .

According to a document produced by the National Transport Authority on guidance for bus stops, there are two main criteria for bus stop allocation namely 'safety' and 'passenger need'. The selected location must address the needs of intending and potential passengers and the selected location must be appropriate from a safety perspective - the Naas road fulfills

both of these criteria.

"A key aspect of the Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan is to provide local routes that connect smaller settlements with the regional public transport network. This can only be fully achieved with more bus stops. The purpose of the Rural Mobility Plan itself centres on accessibility and this is needed in Blessington with regards to bus stops."

Councillor Timmins continued: "I will be making the strongest possible case to Wicklow County Council for a bus stop in this location on the Naas Road and for more bus stops in West Wicklow where public transport options are severely limited.

According to a Briefing Note from Transport Infrastructure Ireland in July 2020, buses and coaches represent a significant part of the Irish public transport system and they are entirely reliant on the

road network to deliver their services. To put this in context in 2017, 278 million public transport passenger trips were made in Ireland. Of these passenger trips, some 195 million, or 70% of all passenger trips, were made on either a bus or coach service. As such, bus and coach services represent a significant source of public transport capacity in Ireland. The bus is the only public transport option in Blessington at present and we need more bus stops."

Councillor Timmins concluded: "Separately, I am including a proposal in my upcoming Blessington Local Area Plan submission for the Luas to be extended to Blessington having succeeded on three separate occasions to get this back into the County Development Plan. However in the interim, we need more bus stops, and buses in this area to meet the needs of the growing population."

Luas to Bray 'some distance away'

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has confirmed that any proposed Luas to Bray is some distance away.

The Extension of the Green line that would link Bray to the Luas network requires a series of steps before any works can begin.

Commenting on the update, Social Democrats local election candidate, Aaron McAllorum said: "The update provided by the NTA is clear-cut in what will be required to

bring the Luas as far as Bray.

"The NTA point to a multiplicity of considerations, from the alignment and the locations to be served, planning matters and design work. The task ahead in bringing a Luas to Bray can't be viewed as simply an extension of an existing line, as much as it would

be great to have a direct Luas connection, in view of the amount of work not commenced to date at the preliminary stages I would be sceptical of the timeline for delivery."

The NTA in their response said: "The Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2022-2042 contains a number of proposed Luas network extensions, including an extension of the Luas Green Line southwards in order to

serve Bray and its Environs. Luas to Bray is part of the Medium-Term proposals for development and delivery within 2031-2036. The alignment and the locations to be served have yet to be determined and will be subject of future planning, appraisal and design work. The enabling infrastructure required for this extension have therefore not been determined at this stage."



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Meet the candidate; Ciarán Hogan - Aontú

Aontú Wicklow have proudly selected local man Ciarán Hogan to be their candidate in the local elections coming up soon on June 7th.

Ciarán is a father of two girls, which are the main driving impetus for his political move. A small business owner he has worked as an entrepreneurial venue owner for 8 years based in Dublin city center. Previously to that he has a background as a trained commercial pilot, holding an ATPL license.

Speaking of his political run he said "I could see for some time that the country was going in the wrong direction. Too many people in their 20s and 30s were struggling and not through their own fault. There aren't the jobs, houses, surgeries, nor opportunities to keep them here, and the lack of national pride and hope was stark."

"We live in the most beautiful part of an already beautiful country; Wicklow is the best of the best. We don't have natural disasters, hurricanes, earthquakes, we don't have snakes, except those few in the

Dail. *So every crisis we face has been created either on purpose or by failure of those in the Dail and local councils.*"

Ciarán and Aontú have strongly criticised the government on many issues from housing, to cost of living and the disastrous referendums that were defeated by landslide vote of the Irish people. It is in this time when we most need a strong opposition against the government that Aontú and only Aontú stood up and challenged this government and their countless failures. They are calling for a General Election now so that "we can hear the voice of the people against the political establishment that seem more detached from the average person than any government in history of the state." Said Hogan

"I have three main goals if I win a seat in the council. One I will tackle the commercial vacancy rates in Bray, which at the moment stand at one of the worst 15.1%, Main



Ciarán Hogan - Aontú candidate for the Wicklow County Council election 2024.

Street is derelict and needs business and life to support the community. Next is traffic; If road are the veins and arteries of our community then twice a day we have a massive heart attack! The huge waste of productive time that happens when hundreds of people are stuck in their cars at the various bottlenecks to and from Bray is unacceptable. And third I want to address is making Bray more beautiful. The architecture, natural beauty and social facilities should altogether be a feast for the eyes and a testament to what we have made, and how we respect our natural and built world

together. Too many ugly buildings, useless structures, and wasted green space show that very little effort or thought is being put into development. I know it take effort and hard work.

I am used to hard work, as a businessman I know what it's like to work 80 hour weeks, for months on end. I know the value of the money I spend, and I know that efficiency that is always the goal in everything I do.

Aontú are currently leafletting and canvassing around the Bray Local Election Area (LEA), Which spans from Castle Street in the North to Woodbrook Glen at the South and Ardmore Park to the Promenade. If you would like to know more about the party or Ciaran Hogan's campaign visit the website Aontu.ie or on social media.

No matter what happens or what you believe it is important that everyone who can vote does vote in the upcoming local, European, and General elections. I hope to earn your vote, with hard work, dedication, and most of all a love for Bray, Ireland and our future generations who inherit this great country.



Ciarán Hogan - Aontú candidate for the Wicklow County Council election 2024.



Aontu Wicklow representative Ciaran Hogan left, with Aontu Leader Peadar Toibin in Dublin castle after referendum results.



Ciaran Hogan Left with Aontu European candidate Patrick Murphy middle, and party Leader Peadar Toibin right at public meeting in Royal Hotel Bray.

CIARÁN HOGAN

Candidate for the Wicklow County Council election in 2024

Bray East

SELECTED



The Greystones/Holyhead Twinning Partners once again travelled over to participate in this year's Greystones Parade. As always, they provided the crowds with plenty of energy and colour, receiving a great response as they travelled through the town. The Holyhead contingent was delighted to have been chosen as the Best Commercial Entry in the parade. The Welsh visitors always enjoy coming to Greystones and look forward to their Christmas trip with the Holyhead Santa.

2024 Greystones Municipal District People of the Year Awards



The Awards will be presented in the Greystones Golf Club, Greystones on Thursday 25th April, 2024 at 8pm

Application forms and tickets are available from Greystones Municipal District, Tel: 01 2876694 or Email: Kcoughla@wicklowcoco.ie / greystonesmd@wicklowcoco.ie
Ticket Price €35
www.wicklow.ie

Closing date for receipt of nominations is Thursday 28th March 2024

- Sportsperson of the Year
- Civic Award
- Special Person of the Year
- Cultural Person of the Year
- Commercial Award
- Young Entrepreneur of the Year



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Irish Rail commits to fixing flooding issue at Greystones South Beach archway

Irish Rail has made a commitment to resolve the flooding at the South Beach archway in Greystones. This low lying point is close to the South Beach playground, and experiences regular spot flooding. Work is expected to commence on Monday, April 1st, and is expected to be completed by mid-April.

Cathaoirelach of Greystones Municipal District Cllr Stephen Stokes stated: "I am thankful to Irish Rail for addressing this issue. It is currently a major deterrent for people who wish to access the South Beach in Greystones."

Irish Rail is planning to carry out the work at night time. As such access is not expected to be impacted during the work, while it is being carried out. Irish Rail will be installing a new bridge deck, with a concrete structure. Additionally as part of the drainage work a culvert is expected to be installed, which will significantly improve the issue of surface water. Irish Rail will also be seeking to make the archway accessible, for easy access to the boardwalk.

Cllr Stokes added: "The boardwalk is a popular amenity. It has further opened up our seafront to those who are less mobile. This news is a further step forward for the community. I will continue to press for more accessibility and amenities across Charlesland, Delgany, Greystones, Kilcoole, Killadreenan and Newcastle."

Local Green Party councillor Lourda Scott had contacted Irish Rail after the installation of the accessible boardwalk over the summer, when it became evident that completion of the boardwalk at the southern end could not be finished. This means that people in wheelchairs can't access the boardwalk from the southern end, which is nearest to the carpark by the playground. Obviously this is not

"Flooding under this bridge has always been an issue," she said. "After speaking with our local engineer it was confirmed that the solution lay with Irish Rail and until it was resolved the boardwalk at the southern end could not be finished. This means that people in wheelchairs can't access the boardwalk from the southern end, which is nearest to the carpark by the playground. Obviously this is not



The Greystones South Beach archway, which has been prone to flooding

ideal and while many people have been enjoying this new amenity, it wasn't fully serving its purpose. I had previously worked with the access officer in Irish Rail on getting wheelchair access to Kilcoole beach. They were very willing to engage and the works done at Kilcoole have been excellent. So when the problem arose in Greystones I spoke to the Irish Rail access officer in December about a solution to the flooding.

