

Aiming high in Dunhill



Aerial view of Dunhill Ecopark with Enterprise Centre, Education Centre and Integrated Constructed Wetlands.

Dunhill Rural Enterprises Ltd. was established in 2000 as part of the DFBA (Dunhill, Fenor, Boatstrand, Annestown) community network with the aim of developing an entrepreneurial culture and creating jobs.

This has been achieved through the development of Dunhill Ecopark.

Dunhill Rural Enterprises Ltd. is a not-for-profit company with charitable status which consists of a voluntary board including Chairman Willie Moore and Secretary Senan Cooke.

All involved with the impressive facility are justifiably proud of what they have achieved as I discovered during a recent visit to the centre.

“We’re very proud,” said Senan.

“We’ve had difficulties like all small enterprises have had particularly over the last six to seven years. But we have 50 jobs and 28 enterprises so we are very pleased considering the circumstances. We’re always receiving more inquiries and are striving to do better.”

He added: “We need the County Council to take this place and use it as one of the main enterprise centres in the county. If they do that with us we will be very secure.”

Dunhill Rural Enterprises Ltd. is targeting the creation of 10 jobs in 2014.

The Anne Valley Angling Complex is a recent exciting addition to the locality.

This new complex is starting out with three full time jobs and building up to seven over five years.

The target is to attract up to 5,000 anglers per year to Dunhill within five years.

Four artisan food companies located in the Ecopark have won the prestigious McKenna Food Guide Awards for 2014: Tastefully Yours (Audrea Hassett and Norbert Thul) Elda Wild Irish Venison (Jason Conway) Healy's of Waterford (Michael & Elizabeth Healy) and Glorious Sushi (Tetyana Zhemerdzey)

Dunhill Multi-Education Centre, which is also located within the Ecopark, is FETAC and ECDL accredited and offers a wide range of educational and training programmes.

"The centre has given many people confidence to go forward. Many have been provided with the skills and confidence to go on to WIT, Adult Education Centres etc. They started here and moved on to progress their careers and learning development," explained Senan.

The centre's Recreation & Amenity Trail Development Training Programme is the first of its kind in the country.

Senan believes the entire Dunhill facility, which employs many local people, has had a huge positive influence on the surrounding area.

"We think it has had an enormous influence. Not only have we created enterprises in the centre, but there are also a lot of people servicing these enterprises," he said.

"In providing this enterprise centre, we have indicated to young people in the surrounding area that enterprise is a possible career choice. We believe there are a number of enterprises which have been set up outside of here that have been encouraged by the presence of the centre."

He added: "There is a great entrepreneurial spirit surrounding the centre. We're setting an example for the local and wider area."

Three national community jobs conferences were hosted in the centre in 2010, 2011 and 2012.

"When people came from all over the country they were all saying the same things about the difficulties they were experiencing," explained Senan.

"We decided the best option was to get together and learn and encourage and support each other."

Communities Creating Jobs (CCJ) is a 32 county organisation which was co-founded by Dunhill Ecopark.

It involves the development of a national /international network of resources focused on creating ten jobs per community across Ireland, encouraging cross border trade and community collaboration.

Now, Dunhill Rural Enterprise Ltd has developed a pilot project which could have the potential to radically transform employment in rural areas.

If sufficient contacts are prepared to work with the project, Senan believes there is potential to create/accommodate 200 jobs in the ecopark over the next few years.

He believes full employment in the area can be achieved through a variety of low cost voluntary based economic stimuli.

“At the moment, foreign direct investment is heading into Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Galway. It’s never going to come out into the country to the small rural towns and villages unless we take on this initiative,” explained Senan.

“We’ve developed a global investment brief and have shown it to some business people and have received help from them in designing it. We’re working on polishing it at the moment and we’re looking for other locations in the country to come on board with us and to compile their own briefs. If eight of us do these briefs we will be stronger as we will appeal to more Irish people abroad.”

Senan explained that they will use contacts in different locations around the world with a view to attracting investment.

“Even if we only get a few of them to come on board we’ll have broken the system and will have shown that it can be achieved,” he said.

“There is a tremendous amount of support towards Ireland overseas. For example, the GAA has become massively strong around the world because of emigration. All GAA people remain close to their home community. Many of those people have big jobs in different organisations. If they come on board with us it will create enormous links around the world. We believe that if we tap into these contacts it will help us to identify micro foreign direct investments that would locate in Dunhill and Waterford.”

Senan believes that perceptions surrounding foreign direct investment need to change.

“It doesn’t just involve the IDA and multi-national companies operating in the technology, pharmaceutical industries etc. There’s another type of foreign investment which involves small companies. For example, they might establish a presence here so that people can send their products here to finish off before going on to Europe,” he said.

“People will only come if they want to come so we’re putting our best foot forward. We’re selling Dunhill Ecopark as a prime location. Businesses will get all the standard supports that are in place from the government but on top of that they will get the most competitive housing in the country, good schools, the Copper Coast, Dunhill Ecopark etc. We think there’s no place better than Waterford as a county, the south east as a region, and Dunhill as a location.”

He continued: “We’re trying to change the status quo. If people are worried about regional development and getting jobs in the region then they have to do something about it. There is massive potential in Waterford and the South East. We want to empower the small towns and villages. We’re talking about creating two or three jobs, and if that can be done across the country we will create thousands of jobs.”

The plan has been presented to the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation within the past week and was also recently presented to An Taoiseach Enda Kenny’s Chief Economic Adviser.

Canadian Ambassador to Ireland His Excellency Loyola Hearn recently visited the centre and has endorsed the pilot project.

“I congratulate you and your group on the preparation of the Global Investment Brief with the aim of attracting direct, foreign investment to the Dunhill and Waterford areas,” his official endorsement states.

“The work being done by you to attract interest and investment is worthy of praise. This is certainly the way to create a general awareness of the potential of the area. I wish you every success and I offer my full support in any way possible.”

With so much drive and determination, and based on what has already been achieved, the future certainly looks bright for Dunhill.