



Cooking up a storm in Lahinch

BRIEFS

FROM working as a 14-year-old in a pizza parlor in his home town in Canada, to travelling the world as a chef and owning his own restaurant in Lahinch, that's life's journey so far for Randy Lewis.

"I took off from home in Edmonton on Canada's west coast when I was 17 and wanted to see as many countries as possible. My ambition was to be a chef, that's all I ever wanted," he said.

Randy headed to Australia in 2001, then across the US, Brazil, Ecuador and Mexico. Switching to the other side of the world, he visited India, Thailand and Vietnam, before stopping off in Morocco on his way to Ireland.

"It wasn't just the travel. I worked everywhere I went, in kitchens in small and large hotels and restaurants, learning all the time. It was a tough climb but it was worth it. Now I can say I am a self-trained head chef, as well as owning my own restaurant.

"My introduction to the kitchen was doing the very basics - washing floors and pots and pans, general hygiene and food preparation.

"There were no grades along the way but the practical path to becoming recognised as a chef was far better than I could have ever hoped for in going to a catering college. There's no substitute for being in the kitchen all the time.

"I've cooked on five continents and learned something new in every restaurant and hotel I've ever worked in. I've learned from the top chefs who were heading the teams, learned all about the local culture and food. I've used the local fresh ingredients, cooked it and eaten it myself. I haven't picked it up from a book. That's the experience I have brought home to Randy's in Lahinch. I can replicate the dishes here from fresh ingredients," he said, adding that he supports North Clare producers whenever possible.



Randy Lewis in Lahinch.

Photograph by John Kelly

Like in many a tale, there was a defining moment in Randy's career. He came to the North Clare resort in unusual circumstances. Back in 2005, he decided to visit the west of Ireland to experience surfing.

"I did a search on Google and was directed to Galway City 'for the surf' but quickly realised I was off track. A couple of people

I met on arrival in Galway were amused and pointed me to the bus for Lahinch.

"At that stage it was just a stop, as far as I was concerned but I stayed around. In 2007 I got a job as head chef at Hotel Doolin and was there for a few years before I took off again.

"I returned to Lahinch in 2011 - it was during the recession. I

had a look at the premises on the prom, which had been closed up for years. The place was fairly dilapidated but I saw it had potential for the kind of restaurant I wanted, so I decided to take it on. I adopted the approach 'it has to work for me'; that was the only way to do it. You hear people saying they'll take on a business as a project for a couple of years and

to try to see if it works out. That's no good. You have to be positive, believe it will work.

"I fully committed to making Randy's a success as my first business venture," Randy said. His branding 'A Real Taste of Adventure' is a nod to his love to discover the culture and food of far flung places.

It was quite change for Randy from working for somebody else to having to make all the decisions about how to manage the restaurant, as well as leading the kitchen and front of house staff.

"Nine years on, the restaurant has gone very well. At this stage I employ 27 full-time and part-time staff during the summer months and 16 in the off-season. We open for a couple of weeks over Christ-

mas too," he said.

Randy said he doesn't fall into the stereotype of being a difficult chef to work with.

"I'm not one for getting too hot up in the kitchen, I don't have struggles with anybody here. Delivering what the customer wants is my priority," he said.

Randy attributed much of his success to having Indian chef Jay Singh alongside him for the past seven years. He described him as "the backbone of the kitchen", which allows him to attend to other areas of the business.

From the Punjab region, Jay's career in the hospitality industry is, in many respects, similar to that of Randy's. He started front of house before moving to the kitchen.

"I started work as a waiter and used to help in the kitchen. I liked this a lot, kept doing more and I trained up to become a chef," Jay said. He worked in a number of places in India and Australia before he arrived in Ireland and finally Lahinch. "I love it here," he added.

From an early stage in his career, Randy has embraced social media as a way to showcase his travels and his status as chef who truly loves international cuisine. He has a worldwide following.

"I post tips and recipes on Facebook and give cookery demonstrations on YouTube. I enjoy this, it gives me and my restaurant profile but it also helps Lahinch," he said.

During the winter season, Randy supplements the restaurant's income with tastings and cookery classes aimed at people who have a flair for foreign food.

Randy, who was at the top table in last week's episode of Virgin Media's *The Restaurant*, is also in the running for a regular cookery slot on a popular daytime TV show.

Screen tests have gone well, according to Randy, "with some positive feedback".

Rainbows offer a sign of hope for vulnerable children

A SPECIAL support programme for vulnerable children is to be rolled out by the Ennistymon-based North Clare Family Resource Centre.