"I followed up with their Infrastructure Manager in the early New Year to keep the issue prioritised. I was delighted today to get confirmation that works

will be done to fix the bridge to prevent any more flooding by mid April. I will continue to ensure that the next steps are taken to ensure full access from the boardwalk from both entry points. I am very impressed Irish Rail and how proactive they were on getting back to me on this matter. It also highlights the value of having an access officer in an organisation. Even though in this case access to Irish Rail facilities wasn't affected, I believe having a person dedicated to coordinating assistance to people with disabilities really helped me to keep this matter prioritised."



A National Spring Clean is planned for the Dr. Ryan Park, Greystones, on Saturday, April 6th, from 11.30am - 1pm. It is hoped bring people together from across the area. The meeting point will be at the Dr. Ryan Park northwest entrance, close to the football pitches. The event is again being organised by Cllr Stephen Stokes, Cathaoirelach of the Greystones Municipal District. Volunteers are wanted and they are encouraged to bring a friend where possible. Equipment is being supplied on the day, however volunteers are encouraged to bring their own gloves. The event is being supported by An Taisce and Wicklow County Council.

Minister challenged in Dail over use of River Lodge House

Sinn Fein TD John Brady challenged Minister Roderic O’Gorman in the Dail last Thursday, saying that Wicklow residents are being “hoodwinked” regarding the future use of River Lodge House at Trudder, Newtownmountkennedy.

Speaking last week, Deputy Brady said: “In County Wicklow, we have a situation where the department are not only failing to communicate with a local community and public representatives regarding the future use of River Lodge House at Trudder, but appear to be actively deceiving them around its intent. Newtownmountkennedy is the fastest growing village in the state, and public services and amenities have not kept pace with this growth, and the fact that the government have failed to carry out community audits has exacerbated the challenges that the community face.

“For years the community in Newtownmountkennedy, have campaigned to have a former local HSE facility transferred to community use at River Lodge House. In this time, we were repeatedly informed by the department that the premises were unfit for human use.

“The Minister and the Department continue to insist that no decision has been taken regarding the use of the site by IPAS, while the reality being witnessed by local people on the ground suggests that the opposite appears to be the case.

“There is no escaping the fact that there is a clear attempt here to hoodwink the community and pub-

lic representatives.

“The reality on the ground is that locals are looking at bulldozers on site stripping back topsoil, putting in hardcore stone, along with prefabs.

“Is there any wonder that local communities are reacting in anger. It needs to be said that it is government actions that are fostering local anger and protests.

“The governments approach is not working, it exposes a chaotic approach to immigration which has failed communities and International Protection Applicants.

“The crux of the situation is that there is no government plan for immigration. We need a rules-based system, with the rules actually implemented, that is a fair, efficient, and enforced system, with proper communication with communities.

“The government approach has been shambolic from the outset and continues to this day. There is no plan, no consistent approach, and they are not working with local communities.

“What we have seen from the government has been an absolute lack of coherence, they have bounced from crisis to crisis, failing to address any of the core issues underpinning the crisis.

“Leading to a system that takes

years to process applications, with zero enforcement at the end of the day. If a decision is made to refuse the application, it is not enforced.

“We have consistently and vociferously argued the need for a fair, efficient, and effective immigration system. With proper engagement with host communities, dealing with core issues of capacity in local services.

“If an application fails, it should be enforced in a timely manner, returning people safely to their country of origin. We need to speed up the processing of IP applicants.

“It is completely unacceptable that it is taking years in some situations. This is overwhelming an already stretched system, creating bottlenecks in accommodation.

“There is an onus on the Minister to take into consideration the challenges the community in Newtownmountkennedy already face. The service and amenity deficiencies that already exist within the area need to be addressed immediately.

“The decision not to audit services in the area, coupled with the fact the need for community facilities such as River Lodge House, leaves any decision to use the facility for IPAS accommodation as a retrograde decision.”



Derek Kavanagh with the Breen brothers at the Arklow St.Patrick's Day parade.

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Necklace of 'broadband bottlenecks' revealed in West Wicklow speed check

Minister responds to letter from councillor Timmins regarding slow broadband speeds

Cathaoirleach of the Baltinglass Municipal District, Councillor Edward Timmins, who encouraged residents in rural West Wicklow to test their broadband speeds on social media in a 'Broadband Speed Check' has revealed several 'broadband bottlenecks' exist in the villages of Kiltegan, Donard and parts of Dunlavin with other areas experiencing sporadic issues.

A response has been received from Minister of State with responsibility for Communications and the Circular Economy, Ossian Smyth TD to state additional areas cannot be added to the Broadband Intervention Area as their speeds were above 30Mbps during a 2019 mapping consultation.

Speaking last Thursday morning from Donard, Councillor Timmins stated: "After I was informed by local residents that broadband speeds are never more than 30Mbps in some areas of Kiltegan and Donard, I decided to encourage people to test their speeds through several social media posts on the issue. This verified and identified areas which should have been included in the National Broadband Plan which stipulates that broadband speeds of at least 30Mbps should be available nationwide. While not every residence is affected, there is a clear pattern of 'broadband bottlenecks' in, and close to, the villages of Kiltegan and Donard with another area of Dunlavin separately impacted.

"Some rural areas in West Wicklow are being excluded from the NBI high speed rollout because following a mapping consultation in 2019, Department Officials were provided with 30Mbps+ coverage maps from a private operator. It was these maps that dictated the decision to determine the intervention area (IA) and exclusion areas (EA)."

Anonymised samples of the feedback highlights the extent of the problem. Sample Respondent A said "We've had download speeds as low as 12Mbps when Eir were checking with me and they immediately jumped to blaming all sorts of things rather than saying we over



Cllr Edward Timmins

estimate our speeds for the area. Last night I was getting WhatsApp messages 12 minutes after being sent. Sometimes I get a group of emails that could be 30, 40, minutes after being sent. Originally, I thought it was my mobile provider but then realised it's actually Eir's broadband."

Sample Respondent B said "We have spent a fortune on private broadband suppliers, we have been with Wicklow broadband, imagine, three and are currently with regional broadband. Each time we have to pay a large installation fee. The service normally starts off fine, then goes downhill over the first year. I have been in contact with Eir several times over the past few years to get connected to the fibre network in our area but am constantly being told there are no connections left in our area. I have been in touch with NBI and informed they can't do anything as there is service in the area. It is very hard to run a business with little to very slow speeds."

Regarding the response received from the Minister, Councillor Timmins pointed out: "With regards to Kiltegan in particular, the

Minister stated it's a small number of areas that receive speeds of less than 30Mbps. According to the Minister, a further analysis shows that there are 120 premises in the Kiltegan Exclusion Area EA/blue area, and out of those premises it appears that approx. 15 of these get less than 30Mbps but greater than 15Mbps. I believe this figure is higher based on the feedback received from the Broadband Speed Check in addition to speaking to residents. These speeds are in comparison to other areas in Wicklow with download speeds of 204.6Mbps and upload speeds 42.2Mbps!"

Councillor Timmins concluded: "Remote working remains important for residents in more rural areas of West Wicklow who have limited public transport options, so it's essential all communities have access to high-speed broadband. It is a pillar of our current County Development Plan so whether it's a small number of areas affected here in West Wicklow, or not, I believe there should be a change in rules to allow rural villages to be added to the Broadband Intervention Area. In the interim, if any residents wish to query their specific locations, they can contact me or the Wicklow County Council Broadband Officer by emailing broadband@wicklow-coco.ie with their Eircode. A series of speed tests should be carried at different times of the day to determine the service level and ascertain if there are patterns around speed fluctuations at certain times and this can also be raised with the commercial supplier.

"The next stage in the campaign will be to seek a meeting with the Minister which I will be requesting to be held here in rural West Wicklow."



The Belton family at the St. Patrick's Day parade in Rathdrum.



Tara and Aine Carroll with Jessica Newsome at the St. Patrick's Day parade in Aughrim.



COMHAIRLE CONTAE CHILL MHANTÁIN
WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT ACT 2000 (AS AMENDED) & PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS 2001 (AS AMENDED)

NOTICE OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

N81 Hollywood Rural Traffic Calming and Bus Stops

In accordance with the provisions of PART XI, of the Planning & Development Act 2000 (as amended) and Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended), notice is hereby given that:

Wicklow County Council proposes to undertake the development of the N81 Hollywood Rural Traffic Calming and Bus Stops. The proposed development will provide formal bus stop facilities to serve the village of Hollywood, Co. Wicklow and will also provide traffic calming scheme at Hollywood Cross to reduce vehicle speeds and create a safer environment for vulnerable road users wishing to cross the N81 at this location. The works will include pavement renewal, drainage works, public lighting, new pedestrian crossings, bus stop including bus shelters, new gateway treatment plus signage and all other associated ancillary works.

In accordance with Article 120 (1) (b) (i) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended), Wicklow County Council have concluded following the completion of an Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Report that there is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment arising from the proposed development and that an Environmental Impact Assessment is not required.

Where any person considers that the proposed development would be likely to have significant effects on the environment, they may, at any time before the expiration of 4 weeks beginning on the date of publication of this notice, apply in accordance with the provisions of Article 120 (3) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended), to An Bord Pleanála for a screening determination as to whether the development would be likely to have such effects.

