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**Northern  
Ireland** Year of Food  
& Drink 2016

# Year of Food & Drink Dessert Course

September – December 2016

**#EnjoyNI16**



**We  
Catch**

**We  
Cook**

**We  
Breed**

**We  
Grow**

**We  
Craft**

**We  
Enjoy**

## Dessert course of Year of Food and Drink

From rural bakers to global multi-nationals, councils, colleges, politicians and producers, the NI Year of Food and Drink (YoF&D) has been widely embraced, fulfilling all expectations whilst filling our plates. However, as any diner worth their salt knows, there is always room for dessert, served up here in the third of three magazines acknowledging the range of stakeholder engagement.

Following on from our Starter Course magazine covering January to April and the Main Course edition of May to August, this Dessert Course publication adds the icing on the cake, profiling the gamut of activity from September to December. And whilst raising a farewell toast to the YoF&D, we look ahead to the plans for building on its legacy and the sterling work of all those involved. Proposals already in place include two new academies, one from the private and one from the public sector, and a schools initiative run in conjunction with Tourism NI and CCEA. Careers events and community showcases have already highlighted the importance of hospitality and tourism and the economic benefits they bring to all and that activity looks set to continue.

The collaboration and partnerships apparent in all of those projects have been the cornerstone of the year's success, a fact acknowledged by one of the many food tourism entrepreneurs who launched in 2016. With a YoF&D objective of creating 10 new food and drink experiences, Tracey Jeffery's County Down food tour became one of 17, just one of the many targets smashed over the 12 months. These included the aim of generating £10 million worth of positive PR during the year, met four times over by the end of November with a figure of £41 million and more set to come. A five per cent increase in visitor satisfaction levels with local food and drink was also greatly surpassed as shown by a Visitor Attitude Survey carried out at the end of the year. The record-breaking achievements of local companies in the Great Taste Awards also demonstrated the strides the industry has made with a total of 303 gold stars secured in 2016.

All these successes fit in, of course, to the overall vision of boosting Northern Ireland's destination reputation, growing our ability to attract visitors and generate spend through increasing visitor

satisfaction. By positioning our food and drink experiences at the heart of the tourism experience and growing demand for export sales, the YoF&D has not only put the place on a plate but given us a taster of what can continue to be achieved.

Visit [www.tourismni.com](http://www.tourismni.com)

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Industry Development publication  
PDF version available online at [tourismni.com](http://tourismni.com)

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Published: February 2017

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Sept

# Breaking bread in the Black Quarter

BlackQuarterBreads on Facebook and on Twitter @BlackQuarterB



Breaking bread with like-minded people committed to traditional, natural processes was providing one Mid-Ulster 'micro-baker' with both business opportunities and motivation back in September's Bread and Baking month.



Thirty two-year-old Kevin O'Kane is the man behind Black Quarter Breads, a genuine cottage industry in the depths of rural Derry. An IT technician by profession, Kevin's long held interest in food took a more serious turn two years ago when he started baking sourdough. After experimenting with more varieties which he began giving out to friends, he decided to take it a step further after some encouragement from his wife.

"I wasn't really trying to push it but my wife thought the reaction was so positive that I could make more out of it so I thought I'd give it a try. I contacted a few local cafes to see if there was an interest out there, one in particular was very supportive so the business really started from there."

That café was the Auction Room in Maghera who not only began stocking his breads but also allowed him to set up a stand from where he could sell his products. Further research took him to the Real Bread Ireland network, a collection of similar-minded individuals, who had come together to promote 'real bread' and educate both bakers and consumers.

"The Auction Room was really helpful, they share the same idea and ethos which is of quality, local products, wholly natural and fresh. With the Real Bread Ireland network it's encouraging to see how others are also committed especially when you're getting up at the crack of dawn and thinking to yourself 'why am I doing this?'," he laughs.

"There's nothing artificial in my bread, it's just flour, water, salt and fermentation. We're also lucky enough to have a spring well at the house so the ingredients and processes are entirely natural."

The growing demand for artisan products – and particularly artisan bread – is entirely health driven, believes Kevin, citing the horsemeat scandal as a major factor as well as quality and taste.



"People have begun asking 'where is our food actually coming from?'," he says. "If you look at the ingredients on the packaging of a loaf of bread, half the stuff you can't pronounce and the other half you wouldn't know what it is even if you could pronounce it. Most bakeries could fire out a loaf in an hour, with my method it's 12 hours from start to finish, the slow, natural way it was always done prior to the industry taking it over."

