

President's Speech - Chamber Gala Ball & Business Awards - 7th Nov 2015

Fáilte

It's great to see everyone here and in such good form. There is a great sense of optimism in this room. The green shoots of recovery are blossoming; we are in a new phase of growth and opportunity.

Employment is at the heart of our economic, social and community well-being. In the competitive world we live in, we cannot afford to be complacent; we must focus on economic growth, which in turn leads to employment opportunities and improved social and community well-being.

Each of us in this room tonight has a role to play in the economic growth of Galway – to make Galway the best City in the world to work, live and visit.

Meara Cathair na Gaillimh, Frank Fahy; Meara Contae na Gaillimhe Peter Roche, Teachtaí Dála Eamon O'Cuiv agus Derek Nolan, Bainisteoir Cathair agus Contae na Gaillimhe Brendan McGrath agus Kevin Kelly, Neil Pakey, Aerfort na Sionainne, aoichainteoir John Concannon, Uachtaráin na cumainn tráchtála in ear-her Iarthar na hÉireann, Iar uachtaráin Chumann Tráchtála na Gaillimhe agus a dhaoine uaisle

Tá mé thar a bheith sásta bheith anseo libh ar an oíche álainn seo. Thar ceann Chumann Tráchtála na Gaillimhe, ba mhaith liom ar dtús, céad míle fáilte a cur romhaibh go léir.

Ladies and Gentlemen. As President of Galway Chamber you are most welcome to our 2015 Gala Ball & Business Awards.

Firstly I wish to thank our main sponsors Shannon Airport represented tonight by their CEO Neil Pakey, and all the individual award sponsors GTC/Westbic, VHI, AiB, Galway City Council, Bank of Ireland, Port of Galway and Connacht Tribune

It's my great privilege to share the stage this evening with the fifteen finalists and ultimately the five category winners and the overall winner of the Galway Chamber Business Awards 2015.

A key theme of the awards this year is 'Celebrating Innovation and Creativity'... Ag Ciliúradh Nuálaíocht Cruthaitheacht.

This year we received a record number of nominations, and I want to say a buíochas speisialta to every business that entered, to our sponsors and of course to our panel of judges Barry Egan Regional Director EI, Shay Livingstone President of the Galway Branch of the Irish Hotels Federation, John Slattery, Shannon Duty Free Manager, Meadhb Seoighe, Enterprise Development Executive, Udaras na Gaeltachta and the Cathaoirleach of the Judging Panel, Past President of Galway Chamber Carmel Brennan. Given the high quality of all the entrants the judges had a extremely difficult task and in fact deliberated over the entries for two full days –, go raibh míle maith agaibh. Agus ba mhaith liom a rá, comhghairdeas to all the finalists, it's an honour to share this evening with each and every one of you.

And may I say of all entrants - You are The People who demonstrate Vision, Courage and Ambition

to drive both your business and as a consequence this region forward. You are demonstrating to all of us what we can be.

And perhaps unknown to yourselves you are changing conversations - we are no longer talking about what we are but also what we can be.

Conversations that start with “we can” are charged with opportunity and potential

- We can bridge Connacht’s disposable income shortfall of 19%
- We can make Galway the best city to start and grow your business, with the best ecosystem to promote innovation and creativity
- We can make Galway the most desirable location for FDI
- We can create a new inner City Innovation District, which one day, will house 20k people
- We can revitalize our Port so that it becomes a tourist mecca full of international sailing boats & recreational vessels & see 100+ liners dock
- We can rejuvenate our tourist offering by creating a covered food market showcasing our local food producers, and build both a state of the art conference centre & a Regional visual Arts Centre
- Just imagine an Art & Craft village in the Claddagh with Gallwegians making Aran Sweaters & Galway Shawls, Curraghs and Hookers, Bohrans and wooden flutes and of course Poteen & the famous Claddagh rings. We can deliver this.
- We can win the European City of Culture competition

Ladies & Gentlemen – We can achieve all this and much more by replacing complacency and acceptancy with courage and determination.

To achieve we must collaborate and dare to be different and have the courage, drive and ambition to solve.

More than anything else it is my view that People make this City & Region. People, like all our Business Award entrants tonight, who have great ideas and an insatiable appetite for solutions. People with the courage, drive and ambition to solve real world problems. People who are putting Galway on the map as a place where innovation and creativity come together in world-class companies.