In accordance with the provisions of Article 250 (1) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended), Wicklow County Council has carried out a screening of the proposed development to assess, in view of best scientific knowledge, if the development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, would be likely to have a significant effect on a European site. Accordingly, Wicklow County Council has determined that the proposed development would not be likely to have a significant effect on any European site and that therefore, an Appropriate Assessment of the proposed development is not required.

Plans and particulars of the proposed development can be inspected or purchased at a fee not exceeding the reasonable cost of making a copy, at the offices of Wicklow County Council, Station Road, Whitegates, Wicklow Town during opening hours from 9:00 am to 3.30 pm Monday to Friday and also at Baltinglass Municipal District, Civic Offices Blessington Business Park, Blessington, Co. Wicklow during opening hours from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm Monday to Friday, excluding Bank Holidays, for a period between **Thursday 28th March 2024 to Tuesday 30th April 2024**. Plans and particulars will also be available to view on the Council's Online Consultation Hub at www.wicklow.ie/Living/ConsultationHub

Submissions or observations with respect to the proposed development, dealing with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area in which the development would be situated, may be made in writing to the Senior Executive Officer, Transportation, Infrastructure Delivery & Emergency Services, Wicklow County Council, County Buildings, Station Road, Whitegates, Wicklow Town on or before **noon Tuesday 14th May 2024**. Submissions may also be made by email via the following address n81@wicklowcoco.ie. All submissions should be marked "N81 Hollywood Rural Traffic Calming and Bus Stops - Part 8 Statutory Consultation".

Further information is available from the Transportation, Infrastructure Delivery & Emergency Services Department, Wicklow County Council on 0404 20100

'THANK YOU WICKLOW'

Continued from page 1

“However challenges never go away; they just change. There will always be challenges but they can always be met if we cleave to fundamental

values that define my party and which have served this nation well. These are the values that will define my leadership in Fine Gael. “Hope. Enterprise. Equality of Opportunity.

Integrity. Security. I have been working in the community since I was 15 years old and those values meant and mean everything to me.

“I believe in public service and the power of politics to make a difference and to make people's lives better.

“That is how I came to be involved in politics in the first place. I grew up with parents who worked hard and raised their children to believe in the rewards of working hard.

“Ordinary decent people, like families all over the county, who inspire their children every day. My mother used to tell us that success is about liking what you do.

“They gave up so much and worked so hard for us and today I must thank them too. I want to also thank my incredibly supportive - and extraordinarily patient - wife, Caoimhe, and our wonderful children, Saoirse and Cillian.

“When I was eight, my little brother, Adam, was born and my parents quickly realised he was a little bit different. As time went on we realised Adam was autistic, although much less was known about autism at the time. As a brother, I grew increasingly frustrated at the lack of information and the absence of support for families like ours.

Continued on next page



Pictured celebrating the success of Simon Harris' selection as Fine Gael Party Leader and incoming Taoiseach are (L-R) Cllr Avril Cronin, Cathaoirleach of Wicklow County Council Aoife Flynn-Kennedy, Cllr Irene Winters, Cllr Sylvester Bourke and Cllr Melanie Corrigan.

From Greystones Town Council to Taoiseach in 15 years

Charting the meteoric rise of Simon Harris

2009 - Elected to Greystones Town Council and to Wicklow County Council with the highest percentage vote of any County Councillor in Ireland.

2011 - Elected to Dail Eireann, the youngest Deputy in the 31st Dail at just 24 years old. Selected by Fine Gael to nominate Enda Kenny for Taoiseach.

2014 - Appointed to the top junior ministerial position, as Minister of State at the Department of Finance with responsibility for the Office of Public Works, Public Procurement, and International Banking.

2016 - Appointed to the cabinet as Minister for Health. Re-appointed in June 2017 when Leo Varadkar succeeds Kenny as Taoiseach.

2020 - Appointed as Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. Re-appointed following Leo Varadkar's appointment as Taoiseach on in December 2022.

2024 - Confirmed as leader of Fine Gael following resignation of Leo Varadkar, putting Harris on course to be Taoiseach.



Simon Harris celebrating with his support team: Kerry Condon, Finn Moffet, Peter Michaels and Matthew Carter

Wicklow Fine Gael Councillors Back Harris

Minister Simon Harris has the backing of all 9 Fine Gael Councillors in Co. Wicklow as the leader of Fine Gael and future Taoiseach.

Since Simon was first selected as a Fine Gael candidate his commitment to the party, his community and his desire to get things done to improve the life of citizens in Wicklow and the country has never been in question.

He has the drive, the energy, and the ability to bring our county and country forward. Simon will be a leader for all.



Cllr. Vincent BLAKE



Cllr. Sylvester BOURKE



Cllr. Melanie CORRIGAN



Cllr. Avril CRONIN



Cllr. Shay CULLEN



Cllr. Aoife FLYNN KENNEDY



Cllr. Derek MITCHELL



Cllr. Edward TIMMINS



Cllr. Irene WINTERS

WORKING FOR WICKLOW



Continued from page 9

“This led me to campaign, to advocate and ultimately to politics. That experience is what keeps me grounded, it underpins my belief in the need for politics, for good Government, and for Government to always be about delivering for the people.”

Wicklow I remain grateful and can assure you this: Under my leadership, I stand to support businesses, especially small businesses. I stand for making work pay, for supporting education and educational pathways for all, for law and order, for supporting the family farm and helping farmers to transition to meet the challenges of

food security and climate change, for democracy and freedom, for truth, for Europe and for peace.

“In the hours, days, weeks and months ahead I will act and always listen. I will never lose touch with people of Wicklow who have made me who I am. I love this county and this country. I will work every



Former Taoiseach Enda Kenny pictured with Simon Harris

Benville Robinson LLP
SOLICITORS

The partners and staff of Benville Robinson congratulate Minister Simon Harris on being selected as leader of Fine Gael and next Taoiseach

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moment of every day to keep it safe and to deliver for people.

“The late, great poet, Séamus Heaney, penned

lines which have become a guiding principle for me: ‘Hope is not optimism, which expects things to turn out well,

but something rooted in the conviction that there is good worth working for’.

“I know the value of

hard work. I feel the desperate need for hope. I promise to do my damndest for the good of Wicklow, for the good

of the country and for the good of my party. I'm up for it. I'm ready. And I thank you again for your trust.”

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The Chair, Board, staff, students and past students of Bife warmly congratulate our past Board member, Minister Simon Harris, on being selected as County Wicklow's first Taoiseach



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A life in politics: Simon Harris through the years

Hoteliers congratulate Simon Harris

The Irish Hotels Federation has congratulated incoming Taoiseach Simon Harris who has been “a good friend and supporter of Irish tourism”.

Michael Magner, President of the Irish Hotels Federation, the national representative organisation of over 900 hotels and guesthouses: said "On behalf of the Irish Hotels Federation, I would like to congratulate Simon Harris on becoming leader of Fine Gael.

“Hailing from a constituency with a very strong tourism heritage, Minister Harris has been a good friend and firm supporter of Irish tourism throughout his career. We look forward to continuing to work with him and his colleagues in Government to address the challenges now facing our industry and ensure that Irish tourism remains at the heart of national economic policy.

“As Ireland's largest indigenous employer, a key priority for us and our tourism industry partners over the coming months is to secure policy measures to help offset unsustainable increases in Government-controlled business costs, which are having a disproportionate impact on tourism and hospitality businesses.”

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Fine Gael North Wexford South Wicklow constituency 'excited and invigorated'

The Fine Gael North Wexford South Wicklow constituency said they are "excited and invigorated by the decisiveness and emphatic support the Fine Gael Party has shown in the selection of Minister Simon Harris TD as leader of the Fine Gael Party and as our candidate to be the 15th Taoiseach of Ireland".

In a statement they said "Minister Harris has shown true dedication to his role as a public servant, supporting communities the length and breadth of Ireland. As he steps up to be our candidate for Taoiseach, he does so with our full backing and support. He has shown a determination to add value in every role he has taken on, we know his leadership will be about who we embrace, what we create, who we include, he will embody

the values of Ireland and represent us on the international stage.

"With his close links to Gorey and Arklow through his wife's family, we hope this will bring additional focus to this long-neglected part of the country. The Fine Gael party locally, through our strong representatives will endeavor to lobby to improve infrastructure and services in the area. Minister Harris is a Greystones native, who has served his community

since being elected to Wicklow County Council in 2009 (with the highest percentage vote of any county councillor in Ireland) as well as Greystones Town Council. He was elected to Dail Eireann in 2011 for the then Wicklow Constituency. He has served on the Dail's Public Accounts Committee and the Oireachtas Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform. Throughout his life he has been a strong advocate for

Mental Health and a champion for people with Disabilities in Ireland.

"He has served with distinction in senior roles in the Department of Finance, Health, Justice and most recently in Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. Most recently he has championed a renewed emphasis on apprenticeships. He has been instrumental in trying to improve the lot of 3rd level students and their families. His breath of experience across these roles will only serve to make him a great leader of the government.

