

DAMIEN'S
DIARY

Billionaires, bankers and blatant begrudgers

When I asked Dr Pearse Lyons, founder of Alltech and Ireland's sixth richest person, if he had any big ambition left, he said that he wanted to be number one. Not Ireland's richest man, but rather making Alltech the world's number one business in its field. That said, achieving this would probably make him Ireland's richest man in the process too.

Here is a man who left Ireland in the early 1980s to set up his own business. He had a few thousand pounds to get him up and running and, almost 30 years later, Alltech

employs over 2,000 people in 128 countries. A classic case of the boy doing well.

It begs the question: had he stayed in Ireland and attempted to build the Alltech brand, would he now be looking at a company worth several hundred million euros? I would bet against it, based on my observations of a man who pushes himself to the front to the point that he now has a reserve whiskey named after him – an honour he bestowed upon himself. It's the sort of brazen self-promotion cheered on in America but which is far from encouraged here.

This is evident in the cur-

rent downturn whereby it's not unusual to hear the local village gossip whispering things like: "who did he think he was anyway?" and "good enough for him" in reference to neighbours' children who are facing bankruptcy and losing businesses built up in recent years. We seem to begrudge success or even attempts at it. In the US, the attitude is "go for it" or "good on you for trying".

Back in Ireland when a firm goes into receivership or a hotel closes, the hurlers on the ditch have all the answers about how the hotelier was greedy or how the auctioneer creamed everyone else and

is now paying some sort of penance. A fault will always be found. But sympathy? You must be kidding.

Of course there was recklessness, greed, mismanagement, bad politics and fraud which combined to destroy our sovereignty. However, it is wrong to place everybody who borrowed cheap money to set up a business or expand a business in the same boat as the speculators, bankers, politicians and regulators who took unrealistic and blatant risks.

We need people willing to take a risk to create employment and subsequent taxes to keep the country's engine

oiled. That risk extends to the point that they are entitled to nothing from the State if their business goes south. But for some strange reason, there is a sense of schadenfreude when banks roll in to take over businesses, despite the obvious consequences for every citizen when a business ceases to operate.

Unfortunately when it comes to building a business and creating employment, there are victims who for one reason or another fail in the ascent to the pinnacle of their ambition. Why then should we snigger behind our hands at them? We need to grow up and cheer on swash-

bucking thinkers like Pearse Lyons who wears his success on his sleeve and who shows the sort of self assurance which the Americans love but Irish people seem to loathe – and more is the pity. **CL**



Damien O'Reilly

Catch *Countrywide* with Damien O'Reilly, RTÉ Radio 1, on Saturday mornings at 8.10am.

BA BA BLACK (AND AMBER) SHEEP

It's a case of ba ba black and amber sheep as Kilkenny plays host to the All-Ireland and international sheep shearing and wool handling championships this weekend, 4-5 June. Upwards of 2,000 sheep are set to be shorn by Irish and international competitors at the two-day competition at Cillín Hill, while the festival line-up will also include sheepdog trials, craft and food exhibits, a fun fair, 24-hour charity sheep shear and a festival dance with The Conquerors on Sunday night. And with the Cat Laughs comedy festival also in town, where else would you want to be this bank holiday weekend? See www.sheepshearing2011.ie for more



SUNFLOWER DAYS

"Ensuring a good death should not depend on the state of our economy." A sobering thought, these are the words of Kevin O'Dwyer, chairman of the Hospice group, who is calling on the public to support volunteers selling sunflower pins and sunflower seeds on Sunflower Days, 10 and 11 June. With no statutory funding available for capital projects, fundraising is a major source of income for hospices and voluntary hospice groups, and all of the funds raised locally, stay locally. There is an urgent need for volunteers to sell on the days, and anyone who has a few hours to spare is asked to please contact their local hospice. For more information, visit www.sunflowerdays.ie



LOVELY LEITRIM IN THE PHOENIX PARK

Visitors to Bloom in the Phoenix Park this weekend might drop by the delightful Phoenix Café, located at the Ashtown visitor centre close to the festival site. Run by Leitrim farmer's daughter Helen Cunningham for the last 13 years, the Bridgestone award-winning café is the perfect place to put your feet up after pursuing the plants, with a selection of soups, salads and hot specials – many organically sourced – as well as naughty-but-nice cakes, served in a unique setting, with a courtyard for sunny days. For further information, call 01-677-0090.



DITCH & SWITCH

Husqvarna Ireland has launched a new Facebook campaign called Ditch & Switch with celebrity gardener Dermot O'Neill. Log onto the Husqvarna Ireland page on Facebook, upload a picture of your old piece of garden equipment, get all your friends to 'Like' your picture and you could be in with a chance to win one of the many Husqvarna garden prizes. For further information on all Husqvarna products, log on to www.husqvarna.ie



STRESS-BUSTING KIT

With the Leaving and Junior Cert fast approaching, Jennifer Matushcka, a farmer's wife from Moone in Co Kildare, has the perfect stress-busting answer: the Exam Survival Kit. This clever idea contains handy stress-busters like Healing Herbs Five Flower Rescue Remedy which soothes when panic threatens, and bubble gum that increases concentration. Cleverly, the set comes in a transparent case which doubles as the see-through packaging demanded for your stationary in exams. The kit can be ordered from www.examsurvivalkit.com, and arrives at the student's door gift-wrapped. The kit is currently retailing at a special price of €22.99.



TRIATHY RETURNS

Billed as Ireland's fastest triathlon, TriAthy returns to Athy in Co Kildare for its fifth year over the June bank holiday weekend. Over 2,500 athletes are expected to participate in the event, which includes a swim in the River Barrow. To coincide with the triathlon, Athy Town Promoters are organising a family day on Saturday, 4 June from 11am onwards with fun activities for all the family in the town centre. Details from the Athy Heritage Centre Museum (059-8633075) or online at www.triathy.com



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