What has most impressed me in the past two years in my role as President of Galway Chamber of Commerce is the people who are creating an innovation and creative ecosystem, forging links, making connections and placing Galway on the map – these people in my view are true pioneers.

These are the people persuading Boardrooms right across Ireland, Europe & America that there is a better place to do business – Just look at the transformative work and global reach of the people working in the Research Centres in NUIG, GMIT & The Marine Institute.

These are the people in our local authorities working to shape economic development within very constrained budgets but who see beyond those budgets and have the vision and energy to want to make a change – Just Look at the enormous input into the European City of Culture application, and the achievement of Micro City of Europe for future investment status for Galway.

These are the people on the Chamber of Commerce council & committees – These people are all committed to excellence and all of them 2nd place is never good enough. – Please look at the work they have carried out on the Galway City Innovation District, Port Development application, Economic Development Plan, and the formation of the Atlantic Enterprise Corridor with the other Chambers in the West & North-West – many of them represented here tonight

Galway Chamber's strategy for the future is to plan for 2030 and beyond. With the expected population growth and employment forecast, infrastructural development must be prioritized as part of our planning for City & County.

Our members are telling us they are feeling the cost of congestion. Galway is facing a traffic crisis that is dampening our attractiveness and reputation both domestically and internationally. We can and must solve the congestion problem.

Similarly Galway is facing intensified competition in the tourist sector, and if we want to maintain our position as destination of choice we must explore all possibilities – keep prioritizing, adopting, & investing in our tourist infrastructure – Greenways, Museums, Visual Art Centre, Art & Craft village & covered food market to name but a few – in summary never stop thinking big and always strive to be the very best.

Notwithstanding these challenges, we are leaders on many fronts and we are definitely doing many things well. That is why, for example, we are home to a cluster of world leading companies.

But it is our mix of FDI and indigenous SMEs that is key to our success.

It's our small and medium businesses that give Galway its character and have a key role to play in sustaining and driving place and people centred development.

This room is populated by many such entrepreneurs who have worked creatively and with determination to invest, build and maintain their livelihoods in the Galway Region.

The credit for Galway's character, vibe and reputation must go to you.

The thing is we need to keep investing in the Galway Region, and we can't afford to let Galway fall behind – because if it does the rest of Connacht will fall behind too.

Now we need to build upon existing resources to ensure Galway maintains and excels and in doing so leads the rest of Connacht.

We are at a good starting point.

Galway Chamber is central to these developments and your presence here tonight attests to the importance of community and links. Your views and perspectives are an integral part of our vision for the future.

Together, as people, and as Galway's business community, we can make the "We can's" become a reality.

Before I finish I would like to thank a number of people:

My wife Margaret and our family for all their support – I certainly have been an absentee Husband on occasions and I thank you for your understanding and encouragement,

The Staff in Galway Chamber are really a wonderful team ably led by Maeve Joyce and do a wonderful job for you the members and I would like to thank them for that, To my employers AIB for giving me the time and backing to devote to this role.

Ba mhaith liom buíochas speisialta a ghabháil le mo Deputy President Conor O'Dowd, to the excellent Chamber Council & Chairs all of them individually mentioned on your menu – each and every one of them giving endless hours on a voluntary basis to supporting the work of the chamber. Finally I would like to thank Carmel Brennan, Chair of our Business Support Committee

whose committee, along with Maeve Joyce & Elaine Murphy organised this event. I would also like to say a special word of thanks to our Master of Ceremonies David Hickey CEO Connacht Tribune Group.

To conclude...

Galway is the innovative and creative heart of Ireland. Its welcoming people, its arts and culture and natural beauty inspire all. We each have a role to play in growing our economy, to create employment opportunities and improve social and community well-being. So when we talk about investing in our people, infrastructure, Tourism, Arts & Culture, education and research, it is not some abstract ideal that we should be trying to achieve for its own sake, it is not merely to reach the top of some anonymous league table – but it should be to facilitate and enable the vision and ambition that is driving the people of this Region. We must fight tirelessly against complacency, we must have the courage to think BIG.

Together We Can achieve.

Go raibh maith agat gach duine agus Go n-éirí an bóthar leat .