"We are proud to have him as our leader and future Taoiseach. We thank Caoimhe, his wife and his children for their support of Simon, without whom he would not be able to do the amazing job he has done so far. We wish him every good fortune in this new role."

Councillor Diarmuid Deveraux commented "I welcome the proposed election of a new party leader, which I hope will lead to a change of direction, especially in relation to rural Ireland and local communities. I wish the

incoming Taoiseach every success in the task ahead".

Cllr Sylvester Bourke commented "I am absolutely thrilled for Minister Simon Harris to become our leader and Taoiseach. With his skills and proven ability to deliver, he will be an excellent Taoiseach".

Donal O'Sullivan, Fine Gael North Wexford South Wicklow Constituency Chairman commented "Minister Simon Harris has been active within Wicklow Fine Gael for over 20 years and has proven in that time his dedication to public life through his hard work, boundless energy and compassion. We look forward to being led by him in the upcoming elections".

Local Election Candidate for the Gorey District, Darragh McDonald commented "It is very exciting to see a new generation of politician come to the forefront. Minister Harris's work on disability issues within education has shown his integrity and work ethic, I look forward to working with him as he looks to other struggling areas of Irish Society."



Simon Harris with Greystones Local Elections candidate Aideen Lennon

Best wishes from Fianna Fail

Former Fianna Fail councillor from Greystones Kathleen Kelleher sent best wishes from the Wicklow Fianna Fail CDC Officer Board.

"The new leader of Fine Gael and incoming Taoiseach Simon Harris is one of our local TDs, a partner in government and will be the first Wicklow Taoiseach. Here in Wicklow, we have watched the new Taoiseach from his younger days in Greystones. Through his first local election wins on Greystones Town Council and Wicklow County Council in 2009, to election as TD in 2011. He has always performed well, has kept his local connections alive and is committed to Ireland."

On a personal note, Kathleen Kelleher said: "I have watched Simon for many years, since canvassing with him when he was a teenager. He grew up in Redford Park, right next door to me in Rathdown Park. He told me, as a youngster, that he would be Taoiseach one day. And he is!"

"I lost my Wicklow County Council seat to him in 2009, but kept my Greystones Town Council seat. However, even then, 15 years ago, his determination and skills were evident. Simon has put those skills to good use over many years for the benefit of Wicklow. Now he will do the same for Ireland. I fully acknowledge that Fianna Fail and Fine Gael are partners in Government and will continue this good working relationship."



WICKLOW TOWN & DISTRICT CHAMBER
Good for Business and Community

Congratulations Simon Harris

Wishing you every success into the future



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Congratulations Simon on becoming Wicklow's first Taoiseach



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Open Door Quiz Night raises €2000

Open Door hosted a packed fundraising table quiz on Thursday, March 14th in Greystones Rugby Club. The event was hosted by Sugarloaf Lions Club. Cllr Stephen Stokes, Cathaoirleach of the Greystones Municipal District attended the quiz and congratulated Open Door and the Sugarloaf Lions Club on their efforts.

Cllr Stokes stated: "It was a very enjoyable evening for a worthy cause. I would like to congratulate Suzanne Cox from Open Door and Joe Grennan who was quizmaster on the night." A total of €2000 was raised for Open Door. Cllr Stephen Stokes remarked that he would like to see more funding for organisations such as Open Door. Cllr Stokes added: "Open Door is making lives better. Their staff and volunteers make a positive impact in the community. Funding is an ongoing challenge. However you cannot put a price on the social value they give to the community. Therefore I would like to see increased funding provided." Although they are based in Bray, Open Door's catchment area covers North Wicklow and South County Dublin. They provide facilities and activities for adults with physical disabilities as a result of multiple sclerosis, stroke, motor neurone disease, spina bifida, road accidents and others. Open Door has purpose built centre designed to allow easy access to the various activities within the building. Cllr Stokes concluded: "The Open Door Team are an amazing group of people. I wish them continued success with all of their efforts."



Suzanne Cox of Open Door with Cllr Stephen Stokes

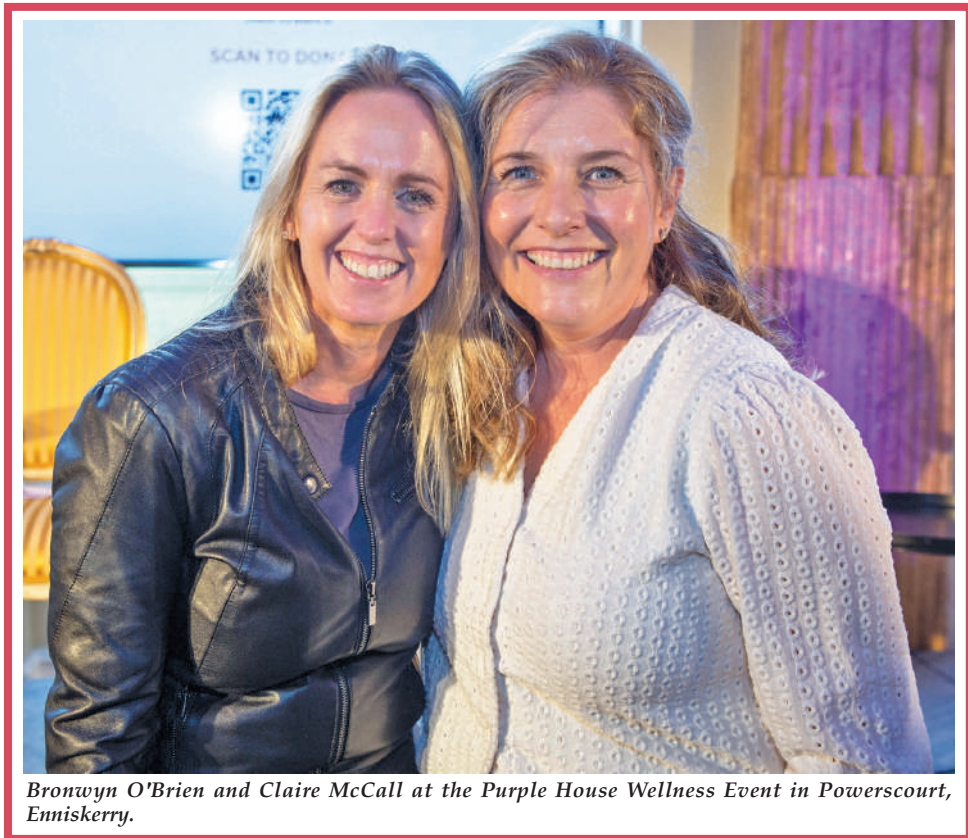
Successful open day event brings babysitters and families together

A recent event in the Royal Hotel in Bray helped to foster networking and relationships between families and babysitters in Bray and surrounding areas.

The open day event was organised by childminding organisation Oogo, which aims to make childcare more personal and accessible. It took place on 9th March and sought to connect babysitters and childminders with families. The day was a success, with several families finding potential babysitters for their children on the day and sharing their experiences. Cathaoirleach of Wicklow County Council and local councillor Aoife Flynn Kennedy also attended the event to show her support for Oogo, which is free for babysitters to join.



Cathaoirleach of Wicklow County Council Aoife Flynn Kennedy, with representatives from Oogo and a local family at the recent open day event in the Royal Hotel



Bronwyn O'Brien and Claire McCall at the Purple House Wellness Event in Powerscourt, Enniskerry.



Soroptimists Bray annual table quiz raises €1700 for local charities

Ninety participants of Soroptimist International Bray's Annual Table Quiz generously contributed to a fabulous amount of €1700 for local charities, including Bray Women's Refuge, Purple House, Five Loaves and Hygiene Hub.

Pat Hastings had come up with a wide variety of questions which challenged the participants while also providing all with the feeling of achievement. The winners were rewarded with vouchers generously sponsored by John Duggan and the runner-up with white and red wine. SI Bray say they are looking forward to welcoming you to their next Table Quiz in 2025.



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Four awards for Wicklow at National Cumann na mBunscol Awards

On March 8th all roads led to the centre of the country to Mullingar for the National Cornmarket Cumann na mBunscol Awards.



Wicklow Cumann na mBunscol was announced as the first winners of the night as it scooped 1st place for its Social Media presence

These awards are like the Oscars for primary school teachers involved in the promotion of Gaelic games in their schools and counties. The glitz, glamour and nail biting were all evident as teachers from the 32 counties were present as the awards were announced in order from 3rd place to 1st place.

Wicklow Cumann na mBunscol was announced as the first winners of the night as it scooped 1st place for its Social Media presence and then 2nd place for Public Relations. St. Laurence O'Toole's, Roundwood also came away with 2 awards on the night, 3rd place in the Promotion of Gaelic Games and Culture category and 3rd place in Large School of the Year. What a night for the Garden County!

A large group were present on the night from St. Laurence O'Toole's to claim their well-earned prizes and Allianz Cumann na mBunscol Chill Mhantáin were represented by Cathaoirleach Ciara Fagan, Cisteoir Éamonn Hughes and PRO Pam McDermott. This is a fantastic achievement for Wicklow to be so highly represented nationally. Well done to all, huge congratulations.