That tradition and heritage is also apparent in the name of the fledgling business which, given its proximity to Heaney Country and his focus on place and names has a certain, although unintended, resonance.

"The area we live in here is called Ballymulderg but my father and my uncles would always have referred to it as the Black Quarter," explained Kevin. "I looked up some old maps from the 1800s and that's what the area was labelled there so I thought it was an important link, from the tradition of the area to the traditions used in the baking."

"The new Heaney Centre will bring a lot more people round this country and, if we offer them a wider experience with our local produce and places to eat, that can only be a good thing. There is a growing interest in artisan food and its link to tourism and I'm willing to work with anyone to further that progression."

At the minute it's social media that is driving Kevin's sales as well as providing the all-important marketing and communication channels. Currently also working full time on top of his Thursday to Saturday baking business the dream is to run his own bakery producing artisan produce. "It's been a slow but sure build-up from starting out on Facebook where people place their orders then come to the

house to pick them up. The parish café in Magherafelt is also stocking the sourdough and I'm now doing baguettes, cobs and wheaten and most recently a focaccia with herbs. I've started to do the odd festival where the Celtic designs I'd come up with for some of the breads have also given me a bit of stand out and something to get a conversation going.

"I'd love to have my own bakery where the breads could be baked and then eaten on site, it's just getting to that stage and the plunge you need to take."





## Krazi Baker's commitment to tradition gives rise to business success

krazibaker.co.uk, Facebook and Twitter @KraziBaker



Mark Douglas has seen many changes in his chosen profession over the past 34 years having earned his crust as a baker since the age of 16.



Amongst those changes was a move towards pre-mixing and away from long-held skills which frustrated the artisan baker schooled in the traditions of the industry. So, bolstered by the belief that we should all be 'the change we want to see in the world' Mark became the 'Krazi Baker' armed with a DIY attitude and zeal for his profession.

That zeal saw the Lisburn man initially set up stall at a local market with little else but a reclaimed griddle and his passion for traditional baking. However, finding his baked onsite products literally selling like hot cakes, Mark gradually expanded as he explained to tourismni.com in Bread and Baking month.

"I never expected the reaction that I got," he says, "when you're doing it all your life, you're maybe just too close to it but after starting off in Conway Mill in September 2013, I moved to a weekly car boot sale on the Crumlin Road. It was supposed to be a 'finding out' process but I couldn't keep up with demand,

they were buying them as soon as I could make them so I knew I'd have to expand."

The three-foot griddle donated by an old workmate from a former home bakery in Sandy Row was soon joined by a four-foot hot plate and a self-built extension to the market stall but still his soda bread, potato bread, wheaten breads and treacles were flying off the griddle as fast as he could make them.

"There's no additives, no preservatives, no pre-mixes and because they're made onsite the 'theatre' of baking appeals to people, they enjoy the process and the interaction.

"However, at the end of the day it's the taste that's the key and the difference people find from what they're getting in the supermarkets."

Those supermarkets, like many home bakeries, gradually moved away from the old ways, says Mark, where products were made from scratch and, more often than not, in the back of the shop. The loss of that skill in the home as well as in the baking industry was another motivating factor for the 'Krazi Baker'.

"The pre-mixing is part of that wider issue where we're all living different lives, where it's all about speed and convenience and people's health has suffered for it. With pre-packed and pre-prepared meals, we're not only losing out on health but also on simple kitchen skills like basic cooking and baking. I find it very sad that people have lost that simple function."

This provided another spur for Mark as his 'street' work continued to expand with appearances at a range of events culminating in a stall at a local market. However, after the closure of the market in November last year, Mark seized the opportunity to address his concern.



"I built a small unit at home and Tweeted out that I was starting baking classes as I wanted to try and bring baking skills back into the home."

That development had followed his gradual move into full-time street baking as he explains: "In 2013 I had joined Food NI who pointed me in the direction of certain shows and by 2014 I had a fairly full calendar. I was doing that on top of my full-time job in a bakery, which was about 50 hours a week and I'd almost sickened myself with it. FolkTown Market came up out of the blue and I got a weekly Thursday stall so when I got that regular spot I took the chance and went full-time in April 2015. I've since moved to Newtownards and am in Conway Square every Saturday, you really need a stable spot where customers can come back."

The unique nostalgia associated with bread making has been another factor in Mark's success with countless stories of 'grannies with griddles' and childhood memories of fresh baked sodas, hot off the griddle and melted butter running down tiny hands.

