ICA News

Irish Countrywomen's Association ~ Bantracht na Tuaithe Jan/Feb 2020



Dear Members,

I hope you all had a relaxing break over the Christmas Holidays and you are ready to take on 2020 with renewed energy. I was delighted to see so many of you at the reconvened AGM at the end of November last year, over 300 members were in attendance at the Midlands Park Hotel in Portlaoise. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Anne Payne and all the members in Laois Federation for hosting us and particularly for the goodie bags we received.
The Christmas Party nights were a great success in An Grianán and my thanks to Niamh and all her team for the hard work that went into making those events such a success.

The year has started with some hard work from the Governance Committee who have begun meeting and are prioritising a review of our Constitution. We have a lot of work to do to bring the Constitution into line with the Charities Regulator and the Governance Code. The Board is following a timeline to achieve this aim. You will hear more about this at the AGM. The ICA competitions are now well underway, with the GEMPACK baking competition taking place on Saturday 14th March and the National Contest Weekend taking place from 3rd to 5th April in An Grianán when the competitions for the Patsy Lawlor Cup and Shield for Set Dancing, along with the Eleanora Gibbon Shield for Music, the Baumann Shield for Music and the National Table Quiz final will all take place. Closing dates for entries are on the website. We are delighted to welcome our new sponsor Blackberry Hearing . Blackberry Hearing are sponsoring a Solo Singing challenge called "Singing Voice of ICA". The finalists of this competition will be invited to An Grianán for a fully sponsored weekend. This is a great opportunity for anyone with a good voice so get your entries in!

The National AGM will take place in my home county of Galway on Saturday 23rd May in the Galway Bay Hotel, you will find more information overleaf.

The ICA Annual Report 2019-2020 is being prepared. We would like to include some examples of the work of Guilds and Federations throughout the year. Please see a form enclosed and we aske each Guild to complete and return it to Central Office.

Please submit your Guild leaf for inclusion on the Tree of Unity if not already submitted.

The Gaiety Theatre Dublin and Imagine Communications are sponsoring this mailing. Please see the insert attached with a very good offer for ICA groups to see The Lieutenant of Inishmore by Martin McDonagh and an ICA hotline to call to find out about High Speed Broadband in your area.

Yours in friendship and fellowship,

Josephine Kelly

National President

AGM SATURDAY 23RD MAY 2020 GALWAY BAY HOTEL

Accommodation packages:

Friday 22nd May and/or Saturday 23rd May 2020

Rate of €177 per single room per night Bed & Breakfast

Rate of €92 per person sharing per night Bed & Breakfast

Rate of €211 per single room per night Dinner, Bed & Breakfast

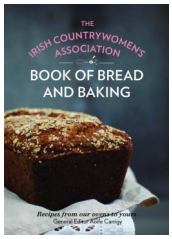
Rate of €126 per person sharing per night Dinner, Bed & Breakfast

Two-night package: (Friday & Saturday) €207 per person sharing for 2 nights Bed & Breakfast and 1 Dinner €360 per single room for 2 nights Bed & Breakfast and 1 Dinner.

Lunch on the day: Soup and Sandwiches with Tea/Coffee @ €13.50

Main Course, dessert with Tea / Coffee @ € 26.95

Please call the Galway Bay Hotel directly on **091 520520** to book your accommodation.



The ICA Book of Bread and Baking is selling very well and is still on sale in Central Office. You can buy your copy for €18 euro or 3 for €50.

Please contact Anna in Central Office on 01 6680002



FEES: Fees are now due. Many thanks to all Treasurers who have already sent them in. Please make sure that you send in your fees to your Federation Treasurer at your earliest possible convenience.

STOP USING WET WIPES!

As well as causing trouble in wastewater systems, wipes can find their way into oceans. Along with other types of plastic pollution, they can cause long-term problems for sea creatures and the marine environment. Wet wipes made up more than 90% of the material causing sewer blockages . They block sewers and septic tanks.