Roundwood also came away with 2 awards on the night, 3rd place in the Promotion of Gaelic Games and Culture category and 3rd place in Large School of the Year.



Leinster Boxing Champion Lanna Byrne with the Arklow Boxing Club at the St. Patrick's Day parade in Arklow.

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Wicklow students receive entrance awards from TCD

Awardees

- Arklow CBS - *Darragh Doyle*
- Avondale Community College - *Caitlin Caw*
- Colaiste Bhríde, Carnew - *Juliette Ni Chonaill & Richard Greene*
- Dominican Convent - *Aisling Ledesma*
- Loreto Bray - *Isabel Lyna, & Ava Florence Hagan*
- St. Kevin's Community College Dunlavin - *Paul Nicholas O'Brien*
- Colaiste Chraobh Abhann - *Hazel Donohoe*
 - Colaiste Na Toirbhirte - *Laurie Sean Byrne*
 - East Glendalough School - *Tadhg Augustine Michael Lord & Ronan Oliver Gilpin*
- Gaelcholaiste na Mara - *Edward Byrne*
- North Wicklow Educate Together - *Patrick Phibbs*
- St. Kilian's Community School - *Charlotte Pettersson*
- St. Mary's College - *Dedunu Aoife Peiris*
- Temple Carrig - *Abby McCann & Dillon McDonagh*
- Woodbrook College - *Aoife Dolan*
- Colaiste Chill Mhantain - *Luke James Dunne*
- Colaiste Raithin - *Patrick O'Connor*
- St. David's Holy Faith - *Robert Shparuta*
- St. Gerard's - *Samuel O'Connell, Leo MacNally, Neill Finn & Samuel Walsh*

Twenty-six students from Wicklow were among a total of 626 first-year students from Ireland and overseas who received prestigious Entrance Exhibition Awards for the 2023/4 academic year from Trinity College Dublin on 15th March.

The awards go to students accepted into the first year of a full-time undergraduate degree programme who achieve the highest points among Trinity entrants from their secondary school, above a minimum of 500 CAO points (or equivalent). Many former awardees have gone on to make a significant contribution to the economic, cultural, and political life of Ireland and beyond.

The student come from 445 different schools and from all 32 counties on the island of Ireland as well as 28 countries overseas. The awards were delivered at three ceremonies at Trinity, to which the students and their school principals were invited.

Provost of Trinity Dr Linda Doyle said: "The Entrance Exhibition Awards are our way of recognising these fantastic students and acknowledging the huge effort they put into

their Leaving Certificate exams. I am really honoured that they have chosen Trinity College Dublin for this next step of their education.

"This year's award recipients are now in the First Year of their studies and I hope they are finding their studies enjoyable and rewarding, and enjoying the huge variety of clubs and societies in Trinity. Our Entrance Exhibition Awards programme includes a special event for school principals, and I want to really acknowledge the amazing work of principals, teachers and school staff who are so dedicated in making sure that students achieve their full potential."

Students who achieve the highest points among Trinity entrants from their secondary school with at least 500 points in the Leaving Certificate (or its equivalent EU/EEA second-level final examinations) are

eligible for an Entrance Exhibition Award. This includes bonus points for Mathematics. When more than one student from a school gets the same high points, all receive an award.

The Entrance Exhibition Awards were awarded to 408 students from Leinster (257 from Dublin), 84 from Munster, 53 from Connacht and 44 from Ulster.

Awards also went to students from the following countries: Austria (2), Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Finland, France, Germany (4), Greece, Hungary, India, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal (2), Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland (2), Ukraine (3) and UK (excluding NI) (5).



Caitlin Caw from Avondale Community College



Hazel Donohoe from Colaiste Chraobh Abhann



Paul Nicholas O'Brien from St. Kevin's Community College

Teachers to debate future of education and teaching at Wexford Convention

500 second-level teachers from all over the country will gather to discuss the future of education and teaching in Ireland at the 2024 ASTI Annual Convention in Wexford from April 2nd to 4th. The event will take place in Clayton Whites Hotel, Wexford, and will be addressed by ASTI President Geraldine O'Brien and Minister for Education Norma Foley on Tuesday, April 2nd.

Student wellbeing

Delegates at the ASTI convention will hear that student and teacher wellbeing must be supported by adequate investment in schools and school communities. This must include properly resourced psychological support services for students. Separately, delegates will call for a survey of teachers on the psychosocial stressors they experience in their working lives. Another motion will consider the need for stronger legislation to deal with online harassment.

Teacher workload

A number of motions at this year's ASTI Annual Convention reflect the concerns teachers have that workload and work intensity are impacting on teaching and learning.

The work of teachers has changed significantly over the past 10 to 15

years. As society has changed, the role of the teacher has expanded leading to excessive workload and increased work intensity. The growing complexity and diversity of tasks and the increase in administrative duties have eaten into teachers' time.

Teacher shortages will once again feature prominently at ASTI Annual Convention with motions calling for recognition of all teaching service abroad for returning teachers, a one-year Professional Masters in Education, and a reduction in the 25-year teachers' salary scale.

AI and the Leaving Cert

A key motion at ASTI Annual Convention will explore the potential impact of AI on the Leaving Cert. Other motions will examine the possible unintended consequences of curricular and assessment policy changes for students and education.

Minister questioned over delays in Blessington school build start date

Jennifer Whitmore TD has asked the Minister for Education the reason why the start date for construction of the proposed new 1,000 student school at Blessington Community College has been delayed from December 2024 to September 2025.

"I was contacted by several Blessington parents who were very concerned with the news that the proposed start date for the construction of the much needed 1,000 student school at Blessington Community College has been delayed by almost a year," explained Deputy Whitmore.

"I have asked the Minister for Education why the construction start date for this project has been pushed back and, in light of the delay, what supports the Department will be putting in place to accommodate the growing school community in Blessington," added Ms Whitmore.

"The school have already seen delays in the delivery of six temporary

classrooms which were to accommodate the First-Year students who started in the school over six months ago. The news that work on the permanent school building has been delayed is a further blow to the school community and is very disappointing," commented Ms Whitmore.

Social Democrats Local Election Candidate for West Wicklow, Deirdre McCormack also shared Deputy Whitmore's disappointment with the news of the delay.

"The disappointment and frustration that this delay is causing is being felt throughout our community here in Blessington and the surrounding areas. The ongoing



Deirdre McCormack and Deputy Jennifer Whitmore at Blessington Community College

space issues at Blessington Community College are not only impacting the current students and staff at the school but are also a major concern for families whose children hope to attend the school in future years. Those of us in the area with children only starting

Primary School are questioning whether the new school building will even be ready by the time our kids are starting First Year," commented Deirdre McCormack.

Deputy Whitmore concluded, "Blessington is a growing community with several new housing

developments at various stages of planning and construction. The Blessington Community College school community is only going to get bigger, and the Department must ensure that the promised 1,000 student school for this town is delivered in a timely manner."

'Lack of updates on school places beyond frustrating'

Social Democrats TD Jennifer Whitmore has described the lack of updated information on Greystones school place shortages as frustrating. Deputy Whitmore received an email from the Department of Education confirming that they had done school inspections last week to determine how they would accommodate the circa 22 students who have yet to secure a secondary school place in the area. Beyond that, it provided no further updates to reassure parents or local schools.

Deputy Whitmore said: "There doesn't appear to be any further information forthcoming from the Department of Education.

We were told there would be an update shortly at our last meeting on the 1st of March. We received

a notice today (Friday 15th March) which gave no real information other than that a further update would be due soon. It is hard to believe that, given that I have been flagging this with the department officials since last

October, they haven't resolved the issue yet. Parents need to get an update and know there will be places for their children in September.

"This entire debacle has been challenging and frustrating, and I

know that the parents and the children affected by this will be upset by this lack of progress.

"It is reassuring that the Department guarantees that every child will have a school place, but we have been hearing that for months now, and it is not as if parents can get children ready for the next school year based on that. There are open days, book lists, school transport applications, and uniforms that need to be purchased. None of this can be done

in this limbo where children don't know where they will go to school yet.

"At this stage, the priority has to be those more than 20 children who don't have a place. I will write back to the Department to express my frustration, and that of parents, at the lack of urgency from the government on this. It is reasonable to expect a timely update on this matter, and that has not been forthcoming. It is entirely unacceptable."



Jennifer Whitmore TD

Wicklow School awarded for diversity achievements



Dominican College Wicklow students at the Yellow Flag award ceremony in the Button Factory Studios, Dublin.

Only 1 in 10 teachers felt they had sufficient knowledge to bring a focus on interculturalism into their lesson plan and only a quarter of all students felt their ethnic or cultural identity was somewhat reflected in their classroom and teaching materials, or not at all, according to a new survey by the Yellow Flag School Programme.

The programme, which supports schools to challenge racism and discrimination today awarded fourteen schools for their work to build inclusivity and anti-racist school environments and communities, at a ceremony in the Button Factory Studios, Dublin. Among them was Dominican College in Wicklow Town.

The Yellow Flag as part of its assessment of schools asked over 14,000 teachers, pupils, parents and guardians, representing 113 different ethnicities their views on the extent of intercultural recognition and teaching in their school.