"These are essentially our national breads," says Mark, "and they're a uniquely Irish thing. I can't tell you how many times people tell me their own baking memories. My own mother baked for eight of us at home, three times a week. She's now 78 and she still bakes three times a week."

With his proud mum claiming credit for teaching him everything he knows, Mark has reaped the benefits of her generations of experience.

"At Christmas she'd have made a soda with cinnamon and sultanas soaked in Bushmills whiskey – as long as my da hadn't drunk the whiskey," he laughs. "She'd reminded me about it and said I should try it so I did and it's selling out at the market every week."

With Mark's particular area of expertise aligned with September's Bread and Baking month his overall ethos ties into the Year of Food and Drink's (YoFaD) core messages: local, artisan, heritage and quality. As such he has played his own part in YoFaD events, namely during Breakfast Month at Connolly Station where he introduced Dublin commuters to the joys of his potato bread and at Tourism Ireland's launch for the Year at the Good Housekeeping Institute in London.

His products have also won wider acclaim and he now boasts four Great Taste Awards for his shortbread made using Abernethy butter, a potato and apple bread, treacle farl and the aforementioned cinnamon soda.

"The exposure from Year of Food and Drink has been great but what I do is very local and is dependent on local trade. After the year is over I'll continue doing what I'm doing and when you're on the frontline that's about taste and quality all the time."



Mark Douglas, aka the Krazi Baker, at the Tourism NI stand in Connolly Station during January's Breakfast Month



## Passion for 'real bread' is grist to the mill

www.ravenhillhouse.com, Ravenhill House on Facebook @rogergordonnich on Twitter



A passion for 'real bread' and home baking and a background in hotel and catering have been grist to the mill for Olive Nicholson and her guests for the best part of two decades.



Owner of the four star rated Ravenhill House in South Belfast along with her husband Roger, Olive has been serving her own wheaten bread since she started the business in 1997. Just three years after the ceasefire and with a tourism industry in its infancy, accommodation was then in short supply along the Ormeau Road. However, the couple's dedication to quality, authenticity and 'local' was ingrained in those early days and remains core to their food offering today.

"I had worked in Philadelphia, London and Dublin and wanted to set up my own business when we returned to Belfast after Roger had been offered a job" explains Olive. "I bought the house to convert to a guest house and Roger later joined me in running the business. Here we are, 19 years later and there have been a lot of changes. However, we've

always focussed on the quality of the food we offer to guests, and not just with our bread but also with our home made muesli, granola and fruit compotes."

As winners of the Irish Breakfast Awards, run by Georgina Campbell Guides, it is no surprise that breakfast at the Victorian guest house is a focal point for the business. Believing that 'home made' is best the pair use the finest locally grown produce and even mill their own flour for their freshly made breads. That range includes wheaten bread, banana breads, toasting breads and, more recently, ryes and sourdough.

"Our trusty grain mill, which we've had in daily use for 15 years, grinds whole wheat and rye grain from Dunany organic farm in County Louth. It's obviously fresher flour when you mill it yourself and from a nutritional point of view, it's much healthier. Here, we can be milling it, baking it and eating it, all on the same day and you'd be hard pressed to find fresher bread anywhere."

The homemade ethos extends to their expansive breakfast menu and its granola, muesli, spiced fruit compotes, stewed fruit, marmalade, lemon curd and apple jelly. The varied a la carte menu also features the best from local food suppliers with eggs from Mullan's Organic Farm, Ardglass kippers from St George's Market and top quality dry cured bacon and sausage from Kettle Foods in Fermanagh. Thompson's Punjana loose leaf breakfast tea and Baillies's coffee finish off the local bounty.



"It very much is 'place on a plate' and our guests really appreciate it," said Olive. "Visitors want to try local foods and especially guests from North America. For them food culture and heritage is an important part of their visit and it's definitely a selling point for us and a way to differentiate ourselves."

Providing differentiation is not just good business sense but springs from a shared passion for 'real bread' and for baking. That dedication was highlighted recently when the couple travelled to Scotland to take part in a 'Bread Matters' class with fellow aficionados. There the emphasis is on using locally grown wheat and getting farmers to use varying and heritage wheat grains. And while bread making might seem like a labour intensive activity, for Olive and Roger the effort more than pays off.

"It's just something we like doing, we're really interested in it. It also makes running our business more interesting when you've something you believe in at the heart of it. There's also the health and quality aspect to making real bread. We don't buy any bread at all now, after making your own bread there is no going back."



Roger and Olive Nicholson of Ravenhill House







# Ministers highlight food and drink quality at Tesco Taste Festival



The official opening of the eighth Tesco Taste Northern Ireland Festival in September heard that Northern Ireland's reputation as a food-producing region was going from strength to strength.