COUPONS 2020

2020 is the 110th Anniversary of the ICA and to mark that, every member will receive a non-transferable €20 coupon redeemable against board and lodging at An Grianán, during this calendar year (2020). The coupon is non-transferable and unlike a voucher, it will expire on 31st December 2020. Each coupon will bear the name of the member for whom it is intended.

This is a reward for your continued support, from the Board.

The competition prize giving at the reconvened AGM was a great opportunity for members to see the fine work of other Guilds. See photos below.







Bridget Pollard Rathkeevin Guild in Tipperary South started knitting little woolly jumpers for babies in Africa 3 years ago. To date she has knitted 700 jumpers. Well Done Bridget!









Officers of Sevenhouse Guild, Kilkenny celebrating the Guild 70th Birthday.

Front: Sevenhouses Guild President Kathleen Mullins and Guild Treasurer Mary Brophy.

Back: Kilkenny Federation President Ann Kelly and Guild Secretary Helen Cunningham.

BLACKBERRY HEARING

Free Hearing Test and Information Talks for ICA Members

Do you find yourself being told time and time again to turn the television down or do you frequently have to tell people to speak louder? If so, then you could be experiencing hearing loss.

Blackberry Hearing is an Irish Company established in 2015 by David Gleeson and John Ryan and based in Kildare. They saw a need to provide a value for money service within the hearing aid sector in Ireland and excellent customer service is at the heart of everything the company stands for. Blackberry Hearing has grown quickly, now has 20 staff and over 45 clinics nationwide, all serviced by highly qualified audiologists. Blackberry Hearing aims to serve its customer to the highest standards and can also offer nursing home visits.

The ICA has teamed up with Blackberry Hearing, as its exclusive partner to offer free hearing test with a qualified audiologist to all ICA members.

All you have to do is call **01-6978470** and quote which Guild you are a member of.

Blackberry Hearing, working with Widex - a world leading hearing aid maker - has provided quality hearing aids to thousands of customers in Ireland. For more information see: www.blackberryhearing.com

n addition to free hearing tests for ICA members, Blackberry Hearing will give informative talks highlighting issues around hearing loss and signs to look out for at your Guild. If you'd like to schedule a visit please email

evelynmckeogh@blackberryhearing.com.

RECONVENED AGM 2019

The draft minutes of the re-convened AGM 2019 can be found on the ICA website.

At the beginning of the afternoon session of the reconvened AGM in November 2019 the National Secretary Eleanor Calnan make the following statement under matters arising:

Matters Arising:

"There are references in the AGM Minutes to adherence to the Constitution and to lack of adherence and references to impression of legality given by the presence of the solicitor. (E.g. Morning: Item 4, 8,16. Afternoon: item 1, 3, 4, 5). The High Court found the EGM and the Motion at the AGM were in breach of the Constitution both procedurally and in substance and invalid in law. A note to that effect will be attached to the AGM Minutes.

Morning Session

Item 9: Early in 2019, invitations to tender were sent to five accountancy companies and three returned tenders. CDM Accountants were selected as accountants. N. Carrick Auditors were selected as auditors.

Item 15: Age of membership: A subcommittee was formed. A Draft policy was sent to Guilds for consideration. The NEB adopted this as a policy followed by its adoption by NAC on 6th July 2019. It is now available on the ICA website.

Item 16: The Petition for dismantling the HSE was not progressed. The petition was not within ICA policy. Petitions cannot be introduced in this manner.

Afternoon session

Item 1: Emergency Motion – second paragraph.

The members who signed the Emergency Resolution confirmed that the National President did not speak with them and that they knew they were signing the Resolution asking that the solicitor be relocated.

Item 3: Second last, last paragraph.

It is now established that there were calls at the EGM for countermotions and that Ms Comerford had approached the Chairperson saying she had a countermotion.

Item 5: second last paragraph

The constitutional requirements for calling an EGM were not met. The calling and conduct of the EGM was in breach of the Constitution.

Item 5: Grant Thornton Report: "On Grant Thornton the National President confirmed a full report on her expenses was being prepared and would come to members" – Grant Thornton have advised that their Standard Terms of Engagement are to restrict the circulation of their reports to those who commissioned them. This is for their own protection. We have requested permission from Grant Thornton to upload their report to the members section of the website. This has, to date, been refused.