Over 5,000 parents or guardians answered with only 1 in 3 responding that their child or young person's cultural or ethnic identity was very much reflected in the classroom and learning materials.

The awardee schools who completed the 8 step programme were from Dublin, Cork, Galway, Louth, Waterford, Wicklow and Kildare and received a Yellow Flag for their achievements by Minister for Children, Equality,

Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O'Gorman, who said; "Children and Young people often lead the way in showing us all a real model of inclusivity.

The Yellow Flag programme is incredibly valuable in how it brings to the fore that inherent sense of fairness and mutual respect in such a practical way.

It's a real privilege for me today to be able to award a Yellow Flag to 14 primary and post-primary schools from all over the country, recognising their significant achievement in challenging racism and discrimination. The survey results highlighted today also reveal just how much more work is needed in spreading this positive work further - a job Government is committed to supporting."

Speaking at the event Yellow Flag Coordinator Sian Abraham Long said "Over 55,000 students in Ireland were in a school which proactively adopted it, but government investment is needed to ensure schools are working to the same standards within the cur-

riculum and with teachers supported in their efforts through training And could be integrated within the revamp of the primary curriculum framework.

"Many teachers reported never having received intercultural or anti-racism training, which is also a finding among 8 in 10 teachers who took part in the survey and who entered the 2-year cycle programme in 2023."

Student of Dominican College, Wicklow Town, Grace Barry said "Our Yellow Flag diversity committee, along with teachers and the student council, take action towards a better school environment where pupils are educated on matters such as racism and discrimination and how it affects young people's mental health."

The Programme is partially supported since 2023 by the Department Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth under the Ireland Against Racism Fund support government's goal to foster inclusivity and promote social cohesion and integration.

Over 13,000 students in Wicklow benefit from free school books

Minister Simon Harris has confirmed that tens of thousands of young people in post-primary schools will benefit from free school books this coming September. This means that over 13,000 Wicklow students in 23 post primary school and their parents will not have to worry about buying renting any schoolbooks for the academic year 2024/2025.

Minister Harris said: "This is further great news for Wicklow parents who have children. Families of young children every year worry about the cost of education as September gets closer. Government is stepping in to make sure that the cost of education is being reduced every which way, with the cost of school books being removed and the cost of school buses also being removed.

"As Minister for Further and Higher Education I am particularly attached to removing any barrier that there is to education especially financial. Speaking to principals and administration in schools I know that the free school books scheme can be an administrative burden. So I am

delighted that Schools will also separately be provided with an Administration Support Grant to assist with the roll-out and implementation of the scheme and to relieve any additional administrative burden."

- This scheme will ensure that parents and guardians of students enrolled in Junior Cycle years in post-primary schools in the Free Education Scheme will not be asked to buy or rent any schoolbooks for the 2024/25 school year.
- The scheme will provide, at a minimum, free schoolbooks, and core classroom resources for all students in Junior Cycle years in post-primary schools in the free scheme in the 2024/25 school year, easing the financial burdens facing

families during back-to-school time.

- Special schools in which children and young people with special educational needs are enrolled in Junior Cycle programmes will also receive the Junior Cycle rate in respect of these students in 2024/25

Minister Harris added: "The free School Books Scheme has been a success at primary level, now it's time to see this scheme work for post primary school students and make sure education is never impacted by any financial costs.

"This is especially important to students moving from primary to post primary school students as families often incur a higher cost during this transition."



Luci Snell, Pierce Walsh and Callum Farrelly pictured during rehearsals for the forthcoming production of 'Singularity', a drama to be performed at Bray Institute of Further Education (BIFE) on April 17th and 18th.

Breaking barriers, one frame at a time

First-time filmmaker (78) part of the latest crop of filmmakers selected for the Dublin Smartphone Film Festival 2024

Now in its 7th year, The Dublin Smartphone Film Festival was formed with a simple ethos: expensive equipment shouldn't be a barrier to creativity.

Confusing, high-priced film equipment can often pose an additional hurdle for filmmakers starting out. They might have a story to tell but feel they can't afford to tell it. The Dublin Smartphone Film Festival, a festival created for films shot on mobile phones, was designed to be the antithesis of this. We wanted to show filmmakers that it's the story that's paramount, and that a simple tool like your mobile phone is an accessible and powerful storytelling device.

This freedom for filmmakers is clearly reflected in the latest crop of officially selected films. Taking place on March 30th at the Pearse Street Theatre and the Irish Film Institute, the festival features an exciting mix of shorts. These include a sci-fi film from first-time director George Carter (78), a powerful docu-



mentary about women's rights in Iran directed by Saba Ghasemi, and the premiere of the drama 'Now & Then' from multi-award-winning Independent Filmmaker Frank W Kelly.

The festival organisers have meticulously curated an exceptional program, emphasising powerful original concepts and innovative utilisation of technology. In an exciting

year before the doors even open. It has been an incredible period of creativity with people utilising the tools they have at their disposal to tell stories.

"There has never been a more interesting time to explore Smartphone filmmaking. This is what the Dublin Smartphone Film Festival is here to do; to encourage the next generation of filmmakers to create their stories using their phones and to provide them with the widest possible platform to present these stories to a wider audience"

The Dublin Smartphone Film Festival will take place on the 30th of March 2024 at The Pearse Centre and Irish Film Institute.

The next festival workshop will take place on 30th March in the IFI, Dublin. See Dublinsmartphonefilmfestival.com

development, this year's festival has partnered with the Irish Film Institute to host a filmmaking workshop. Here, participants get hands-on experience with mobile moviemaking in the historic Irish cinema landmark.

Festival Director Robert Fitzhugh commented: "We just could not believe the success of the festival in the past 6 years. We sell out each

Twelve Sheep: Life lessons from a lambing season

A hymn to the rituals of farming life from the bestselling Irish author of *The Cow Book*.

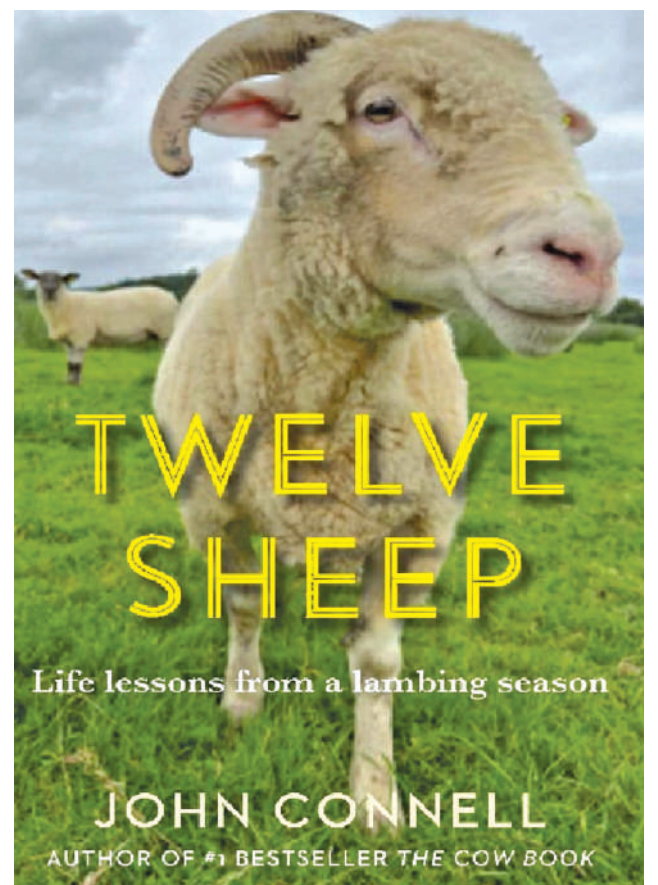
For John Connell, the lambing season on his County Longford farm begins in the autumn. In the sheep shed, he surveys the dozen females in his care and contemplates the work ahead as the season slowly turns to winter, then spring.

The twelve sheep have come into his life at just the right moment. After years of hard work, John felt a deep tiredness creeping up on him, a sadness that he couldn't shrug off. Having always sought spiritual guidance, he comes to realise that, in addition to the soothing words of literature and philosophy, perhaps the way ahead involves this simple flock of sheep. In the hard work of livestock rearing, in the long nights in the shed helping the sheep to lamb, he can reflect on what life truly means.

Like the flock that he shepherds, this book is both simple and profound, a meditation on the rituals of farming life and a primer on the lessons that nature can teach us. As spring returns and the sheep and their lambs are released into the fields, skipping with joy, John recalls the words of Henry David Thoreau, reminding us to 'live in each season as it passes.'

'Sheep, and sheep farming, are far more interesting than you think.' Tim Flannery

John Connell is a multi-award-winning author, film producer, investigative journalist and farmer. His documentary programs have won over a dozen international awards. His number-one bestselling memoir *The Cow Book* was awarded Popular Non Fiction Book of the Year at the Irish Book Awards. He lives in County Longford.