The free Rainbows initiative is for first to sixth-class children, who have been affected by separation, divorce or the death of a close family member.

With a likely starting date in early November, children will meet for one hour a week for nine weeks, with other children of a similar age and loss experience and the session will be led by specially-trained facilitators.

The Rainbows programme will start when there are four children registered. Information meetings will be held for parents on Tuesday, October 15 at 7.30pm and Thursday, October 17 at 10am.

Some of the topics covered are feelings, different kinds of families, change and adapting, anger, support and coping skills. It does not provide an individual one-to-one support service and does not provide counselling or a therapeutic level of intervention.

A Circle of Security Parenting (COS-P) programme aimed at parents of children aged up to five years is also starting on Tuesday, October 8 at the centre.

It is based on decades of research about how secure parent-child relationships can be supported and strengthened.

Over the eight-week programme, facilitators work with parents and care-givers to help them to understand their child's emotional world by learning to read emotional needs, support their child's ability to successfully manage emotions, enhance the development of their child's self esteem and honour the innate wisdom and desire for their child to be secure.

Meanwhile, beginning next Wednesday, the family resource centre will host a five-week course on the benefits of baby massage. Parents learn to read their baby's body language and respond to their needs using massage techniques to deal with colic, constipation, poor sleep and other issues.

Midwives who have decades of experience between them deliver the course.

Highly commended

MARY Kelleher of Fergus View, Kinaboy was presented with a highly commended Bed and Breakfast of the Year Award at the Georgina Campbell National Food and Hospitality Awards 2020 in the Intercontinental Hotel, Dublin recently.

She accepted her award from Georgina Campbell and celebrity chef, Richard Corrigan.

One Book One Community

CLARE County Library and Ennistymon Vocational School have joined forces to promote reading for pleasure among students. The school is running a month-long project, One Book One Community, which will launch in Ennistymon library on Friday, October 18 at 11am.

One Book One Community initiatives have been sweeping across Ireland over the last couple of years. They are a celebration of great books, of reading and of community spirit as libraries, schools, families and communities all work together to inspire children to read.

The book selected, R J Palacio's *Wonder* tells the incredibly inspiring story of August Pullman. Born with facial differences that have prevented him from going to a mainstream school, Auggie becomes the most unlikely of heroes when he enters fifth grade in the local school.

A programme of events to complement the book will take place in both Ennistymon Vocational School and in the library. There will also be copies of the book available to borrow from the library.

The launch at the library is a free event and all are welcome. This event is part-funded by Creative Ireland.

Big improvements in Tidy Towns marks

A NOTABLE increase in marks was recorded in the results for North Clare Tidy Towns 2019 entrants.

The village of Ballyvaughan led the way with 332 marks, up from 323 on last year, and claimed a bronze medal in category A, which is for a population of under 200.

The adjudicators observed that, "A new project listed by you here is the revival of the old court house. Also restored is the large two-storey house (Carter's), an important element of your village streetscape.

"Great to hear that you will be hosting a biodiversity workshop as part of the Burren in Bloom event. A seed-bank of wild plants is another excellent initiative. The Ballyvaughan Workhouse book is a most unusual entry in this category but valid nonetheless."

Also in category A, Boston increased its marks from 234 to 251.

The adjudicators outlined, "It was great to read that last year's adjudicators' comments have spurred you towards the very rewarding pursuit of discovering more about local bird life. You also describe your interest in local butterfly and bee species and that you are exploring this in conjunction with the National Biodiversity Data Centre.

"There are some genuinely worthwhile and indeed necessary projects in which Boston could play a part. These include transect surveys of bumblebees and wildflowers. Birdwatch Ireland also offers training for volunteers willing to take part in the countryside bird survey (CBS). We'd recommend that you get in touch with the Burren Beo group and also Seedsavers on advice on what kind of wildflowers you should be planting here.

"Quite rightly, the national school plays an important part in your efforts in this category. You plan to expand your rainwater harvesting capacity by utilising the church as well as the school. You are making folk conscious of cups and the impact of non-reusable cups and you are stamping down on junk mail," the report continued.

Lahinch, participating in the competition for the first time, achieved 245 marks in category B.

The adjudicators observed, "When it comes to significant projects for the year, there are probably people the world over that could tell us that for Lahinch it was the Irish Open.

"You report that already you have ringing endorsements on your work from across your community and from your visitors. Lahinch Tidy Towns was also a partner with the county council in ensuring that all the back and side lanes adjacent the village were re-surfaced and realigned.