Item 5: Chairman Procedures on page 15-16 and "there was some disputation on the Constitutionality of the proposal". There are factual errors in the introduction to the motion. There was not strong support expressed at the EGM. The meeting on 21st April 2018 was not a Board meeting. The proposal arose in breach of the Constitution and what was proposed was in breach of the Constitution.

Statement by National President on behalf of National Executive Board January 2020

Dear Members,

This is an important time in the ICA as we begin our 110th Anniversary Year. It provides us with the opportunity to renew and reinvigorate our great Association.

As your President, it falls to me, to set the record straight about a number of things which have caused difficulties in ICA recently. Those of you who were at the reconvened AGM on Saturday 23rd November 2019, are aware that the NEB took opportunities to begin to address matters. We are now writing to all Guilds in similar terms.

Adjournment of the AGM on 26th May 2019

On my own behalf and on behalf of the NEB, I apologise to each and every member who made the effort to attend the AGM which was adjourned in May 2019. We also apologise to the families and friends of our members who were affected by the adjournment.

While the Adjournment of the AGM last May was done on advice, in hindsight, we accept that the proposed Standing Orders were unconstitutional and would have impeded the correct running of the meeting. Upon reflection, we should have done things differently and I am sorry that we did not. We made mistakes. We were too reliant on taking advice without questioning it and without fully considering what was in the best interest of ICA. We take full responsibility for our mistakes. At the reconvened AGM in November we reverted to the 2018 Standing Orders.

When I adjourned the AGM in May, I made a Statement on behalf of the NEB. I now know that much of the Statement that I made was wrong. I and the NEB take responsibility for that. The Statement wrongly blamed the adjournment on correspondence that we received from one Guild. The NEB now know and accept that was not the truth. Ballymun Guild did not do any wrong. We thank the Guild for alerting us that the Standing Orders were unconstitutional and for their other correspondence and input which we know and accept was in good faith and in the best interests of ICA. We apologise to the members of Ballymun Guild and to their President Patricia Madden.

At the reconvened AGM on 23rd November 2019, we formally withdrew the Statement made in adjourning the AGM on 26th May 2019 and the Statement subsequently circulated to Guilds .

NEB Briefing Documents and Communications 2018 - 2019

In **August 2018**, the NEB issued three Briefing Documents to Guilds about the High Court case. The documents wrongly blamed those involved. There was no admission of responsibility by the NEB for the failure to listen to members who alerted to the many breaches of the Constitution and of the law that actually led to the High Court case. On behalf of the NEB, and the ICA, we say sorry to all of you who were blamed and hurt and were alienated as a result. We thank you for your work for ICA. We say sorry to your families, your guilds and your friends and we thank them for supporting you.

At the reconvened AGM, we formally withdrew the NEB Briefing Documents of 11th, 14th and 15th August 2018.

In **February 2019**, in answer to questions from Guilds about the High Court case, the NEB sent a document to all Federations and Guilds. We now know this document did not give a true, fair or accurate account about the High Court case and that it, in fact, misinformed members. At the reconvened AGM in November, we formally withdrew the document circulated in February 2019.

We apologise for wrong done to members, hurt caused and division created in ICA by incorrect and misleading communications and by a lack of acknowledgment that the ICA made mistakes. We apologise to all members of ICA for the misinformation that was spoken and circulated.

EGM, AGM, High Court Case

The High Court ruled that the Extraordinary General Meeting in April 2018 was unconstitutional in its calling and chairing and in the business transacted. The NEB acknowledges that the EGM and what happened at it was wrong. We apologise to all members of the ICA for what occurred at the EGM. We apologise to the NEB members 2015-2018 whose integrity was undermined and we thank them for their work for ICA. We apologise particularly to the Election Candidate Officers of our Association, for the unjustified attacks on their honesty and integrity. We apologise for what they and their Guilds, their families and friends suffered. We thank them for remaining faithful to our Association which let them down badly. A further statement about the EGM was made at the reconvened AGM on 23rd November and a copy is attached with this communication.

