

Newfoundland Jobs Fair promotes Canadian 'home away from home'



A jobs fair aimed at enticing aspirant workers from Waterford to Newfoundland was recently held at the Granville Hotel, which attracted several hundred jobseekers.

The province, home to one of the largest Waterfordian diasporas in the world, is going through its own economic boom at present and is keen to entice an educated workforce to meet its current employment demands in health, catering and mining.

According to historian Jack Burtchaell: "It's history repeating itself, when you consider all the Irish, particularly from the south east, who emigrated to Newfoundland in the 1800s."

According to Des Whelan of Keyin College, there were over 60 occupations represented and a dozen-plus employers present.

"Waterford was a popular choice for this fair because of our ancestral link to this part of Ireland," he added. "For many Irish, the chance to live and work in Newfoundland offers a real 'home away from home' experience."

Salaries in Canada's most easterly province are enticing, tax rates there are lower while housing costs are less than Ireland's at present.

Thanks to her natural resources such as gas, oil, mining, the area is on an upward curve, while hydro power plants are being built on the island and also in Labrador on the mainland.

While the winter weather is colder than Ireland and quite similar to Boston, summers in Newfoundland are warmer than ours.

The friendliness of the visitors and their sense of Irishness and connection to the region was palpable during the fair, and there's every likelihood that another Jobs Fair could be held here in the future given Newfoundland and Labrador's labour shortage.

According to Canadian Ambassador to Ireland Loyola Hearn: "The Irish labour force has the skills and education and cultural advantage when it comes to adapting to the Newfoundland way of life." The Ambassador himself has ancestral links to Carrick-on-Suir.

We met pub owner Craig Flynn of the Yellow Belly Bar and Micro Brewery and O'Reilly's Bar (you can see the Wexford link!) who was looking for Irish chefs, a quest which proved successful.

"In the old days, there was a Wexford man's corner in the bar, and after a hurling match way back when, the men from Wexford would go to their corner, hence the name of the bar," he said. "And the men from Waterford and Tipperary had their traditional corners where they enjoyed beer and rum!" We understand hurling is making a resurgence in the province at present.

The Chief Executive of the Newfoundland Board of Trade, Nancy Healy, made reference to nurses' rate of pay in her native land, currently standing at \$50,000 for a 40 hour week. A Euro is currently the equivalent of \$1.40, so given lower house prices, it's clear that this is a enticing wage for those entering the nursing profession.

GPs in the province earn between \$150,000 and \$180,000 while specialists can command a salary in excess of \$200,000.

Said Debbie Molloy of Eastern Health: "We already have some Irish and Philippino staff and we're keen to recruit further Irish staff."

To rent a two-bed apartment in St John's, the capital of the province and a twin city of Waterford's, would currently set one back \$900 (€640).

Construction workers earn between \$40 and \$50, not quite as high as the wages on offer in the western province of Alberta, but given its more pleasant summer climate and cultural ties to the south east of Ireland, Newfoundland holds a greater attraction for the Irish.

"I can envisage the Irish population growing again in Newfoundland," said Ambassador Hearn. "We've projected an indigenous labour shortfall in the region of 30,000 workers over the next decade given the level of infrastructural projects that are likely to come on stream. And with that in mind, I'd suspect you could have somewhere between 500 and 1000 Irish working in the province over the next few years."

The establishment of direct flights by WestJet between Dublin and Newfoundland, which will commence next June, running each year until October, is a massive development which followed on the heels of the Jobs Fair.

Newfoundland's appeal is readily evident, and it's clear that Ireland's loss could well prove the province's gain over the next few years.