

President's review of the year 2011

First I would like to thank Declan Murphy V.P. and all other members of the Management Committee and Council. I would also like to acknowledge the work carried out by the Chamber staff, Brenda, & Kim plus all the others who have participated through the CE scheme.

The year was a difficult one with the departure of Bill. In addition all of us in business have experienced another difficult trading year.

The Chamber has addressed many of these difficulties including:

1. VAT differentials with North
2. Competitive disadvantage with North
3. Disruption at Square.

The Chamber has worked well with many organisations including the following:

Louth County Council
Dundalk Town Council
Louth Economic Forum
Louth Development Board
B.I.D.S.

We have worked with a number of charities on a joint funding event including:

Boxing
Dancing - Rape Crisis & Mens Sheds.

We have also had a number of other functions including

Budget Breakfast
Eures meetings.

Initiatives such as B 2 B and our continued work with our sister company DEDCO. Continued.

The Chambers events included a second boxing event in March 2011, two strictly dancing competitions, which we run in conjunction with The Birches/Alzheimer; Netwell and Rape Crisis North East. We also ran the by now standard Golf day, coming up soon again, and budget breakfast.

The Chamber lobbied all TD's and Senators on the possible change in VAT. We have continued to remind them of the impact this has.

PAT McARDLE economic development JOBS

We worked very closely with Newry Chamber of Commerce & Trade, Newry & Mourne District Council and Louth County Council.

Following my suggestion it was decided to ask Pat McArdle to examine the border area with reference to our area. At this stage you all know his conclusions. I would stress that the glass can be ½ full if our politicians seize the opportunity now that we will take over the presidency of the EU in January. Therefore I would repeat my call for (a) an economic zone and (b) imaginative proposals to stimulate activity on both sides of the border.

Recently the Chamber met with Interreg and Newry Chamber. As a result of this meeting a strategy has been outlined which it is hoped will obtain the necessary political goodwill and interest required to deliver the necessary commitment to the area. We are to shortly have a meeting with Louth County Council and Newry & Mourne District Councils.

JOBS

Since the year end, within the last 4 months we have experienced the loss of DIAGO and Vodafone with others such as JJB in the retail sector.

The news of PAYPALL will outweigh these losses but some will experience the very harsh reality of 2012.

The Chamber along with Chamber Ireland calls on all to vote YES on Thursday.

The Chamber has worked with the **Eures**, holding a successful breakfast in 2012 and two successful job fairs in 2011. We are grateful to them for the subsidy we received which covers part of our salary cost.

We also worked with **Interreg** in holding with Newry Chamber very successful cross border exhibitions.

PARTNERS

In 2011 I set out a target that the Chamber would work with as many organisations in Dundalk as practical. I would refer to our increased involvement with DKIT initially through the Forum but also with specific proposals. We have also increased our involvement with Dundalk Tidy Towns and would encourage all members to look critically at their own premises. There are grants available from Dundalk Town Council.

The Chamber has also worked very closely with Louth County Enterprise Board. We ran a very successful event within enterprise week which included a seminar on Cloud computing hosted by Digiweb and another on aspects of entrepreneurship.

We are currently working through DEDCO on another initiative.

DEDCO

This project has shown a strong resurgence. While the company is separate from the Chamber there are some common directors and the administration is carried out, for a fee, by the Chamber.

Francis Murphy has managed to obtain several new tenants and increased the occupancy levels.

Dedco – Dundalk Enterprise Development Company built two office blocks of 10,000 sq. ft. each. One has been sold to Digiweb. There are no significant borrowings.

We have used the building for a number of events including:

B 2 B
Business evenings (Business After Hours)
Training meetings, etc.

The building which is on the Finnibar Estate is available to members and there are units from one room up to rent on a one week to long term.

B 2 B is run twice a month and currently has 20 members. The proposal is that members become familiar with each other and support directly and indirectly with each other.

Business After Hours consists of stand alone events such as the one we are running on Thursday night. Topics have included, security, HR, tax etc..

We also use DEDCO for our Embassy visits. We regularly host commercial staff from embassies. We have assisted in import, export, joint venture, technology transfer. The Hungarian attaché and I discussed water polo, a sport Dundalk once competed in. The Brazilian and Ethiopian attachés were our most recent and both were interested in joint ventures.

Our next visitors are the Canadians.

The facility also allowed training and other events

BUDGET

Once again I would like to thank Ernst & Young for the presentation and Lombard for the sponsorship. This was a well attended day with all curious as to how bad it was going to be in 2012.

Dundalk Tidy Towns

Call for members to sponsor a roundabout €500.

BIDS

We ran a very successful St. Patrick's Day with Jimmy Cumiskey chairing the committee. We worked closely with Andrew Mawhinney of BIDS on this and I believe we showed off the square very well. Jimmy was instrumental in having Tom Savage launch the programme which helped secure RTE coverage of the parade.