We acknowledge the efforts Patricia Madden and others made to address what was going wrong at the EGM. Patricia also, after the EGM, wrote to ICA setting out clear advices on the Constitution and the law which, unfortunately, were ignored by ICA but the High Court found to be the correct law. The High Court ruled that the motion put to the 2018 AGM was unconstitutional and null and void.

We thank all the members involved in the High Court case and mediation for their work for our Association. They did not do wrong and they acted in the best interest of ICA. We thank other ICA members and friends and family who supported those who were involved in the efforts to put to right what was happening in ICA which for many was at great personal, financial and emotional cost.

Looking forward

At the reconvened AGM and again in this Statement we expressed our apology and deepest regrets to all members for what happened in ICA and for how all our members in general and some members in particular were treated over the past two years. We ask that people accept our apologies.

At the reconvened AGM we held a very meaningful "*Tree of Unity*" reconciliation ceremony as a symbol of our roots and life and growth and of our reaching forward together in unity. We hope that our Tree of Unity will be completed very soon with all Guilds represented.

We ask each of you to help in the renewal of our Association. We hope that you will all support us in our journey forward in genuine fellowship and friendship.

We would like to assure all ICA members that the NEB are committed to doing our best for ICA and for you the members. We are committed to doing everything we can to ensure that we act in compliance with the ICA Constitution, Charity Law and Regulations and Company Law and Revenue requirements. The Finance Committee will be reviewing all monies expended on legal and other fees and will explore any options for recoupment of monies paid out, and will report back to the NEB on this matter.

The NEB has established a Governance Review Committee which is examining the ICA structure and Constitution and will review the breaches of the Constitution and make recommendations for the future. The Committee is working to compile a NEB Governance Manual with explicit policies outlining the powers, responsibilities and limits of authority of the National President and other Officers and of all NEB members. The Governance Manual will enable all Board members to work collectively, as a Board of equals, acting on behalf of our members in the best interests of ICA.

Mr. Niall Keane has been appointed as Interim Chief Executive to help our work towards compliance and to progress the ICA Strategic Plan, adopted in 2018. I, personally and on behalf of the NEB, thank Niall for his support and his work towards setting things to right in ICA since he joined us in June 2019.

Josephine Helly National President

Statement regarding the Extraordinary General Meeting of ICA of 14th April 2018

An Extraordinary General Meeting of the Association was called for the 14th April 2018, by way of a letter, dated the 28th March 2018, sent to Guilds by the then National President.

The ICA Constitution sets out the requirements for calling an EGM; appointing a Chairperson; suspending Standing Orders and introducing and addressing an emergency resolution. These Constitutional requirements were not met.

The High Court stated that the EGM and the Motion at the AGM were in breach of the Constitution both procedurally and in substance and invalid in law.

The DRAFT Minutes of the EGM of the 14th April 2018, as circulated to Guilds, do not reflect what occurred at the EGM and were incorrect in material ways. They are now formally withdrawn. A copy of those DRAFT Minutes of the EGM will be retained on file in Central Office clearly marked NOT CORRECT and FORMALLY WITHDRAWN.

A recording of the EGM is on file in Central Office. A transcript of the recording of the EGM will be retained on file in Central Office as a record of the EGM.

A number of proposed amendments to the DRAFT Minutes of the EGM were verified by the recording and these amendments were incorporated in an 'Amended DRAFT Minutes of the EGM' which will be also retained on file in Central Office

Words spoken at the EGM and words read to the EGM and recorded in the DRAFT Minutes of the EGM and Appendices are now accepted as having wrongly and unfairly undermined and cast doubt on the then National Executive Board and on the honesty and integrity of the Officers who were candidates in the ICA National Elections.

The NEB, on behalf of the ICA, apologises for what occurred at the EGM and accepts and acknowledges that the then NEB and the Officers who were candidates in the election acted with honesty and integrity.

In the interests of ICA and its members, no further DRAFT Minutes of the EGM will be circulated. The records as noted above will be retained in ICA Central Office with this statement.

National Executive Board 2019