Economy Minister Simon Hamilton (middle) at the Tesco Taste Northern Ireland Festival with (l-r) Brendan Guidera, Store Director, Tesco NI; and Sean Largey, Commercial Manager, Tesco NI

Economy Minister Simon Hamilton and Junior Minister Alastair Ross officially opened the festival before an audience which included local producers and food industry buyers from across the UK.

Minister for the Economy Simon Hamilton said: "Events such as this provide a great opportunity for suppliers and producers to get together, sample new products, forge loyalty and fuel innovation. At the same time, they serve to showcase the outstanding quality and diverse nature of our food and drink produce and take on an added significance in what is Northern Ireland's Year of Food & Drink. The sector is

Northern Ireland's single biggest industry and the fact that we're now exporting to over 70 countries is testament to the increased global awareness that our produce now enjoys.

"Northern Ireland boasts the highest quality raw ingredients, state of the art processing facilities and the world class food security record which major retailers demand. Our relationships with customers are based on a trust that we can not only respond to market changes, but anticipate and use them to our advantage. For their part, customers play a crucial role in building brand awareness and helping our businesses to grow in the wider UK market. "Northern Ireland food has truly global potential and Invest NI will continue to promote the pure, natural quality of our produce in key markets outside Northern Ireland."

Junior Minister Alastair Ross said: "Now in its eighth year the Taste NI event is a firm fixture and offers visitors a culinary tour of Northern Ireland. This free event brings together 60 local food and drink suppliers and showcases the excellence of Northern Ireland produce. From the small artisan companies to the well-known local brands, quality has been the watchword which has led to a global appreciation of our foodstuffs.

**"Our food processing industry has a proven track record for growth, even in this challenging current economic climate, and it is vital that we continue to promote all that Northern Ireland has to offer."**

Taste Northern Ireland is a campaign Tesco has been running for seven years. The initiative comprises many activities including in-store signage and sampling events, advertising, and sponsorship, all geared to promoting food and drinks grown, sourced and produced in Northern Ireland. Celebrations culminated in the Custom House Square Festival which ran from 16 to 18 September.

## Irwin's treats 40 Tesco shoppers to 'Bread and Breakfast' break



Stefan Szymura, Account Manager, Irwin's Bakery and Sandra Weir, Regional Buying Manager, Tesco NI

September's Bread and Baking theme was given a massive lift at the start of the month with a unique collaboration between some of the Year of Food and Drink's main players.

Irwin's Bakery partnered with Tesco to offer 40 'Bread & Breakfast' breaks with the one-night breaks for two being provided by Tourism NI. The Tesco customer exclusive ran until October 2 and was open to customers in all its NI stores.

**Account Manager with Irwin's Bakery, Stefan Szymura said: "As a key player in Northern Ireland's agri-food industry and supporter of the Northern Ireland Year of Food and Drink, we thought 'Bread & Baking Month' would be the perfect time to capitalise on our strong working relationship with Tesco and offer shoppers the chance to explore NI through this competition.**

**"Our 'Bread and Breakfast' giveaway was supported through point of sale across 36 Tesco stores in NI, targeted PR and digital media."**

The promotional activity gave further exposure to the Year of Food and Drink and followed on from the successful 'Best NI Picnic' competition run by Irwin's and Tourism NI in the summer.

## First Fermanagh Restaurant Week goes down a treat



Lough Erne Resort's Pop Up Restaurant in the new Visitor Information Centre at Enniskillen Castle

Fermanagh diners were wowed in September by a fantastic range of culinary events as part of the county's first ever Restaurant Week. The initiative, organised by Fermanagh Lakeland Tourism in conjunction with the tourism trade, saw a ten-day celebration of local food and drink inspired by the 2016 Northern Ireland Year of Food and Drink.

The 'Week' started off on Friday 16th September with local restaurants running specials to give discerning diners something they wouldn't normally see on their menus. Other highlights of the programme included three signature events which took place at the newly refurbished Enniskillen Castle - where the venue became a restaurant for three nights only.

The Lough Erne Resort, under the supervision of their executive head chef Noel McMeel, produced a 'Fall in Love with Lough Erne' menu which was served on the new first floor level of the visitor centre with panoramic views of the grounds of the Castle.

Theresa McVeigh from Fermanagh Lakeland Tourism said, "We were overwhelmed by the support Restaurant Week received from our trade who were delighted to be part of the event with over 50 events taking place over the ten days."

