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# FEATURES



Paul Byrne, Radisson Hotel, Mary Harte, Sen. Jimmy Harte and Harry Tseng, Taiwanese Ambassador.

## Knitting together some good ideas



Edel MacBride, of Knitfield, photographed at her studio and workshop in Convoys.

BY UNA MCCRORY

# Who said Donegal has little or nothing to offer?

BY CATHERINE COOK

Donegal has the potential to be the driving force to help the national economy get back on track through the export market which remains largely untapped, the Taiwanese Ambassador said during a recent visit to Letterkenny.

In an interview with the Donegal News last Friday, Ambassador Mr Harry Tseng said there are numerous possibilities which exist for mutually beneficial links between Donegal and Taiwan.

During his one day visit to the county, Mr Tseng met with education and business leaders to examine how bilateral links could be forged. He maintained that there are very real opportunities for Donegal not only from an education and business point of view but also the enormous tourism potential once the region is marketed properly in Taiwan. He was in Donegal at the invitation of Senator Jimmy Harte who has been working closely with the Taiwanese Embassy since his recent visit to the country in January.

When asked about the links which can be created between Ireland and Taiwan, Mr Tseng stated: "There is great potential. Before I came to Donegal I studied a bit about the most important economic activities in the county. The fishing industry is the most important in Donegal with Killybegs which has almost 25 per cent of the national catch which is very impressive to us."

"If you look at the marine industry

at the moment in Donegal - right now there are no sustainable business links with Asia, it is mostly only within the EU. I have met with Mr Pat Connors from Marine Harvest and he sees there is great potential for him to export salmon to Taiwan or to have some type of technology transfer of salmon farming. So this is all very important in terms of developing joint ventures."

### MANY OPPORTUNITIES

Mr Tseng stressed that the area of agricultural, marine and food exports were areas which remain largely untapped between Ireland and Taiwan and said there are many opportunities for Donegal companies.

"Food is an area in particular where links can be created. Among the bilateral trade between our two countries there is nothing related to food. There are no agricultural or fishery products being sold from Ireland to Taiwan or from Taiwan to Ireland. This is something I think you have a very strong capacity in. Your seafood which is very high quality will be very popular with our Taiwanese consumers. And in Taiwan we have 23 million people and our people consume on average around 40 kilos of seafood per year. That would mean every year we consume close to one million tonnes. This makes Taiwan a very significant market for Donegal seafood. And I very much hope in my capacity I can introduce high quality Irish seafood to our market."

When asked if he felt a rural coun-

ty like Donegal could have a significant input into a country like Taiwan, Mr Tseng said there is potential for a great relationship between the two areas.

"Taiwan is a very industrialised country. There are a lot of different sectors and industry which are very important in Taiwan including ICT and the manufacturing industry. Agriculture takes up less than 10 per cent of our economic growth. Even so, I think it is still very important for us to develop bilateral trade - where you have your strengths you are more than welcome to export to Taiwan and where we have strengths we can do likewise."

The Ambassador also stressed the similarities between Taiwan and Ireland's national strategy of economic development and said the exchange and co-operation in science and technology, as well as in education and tourism, are very important.

"I would very much encourage tourism. Yes, it is very important. It is a clean industry and it doesn't create any kind of pollution. You are very blessed to have many natural beauties in Donegal and that is very enviable to a lot of countries in the world. This is something I want to introduce to the Taiwan. There is not much knowledge about how beautiful Ireland is to our Taiwanese people."

Mr Tseng also spoke of how impressed he was on learning of the strong emphasis on teaching Mandarin Chinese at LYIT and their strategy of creating educational links with the East.

"You have a very strong a very good education system. Letterkenny IT is offering mandarin courses and this is a good area that we can build up some kind of co-operation through exchange of visits of the students. We have some resources in the embassy to offer scholarship for students who are interested in studying mandarin in Taiwan so all these areas can be explored for co-operation."

Above all, however, Mr Tseng said that the proactive approach being taken by education providers such as LYIT and by many business people from Donegal actively engaging with Taiwan and China will put Donegal ahead of other counties in terms of generating income and attracting investment.

"I definitely think Donegal is in a very strong position. I was very impressed that Letterkenny is a Gateway town. This shows the ambition and enthusiasm to open yourself to the greater world outside. We, Taiwan, are more than happy and honoured to be able to work with Donegal. And I think you will be able to be a gateway to a better economy."

He also explained how Taiwan has also been described as the 'gateway' to China for those interested in establishing trade links.

Mr Tseng concluded: "Right now the macro-economy in the country is challenging. We have our own challenges in Taiwan too but there is no reason why Letterkenny or Donegal can't be the driving force for your economy to come back as quick as possible."

If adaptability is then name of the game in business survival, Edel MacBride, is showing how it's done. The Convoys designer is launching her new website heralding a new era in her creative realm which has covered 25 years. With her ear finely tuned to the growing demand of home spun crafts, Edel has created 'Knitfield' - her hands on range of knitting pattern kits and crochet classes.

After delving into the retail world, Edel said she felt "I found myself really worrying more whether soaps would sell and I said to myself, 'whoah, I want to back to my knitting,' and so I did."

She is now focusing on bespoke knitwear such as crocheted wedding and evening dresses and ready-to-wear clothing in high quality yarns. 'Knitfield' was born when she ran a four-week crochet course at her own studio in Convoys and was so pleased with the response that she now wants "it to be a Ballymaloe for knitting," she enthuses. "If we can't do this in Donegal, a place famous for its textiles, where can we do it?" To prove the point Edel in conjunction with Harvey's Point ran a very successful knit and network workshop. She believes knitting havens like this have huge potential for attracting tourists interested in crafts. Edel is currently developing and updating classes to demonstrate her techniques which have grown from years working in the fashion industry. 'Knitfield' lets the beginner or fan make Edel's original designs for themselves.

In the meantime, 'Knitfield' kits created by Edel along with the necessary yarn are now accessible via the new website which goes live this Sunday. The treasure trove includes a velvet yarn snood, a child's cardigan and a ladies Aran reference jacket. They retail from €20 to €100.