Two members of the Management Committee, Harry Traynor and myself are on the BIDS Board. Harry deserves particular credit for last year's night of lights which generated activity from the Long walk through Church Street, Clanbrassil Street, Earl Street and Part Street as well as his own Marshes. This year's night will be bigger and build on this success.

I do regret that some retailers have not joined the Chamber. I strongly believe that BIDS cannot carry out the lobbying function that the Chamber is designed for and so well equipped to deliver.

I welcome the setting up with BIDS of a joint retail committee under Jimmy Cumiskey. This committee has launched SUPER SATURDAYS.

Another joint project is the tourism one, chaired by Sean Farrell. I would like to thank Roy Carroll for his work in this area and his strong commitment to the Forum. The tourism report has his fingerprints and footprints.

A third joint committee is the Town watch which is Harry's child. I would urge all retailers in Dundalk to engage actively in this. The Garda are 100% in favour and has shown a strong commitment to this.

We have worked on various schemes as outlined above and campaigned for a yes vote when it was up for renewal. The vote in December saw over 70% in favour.

FORUM

The Chamber has played a significant part in the Forum, particularly in the development of the indigenous and tourist reports. We have actively supported the plans by the DKIT and the adoption of those plans in the Forum reports.

Members should note that the five reports already published are being reviewed.

The target is to complete the following reports before the year end.

AWARDS NIGHT

This annual Louth Business Awards night again proved extremely popular with a full house in the fairways. There were 500 people representing 50 companies competing in 14 categories. My thanks to the sponsors, judges, those who nominated and the competitors themselves.

This year's event has been launched and nomination forms are available here tonight and on the website.

Tourism Committee

This has worked well and my thanks to Tim Mullins and now Sean Farrell. I wish the Tain festival while not a Chamber event, but Tim's baby all the best.

TOURISM CONFERENCE

Attended by 220 including members of the Forum and leading players in the sector. It was sponsored by Eures

EAST COAST SMART GREEN GROWTH

This was organised with the Forum

WEBSITE & FACEBOOK

The website has been constantly updated. There is advertisement space on it and all suggestions to improve it would be welcomed.

We have launched a face book page Super Saver Saturday in conjunction with BIDS. The idea is to invite retailers who have a genuine offer to set it up here.

Louth Business Support Unit

This was an innovation of Con Murray, Manager Louth County Council and has now been included in the Government's National Plan. I would encourage members to make use of his services if you need to engage with the County Council.

Michael has supported the Chamber with the monthly visits of embassies and a number of our events including the Tourism/Eures Conference in March when we had 250 delegates.

OTHER

I represent the Chamber on a number of County and Town council committees.

Alison Cooney sits on the Tara Education and Oonagh Garry on the Louth Leader Partnership Evaluation Committee. Paul Johnson is on the Louth Sports programme for 2 years, then Drogheda.

My thanks to Peter Kierans and Declan for representing the Chamber on the Development.

Chamber was pleased to see both Louth County Council and Dundalk Town Council picking up awards.

We would again repeat the message to Dundalk Town Council. Thanks for the efforts in reducing rates over the last 3 years by 7%. However, businesses have reduced most other costs by higher amounts, mainly through productivity. More effort is required.

We have obtained accreditation for a number of training and other courses including the regular Budget breakfast. Courses covered included marketing, website, face book.

Certs of Origin

This has become a significant activity

FUTURE EVENTS

Supply Buy network

The gateway to growth with Scotland and Northern Ireland has been established to create a Supply Buy Network. There will be a person recruited for this role for 3 year period.

PayPal

We are currently preparing a new page, initially aimed at PAYPALL but will be available to all and in time become generic This will be an information pack for people coming to the area and will cover: School Restaurants Transport Societies.

Again I would ask all of you to encourage organisations you know to update on to the site.

ARDEE – CARLINGFORD

We are currently exploring with business people from these areas how best to do business from a North Louth prospective.

The areas of tourism, retail and infrastructure are of mutual interest.

Internship

Following a meeting with John Perry Minister for Small Businesses, I proposed a type of internship between the accountancy firms, the DKIT and their final year students. To date 9 firms have indicated their support.

The Department, the Accountancy Institute and John Traithone head of the Credit review Office have all shown an interest and expressed support.

COSTS

Membership fees need to be reviewed and the creation of accounts members.

LOUTH AGE ACTION

In October

WORKLINK

DIAGEO - departure

TOURIST EVENTS - NEXT YEAR

The Gathering.

World fly fishing, junior

National Ploughing

I believe Chamber should work with development of the Carlingford Lough region. I note that Interrgey has given a €1,000,000 towards this.