"I usually view rural Ireland from a train or car window but reading this gripping, fascinating book I felt I was becoming a cattle farmer," Roddy Doyle on *The Cow Book*



Alicia Ivory, Diarmaid O'Driscoll and Justina Rymovic pictured during rehearsals for the forthcoming production of 'Singularity', a drama to be performed at Bray Institute of Further Education (BIFE) on April 17th and 18th.

Wicklow students compete for Texaco Children's Art Competition Awards

Young artists who submitted entries to this year's Texaco Children's Art Competition are currently having their works evaluated as the judging process gets underway.

Pictured below is adjudicator, Eoin Butler admiring two of the entries received from Co. Wicklow this year - a work entitled 'Bansko Snow' by a pupil from St Laurence's National school, Delgany (left) and another entitled 'A Predator's Gaze' by a pupil from St. David's Holy Faith Secondary School, Greystones.

Winners in the seven age categories, including one exclusively for artworks by young artists with special needs, will be announced in mid-April.

Now celebrating its 70th year, the Texaco Children's Art Competition is the longest-running art sponsorship in Ireland. First held in 1955, it is hosted by Valero Energy (Ireland) Limited - the company that markets fuel in Ireland under the Texaco brand.



Wicklow Sings Festival for Choirs is back!

Wicklow Sings Festival for Wicklow choirs will take place on Saturday 20th April 2024 in Temple Carrig School, Greystones. Doors open at 6pm.

The Choir Festival will bring together some of the best choirs in Wicklow, boasting voices from over 400 people from all corners of the county.

This is the sixth year the festival organisers, Dara Mac Mahon and Jamie Lyon have brought this event to Wicklow.

Speaking about the festival, Dara Mac Mahon said: "We started this community arts event in 2016 and it has grown from strength to strength since. Choirs participating love entertaining and the Festival is a wonderful oppor-

tunity to showcase their music to a large audience. A wide variety of choirs are represented including community and gospel choirs, barbershop, children's and school choirs, to choral groups and chamber choirs. We would encourage Wicklow choirs to be part of Wicklow Sings, the biggest event for choirs in the County. Any choir interested in performing can register on the Wicklow Sings website www.wicklowsings.ie. Closing date is Friday, 29 March 2024."

Festival Organiser, Jamie Lyon

said "Since we have announced our date and venue, we have been inundated with ticket requests. This is always a sold-out event, so we would encourage everyone to go ahead and book soon on www.wicklowsings.ie."

Check out www.wicklow-sings.ie to find out more about the festival and to buy tickets. There is a special Early Bird price of €15 until the end of March, so don't delay. You can follow further announcements from @Wicklowsings on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.



A Terry Pratchett triumph at the Mermaid

Square One Theatre Group at the Mermaid Arts Centre 9th-13th April. Your chance to enjoy a Literary Master's work LIVE on Stage (Shakespeare meets Monty Python)

Spring has Sprung...which means the next Square One Theatre Group production is on its way! Not ones for resting on their laurels – succeeding with a diverse offering in the past 18 months from dramas 'Death of A Salesman' and Irish written 'The Mai' to comedy 'The Importance of Being Earnest' ... this popular Bray based drama society intends to push the envelope even further with their latest stage show.

Terry Pratchett's 'Wyrd Sisters' invites audiences to change gears. As Monty Python would say, "and now for something completely different...!"

Director Madeline Stringer is delving into the famed satirical universe of Pratchett and taking inspiration from familiar comedic staples such as Monty Python and Blackadder to form a fusion of hilarity.

Along with a colossal cast of 24 playing 33 characters, there is no fear of boredom when they tread the boards!

'Wyrd Sisters' is a feel-good medieval romp which follows three witches in their struggle against an evil usurping Duke as they try to restore a kind King to the throne. A fantasy style quest, there are many plotlines which combine, including: a love-story, case of mistaken identity,

good versus evil, class divide even a play within a play...it has everything but a kitchen sink (unless you count the cauldron where the three witches do their housework).

Standout appearances include the maniacal Duke and his manipulative wife, the Fool who is an appeasing yet conflicted jester, Vitoller the producer with his wayward troupe of thespians, including Hwella a figure based on Shakespeare. Plus, it would be remiss to forget the iconic titular witches themselves: Magrat (Young, eager and a little ditz) Nanny Ogg (Jovial, nonsensical and maybe a little too fond of the gargle) and Granny Weatherwax (Wise, stern and resourceful). Granny was a favourite protagonist of Pratchett himself, dominating in seven of his novels. But it is the smaller stars

that make this show: soldiers who report on incidents, the castle staff, robbers in the woods, a demon, peasants, even holders of signs establishing scenes for the audience. The saying "There are no small parts" really rings true with this spectacle!

There is also the inclusion of the Death character who had been in the original Terry Pratchett story, but when Wyrd Sisters was adapted for stage by playwright Stephen Briggs, the role of Death was removed as a time saving measure. As a highlight for Square One director Madeline Stringer, she requested it remain and was delighted that the change was approved by the rights holder as it adds another dimension to the tale.

Director Madeline remarks: "Wyrd Sisters pokes gentle fun at actors, Shakespeare, and dictators.

Pratchett's stories are not about the plot, but about the weaknesses, strengths and failings of humanity, and the sheer lunacy of life. So do not worry if you find the story befuddling, just enjoy the three witches' way of dealing with their world and imagine how things might be on this strange Globeworld if we had access to their magic!"

A must-see so early booking is advisable. Running from Tuesday 9th to Saturday 13th of April at Mermaid Arts Centre in Bray, County Wicklow from 7:30pm each evening.

Parental Guidance recommended (Suggested 13+ due to mild threat content) but is a show that the whole family will love, tweens & teens can laugh at the silly shenanigans while older viewers will appreciate the witty dialogue and Blackadder



Members of Square One Theatre Group promoting Wyrd Sisters

style humour.

Tickets are available online at: <https://www.mermaidartscentre.ie/whats-on/events/wyrd-sisters>

Or by contacting Mermaid Art Centre in person or by phone on 01 272 4030.

Box Office opening hours are Monday to Saturday 11am to 4pm, open until 7.30pm on performance nights.

ABOUT THE STAGE
ADAPTION P
LAYWRIGHT -
Stephen Briggs

A British writer of subsidiary works and merchandise surrounding Terry Pratchett's comic fantasy Discworld. He is also a narrator of many Discworld audiobooks who graduated from Curtin University with a double major in Theatre Arts and Creative Writing before attending WAPPA and studying Broadcasting. Midway through his time there he decided he didn't want to be a journo and

moved to Sydney to join RMK Voice Productions. Stephen has voiced countless campaigns and appeared in numerous professional plays. He has written and directed six short films, one of which, 'Whatever it Takes' satirises the Voice Over business.

The 'Wyrd Sisters' script from Briggs has received 4.4 stars on Goodreads and 4.5 stars on Amazon.

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Madeline Ann Stringer has been a member of Square One Theatre Group for about 26 years. This is her third time directing a full-length play, the others were 'Pygmalion' and 'When We Are Married' - both also comedies. Madeline feels there is enough solemnity in the real world to have any interest in letting it onto the Stage as well!

She has written three one-act plays, 'Two Wrongs' was put on by

Square One in the festivals, and 'Rhyme for Reason' did well "on the Circuit" with her other group, Tane Drama Society.

Madeline loves Square One for its "can-do" attitude, team spirit and camaraderie. She hopes the audiences for Wyrd Sisters enjoy it as much as she has enjoyed getting it ready to be seen!

ABOUT SQUARE ONE THEATRE GROUP

On an unassuming Wednesday evening in the former residence (turned pub) of Oscar Wilde, a handful of players met to discuss the business at hand: How they could fulfil their desire to create theatre while also providing a much-needed cultural experience to the town which they called home. Among important topics was the need for a name. As the conversation continued and the obligatory tangents took place...a pause occurred. One of the group

remarked "Look! We are back to Square One!" ...and with those simple words of wisdom, so began a saga of stage-work within the seaside suburb where that Strand Hotel was situated.

Their first show was 'The Far Off Hills' in 1976 which took place at the meeting area of a church called the Epworth Hall, followed by 'An Trial' and 'Sive'.

The opening of The Mermaid Arts Centre in 2002 has provided the group with a place to call home and elevated production to an increasingly high standard. Observers comment on the exceptionally professional quality of the actors, sets, costumes, technical, design elements including poster art as well as the polished nature of interactions with the voluntary members, giving the impression this drama league is so much more than an amateur community troupe.



Square One Theatre Group taking part in this year's Bray St. Patrick's Day Parade

Jigsaw launch new hiking campaign Colours Climb

Jigsaw, the charity dedicated to supporting youth mental health, is thrilled to announce Gaelforce Events as the proud sponsor of their upcoming national hiking fundraiser, the Colours Climb. This exciting collaboration aims to raise awareness and funds for youth mental health services.

Taking place this April, the Colours Climb invites people to team up with their family and friends on a walk or hike while wearing your favourite colour, uniform, or jersey.

Gaelforce Events has been a dedicated supporter of Jigsaw since 2014, making a significant impact by raising and donating over €50,000 during the past decade to support young people's mental health.