"The promenade also received a major facelift over this period. This area has been completely overhauled. The car park, life-guard's hut and playground all looked great. So too did the new toilet block, which was just about spotless. The recent painting scheme has had a massively positive impact on your streetscape.

"A big ticket item is the first mentioned by you here - a traffic management plan for Lahinch. You are also planning to join a foot-

path so that a looped walk will be facilitated. This would be another great achievement for your group and the wider community. Yet another project of great public benefit would be the improvement of public access to Creg Beach."

In category C for a population up to 2,500, Ennistymon showed a considerable improvement on last year, up from 283 marks to 293.

The adjudicators noted, "Wonderfully vernacular. Several of your unused shop-fronts looked very well indeed and that's not common at all. The florist's shop near the bridge is gorgeous. Nearby a derelict premises would look good with a little care and attention.

"At the start of your entry you flagged the Special Area of Conservation designation. This rightly defines your actions in this category to a large extent. We feel your excitement on the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan. All work involving bats must be carried out by licensed experts, as we are sure you are aware.

"You are advised not to use herbicides in any area unless this is absolutely necessary. The river walk was lovely," the report added.

Also in category C, Corofin gained 10 points, up from 295 to 305. The adjudicators stated, "Among your new projects are a slew of new planters. The wooden containers look great. New projects for you in this category include biodiversity training - very important - well done, a gardening workshop and a village bat walk. The adjudicator started the assessment at Inchiquin Lake and it was a good choice.

"The new footpaths are an extremely welcome addition - well done to you and the local authority for this. The work at the grotto was splendidly done; so too the work opposite and the volunteers should be proud of what they have achieved here."

Ruan, in category A, recorded an increase of eight marks, from 316 to 324. The report stated, "You give due credit to those who support your work and are inclusive of youth, all residents and other special interest groups. The adjudicator noted that your local National Parks and Wildlife Service conservation ranger wasn't among those name-checked. Perhaps she/he could be added next year.

"You have numerous projects listed as new, maintained or ongoing. These include important documentation of the graveyard, a new stone wall and painting of a village pump. It was good to read that your community employment staff have been upskilling in plant identification, care and maintenance.

"You have erected bird boxes and a squirrel house, as well as an insect hotel or two. You have also planted native trees and fruit bushes for birds. You maintain a watching brief on The Riasc. You hold a wildlife week each year in the school each springtime. Well done on setting up the rainwater harvester system and for monitoring the water consumption in the community hall. Your composting area was noted, well done. Straw-berries and onions were growing in front of the playschool - super. The national school garden has brilliant examples of reuse."



The Happy Pear, Dave and Steve Flynn, with Ms Gardiner's science class, who won €5,000 and bought a new geodome at Gort Community School.

Photograph by John Kelly

Happy Pear bring smiles to Gort schools

THERE was a great welcome for the Happy Pear when they brought the message of healthy eating to Gaelscoil na bhFilí and Gort Community College last week.

The celebrity chef twins, Dave and Steve Flynn, demonstrated how food can be fun and how the lunchbox can be more appealing for school-goers.

In their school tour mission statement, the Happy Pear talk about the impact healthy eating can have on the lives of young children and teenagers.

"We want to inspire and empower as many young people to make healthy choices to help them grow and develop. We have no agenda other than to inspire them through our story and experience and help empower them to live a healthier, happier, more connected lives. We want the opportunity to talk to as many kids as possible," they say.

Explaining how Gort Community School came to be chosen for a visit,

PRO Caroline Meagher-Baynes said, "Staff and students work very hard to promote a healthy lifestyle and awareness of the climate crisis. Students are genuinely interested and put huge work into health and climate related projects this year."

In 2018/19, the Gort school won Ireland's Fittest School for the second year in-a-row and is a WorldWide Global School.

Transitions year students won the National Young Innovator Awards with an idea for a product Plastic Pennies, which aims to reduce plastic consumption. They also won Ireland's Young Food Entrepreneur GROW-2CEO competition with their spinach soup and their prize money will go towards the school vegetable garden.

Gaelscoil na bhFilí principal, Brid ní Dhochartaigh, said they too were delighted to meet Dave and Steve in their visit to the town.



(Clockwise from above) Luis Joachin and Kyle Christaldo taking part in a breathing exercise during the visit to Gaelscoil na bhFilí. Gaelscoil pupil Amy Roise Ni Cheadlaigh looks on during the visit of the Happy Pear. Students at Gort Community School wear their colours with pride.