As a testament to their ongoing commitment, as part of Gaelforce Events sponsorship of the Colours Climb, they will be hosting a special charity hike for Jigsaw at the upcoming Gaelforce 10K Kippure event on Sunday, 14th April 2024, in Kippure Co Wicklow.

Ciara Young, Director of Gaelforce Events says, "Marking our 10th year as proud charity partners with Jigsaw, Gaelforce Events is delighted to sponsor the Jigsaw's Colour Climb. Mental health influences every part of a young person's life, and we strongly support Jigsaw's vision that every young person deserves support for their unique journey. Working alongside Jigsaw, we promote outdoor activity as a vital tool for enhancing mental well-being, while they provide the essential services to understand and support young people's mental health. We hope you will join us at Gaelforce 10K Kippure, or do your own challenge, to support Jigsaw to make a difference, one step at a time, towards a future where every young person thrives."

Recognising the crucial role of relationships in good mental health and wellbeing, Jigsaw emphasises the importance of connections with those around you. That is why they are asking communities to join together for a Colours Climb this April.

"We think Colours Climb is the perfect way to experience a sense of wellbeing and togetherness that you get when challenging yourself while also raising vital funds to support young people experiencing challenges with their mental health."

"Like anyone experiencing a challenge in life, it is the strength and support we get from others that helps us get through. That is why we are so delighted that Gaelforce Events have come on board as our Colours Climb sponsor. They have been such incredible friends and supporters to

us in Jigsaw for the past 10 years. Their ongoing support and commitment shows how working together we can ensure young people have the support they need to thrive," says Justin

McDermott, Fundraising Manager, Jigsaw.

This partnership marks a decade of collaboration and emphasises the shared commitment of Jigsaw and Gaelforce Events to positively

impact the mental wellbeing of young people. The Gaelforce 10K Kippure charity hike is a fantastic opportunity for participants to actively engage in supporting Jigsaw's crucial mission. Colours

Climb, proudly supported by Gaelforce Events, is a walking or hiking challenge that is taking place throughout April 2024. For more information, visit jigsaw.ie/colours-climb



Picture at the launch at Gaelforce Events HQ in Killary Harbour are (L to R) Justin McDermott, Jigsaw, Shane Young, Gaelforce Events, Ciara Young, Gaelforce Events, and Aine Dunkley.



Tommy Doyle and Eve O'Toole from Glenealy GAA Club, at the St. Patrick's Day parade in Wicklow Town.

TECHNOLOGY RECRUITMENT



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CHILL DARAGUS CHILL MHANTÁIN
KILDARE AND WICKLOW
EDUCATION AND TRAINING BOARD

Tá Bord Oideachais agus Oiliúna Chill Dara agus Chill Mhantáin ag lorg iarratas ó dhaoine leis na cáilíochtaí cuí don phost mar:

POIST MHÚINTEOIREACHTA IARBHUNSCOILE – GACH ÁBHAIR

a d'fhéadfadh teacht chun cinn ón 1 Meán Fómhair 2024 ina 23 Iarbhunscóil ar fud Chontaetha Chill Dara agus Chill Mhantáin.

Gach eolas ar fail ó www.etbvacancies.ie agus ar KWETB gréasáin: <https://kildarewicklow.etb.ie/post-primary-teaching-vacancies>

An dáta deiridh le hiarratais chomhlánaithe ar líne a fháil: 12 meán Iae Dé Máirt 9 Aibreán 2024.

An Dr. Deirdre Nic Aoidh, Príomhfheidhmeannach.

Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board invites applications from suitably qualified persons for:

POST PRIMARY TEACHING POSTS - ALL SUBJECTS

which may arise from 1st September 2024 in its 23 Post Primary Schools across Counties Kildare and Wicklow.

All details are available at www.etbvacancies.ie and on the KWETB website: <https://kildarewicklow.etb.ie/post-primary-teaching-vacancies>

Closing date for receipt of completed online applications: 12 noon on Tuesday 9th April 2024.

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Retailers warned of vape compliance rules

WEEE Ireland is warning Wicklow retailers to be vigilant about the regulatory landscape surrounding disposable and rechargeable vape devices and e-cigarettes, as non-compliance could result in significant fines and legal consequences.

Launching its Vape Retailer Compliance Awareness Campaign, the e-waste and battery recycling scheme said that purchasing vapes from an unregistered supplier could lead to fines ranging from €500 to €2,000 from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). "WEEE Ireland has 299 registered retailers in Wicklow who could be impacted if they unknowingly purchase from an unregistered importer of e-cigarettes or vape devices.

Enforcement campaigns are currently underway across the distribution and retail sector to ensure companies supplying e-cigarettes and vape devices are in compliance with the regulations.

"Disposable and rechargeable vapes, as well as e-cigarette devices and their batteries, fall under the scope of the European WEEE Directive, European Battery Regula-

tions, and Irish WEEE Regulations," said Elizabeth O'Reilly, Head of Environmental Compliance at WEEE Ireland.

"Some importers may not be meeting their legal obligations and acting at an illegal competitive advantage over compliant producers.

"For distributors and retailers, purchasing products from an unregistered supply chain can incur extended producer responsibility under these regulations. "This includes registration with the Producer Register Ltd, reporting monthly sales in Ireland, and financing take-back and recycling solutions for waste vapes and batteries from end-users.

"We encourage distributors and retailers to review new and existing supply chains and request confirmation of EEE and Battery Producer Registration in Ireland as

part of procurement due diligence.

"Supplying unregistered products to other retailers or directly to consumers can lead to breaches of regulations and enforcement action."

To support compliance, WEEE Ireland said retailers should check if their supplier is registered as a Producer on the PRL website (www.producer-register.ie/producers).

Speaking of a retailer's recycling obligations when it comes to vape devices, O'Reilly said it is essential for retailers to understand that so called disposable or single-use, and rechargeable vape devices contain batteries and are categorised as Electronic and Electrical Equipment (EEE) products.

"Like any used electronic item, vapes can and should be recycled at the end of their life cycle. Retailers are obligated to take these back on a one-

for-one, like-for-like basis in-store or on delivery," said O'Reilly.

"WEEE Ireland facilitates the collective take back of this e-waste for free recycling, via our Blue Battery Box System. These boxes are available for delivery and collection to retailers free of charge, to retailers to ensure the easy recycling of these waste devices.

"Authorised waste electrical and battery recycling protects the environment and human health, supports climate action, and ensures the recovery of valuable resources.

"We encourage retailers to participate in registered supply chains for electrical equipment and batteries, supporting responsible recycling to prevent resources from going to landfill, being illegally dumped, exported, or handled by unauthorised operators, and having a significant environmental impact."



Naoise and Saoirse O'Reilly at the St. Patrick's Day parade in Wicklow Town.

'Insurance sector enjoys massive profits while consumers and businesses continue to face high costs'

Sinn Fein TD John Brady has warned that insurance companies continue to pocket savings brought about by recent reforms at the expense of consumers. His comments came as FBD and Aviva Insurance both announced massive increases in their profit margins.

Deputy Brady said: "Last week it was revealed that FBD and Aviva Insurance have recorded massive increases in their profits for 2023. FBD recorded profits of €81 million, an increase of more than 23 percent on the previous year, while Aviva recorded profits of €72 million, a 125 percent increase on the previous year. These profits were accrued at a time when households across Wicklow were forced to shoulder a cost-of-living crisis last year and which they continue to struggle with.

"Despite a series of reforms in the insurance sector, it is clear that the insurance industry is not passing these onto consumers. Businesses continue to struggle with high insurance costs, with 87 percent of businesses having had no reduction or seen their premiums increase in the past two years, according to a recent survey by the Alliance for

Insurance Reform.

"And many motorists continue to face high insurance costs, with insurance prices failing to fall in line with reforms in the sector. The focus and the purpose of any reform in the insurance sector has to be to reduce costs for consumers, not to bolster the profits of the insurance industry.

"Legislation brought forward by Sinn Fein, the Judicial Council (Amendment) Bill, would hold the industry to account and put pressure on insurers to lower prices by requiring them to disclose how they have or have not passed on the savings made by the new personal injuries guidelines to their customers - euro for euro. That some of the biggest players in the insurance market are announcing massive profit gains suggests that consumers continue to be taken for a ride."

Penneys announce Bray summer opening

Irish retailer Penneys has confirmed that its much-anticipated new store in Bray will open in the coming months. The unit has officially been handed over to Penneys and works will now commence on the store fit-out, with doors expected to open to customers this summer. The official opening date will be announced in the coming months.

The new Bray store will be Penneys' first in Co. Wicklow, and its 38th store in Ireland. It will span 19,600 sq. ft of retail space and will be located in the Bray Central Shopping Centre, in the heart of the town, providing a boost to the local economy. Recruitment for the new store will also begin in the coming months.

The new store in Bray is part of Primark's commitment to invest over €250 million in Ireland over a ten-year period, which includes the development, relocation and/or refurbishment of its stores across the country. The investment also includes a €75 million state-of-the-art warehousing and distribution facility in Newbridge, Co. Kildare, which is currently under construction.

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