Fermanagh Lakeland Tourism conducted an extensive marketing campaign around the event which included the production of 65,000 programmes distributed throughout Fermanagh and Omagh, banners and roadside signs, local newspaper advertising, PR activity, extensive social media campaigns, attendance at various promotions throughout the year and production of promotional collateral.



# Place, tradition and family the preserve of Anahorish artisan

www.anahorish.com



The Seamus Heaney HomePlace, which opened in Bellaghy in September, highlights many of the themes that inspired the poet's work: place, tradition, rural life and family.

Three miles away is the townland of Anahorish, which neighbours Mossbawn where Heaney was born and grew up, and which fans will recognise from a number of his poems. There too tradition, the countryside and kin are ingrained in the people and subsequently the produce.

With Anahorish Preserves Malachy Gribbin is continuing a food production line began by his forefathers over six generations ago. Owners of the slaughterhouse mentioned in Heaney's Anahorish 1944, Malachy's artisan preserve business is based at the slaughterhouse named in the work, his uncles the men providing the narrative voice. In Stepping Stones Heaney remarked, "Later on, in the early fifties, when we began to keep pork pigs, you'd hear them grunting too, although the earliest pig calls I recollect were screams coming from the Gribbin slaughterhouse in Anahorish, a quarter of a mile away."

"It was something my father made us very aware of as we were growing up," said Malachy, "the Heaney connection with the local area and the importance of it."

**"My grandfather was a pig dealer and breeder and he ran the slaughterhouse. He killed pigs in Anahorish and exported them to London and Liverpool and then my father following that. When the farm was divided up my dad took the pig side of the business and that's how I've ended up with the business based here."**



Malachy Gribbin of Anahorish Preserves outside the slaughterhouse named in Heaney's poem

How he ended up producing preserves rather than breeding pigs, however, was due to his own passion for cooking from an early age. A young Malachy and his cousin would pinch bacon and sausages from his mother's fridge for barbecuing on the tracks of a disused railway line. Later on he moved to baking and making his own ice cream until he "just took a notion" for making chutney at Christmas 10 years ago.

**"I started making it as gifts and then mentioned it to Robert Ditty of Ditty's Home Bakery, Castledawson who gave me a five-minute slot at a showcase event he was hosting. I made wee samples of the chutney and as a result I was approached by JC Stewart supermarket who'd been focussing on selling local produce and had been selling their own-label jams. It was just timing that the lady producing those was about to retire so I then took over the jams as well as making and supplying them with my own products."**

Like many artisan producers Malachy also holds a full time job and is a programme manager for a business support programme run by a local council. His 20 years' experience supporting and mentoring small businesses literally bore fruit for his fledging business and developing his product lines.

"Sometimes it's a whole lot easier to give someone else advice," laughed Malachy, "but I secured an innovation voucher from Invest NI to develop a low sugar jam. That was nigh on impossible but it allowed me to work with Loughry College in further developing products from what I would call 'rough' recipes. They cooked and taste tested them and - I wouldn't recommend it to anybody - but we tasted 45 chutneys in one afternoon."



Out of that collaboration came around 25 chutneys and preserves, from Malachy's original Christmas chutney to different fruit varieties. Amongst the current product range is a prize-winning Winter Chutney which won the Bronze award at the 2015 Blas na hÉireann awards, as well as beetroot and apple relish, chilli jam, cranberry and red onion relish and rhubarb jam and chutney made from rhubarb grown at the farm. With his background in business development Malachy appreciates the importance of a bespoke service and will also provide personalised products on customer request.

"We will fill product into whatever size jar is required and we can personalise labels for birthdays, Christmas or even wedding favours. Put simply, if we are asked we will do our best to meet our customers' needs."

As well as supplying JC Stewart food hall in Magherafelt and Ditty's Home Bakery in Castledawson, Malachy has his online sales presence and a number of independents and local farm shops, a distribution chain which he hopes to expand. He has further plans for development and is looking at a number of investment options but, as with so many artisan producers, knows it's a big step to take.

**"The question for me at the minute is realistically, how do you scale up? You could bury £100,000 in a kitchen in the blink of an eye. It'll be interesting to see, what with the new Heaney centre how things like food trails and that would spin out. It is great to think that people will be able to visit the Heaney HomePlace in Bellaghy and leave with a jar of Anahorish Preserves made in the area where he grew up and played as a young boy".**





# Sowing the seeds for Year of Food and Drink legacy



An initiative aimed at encouraging school children to grow, cook and eat local produce was launched at Parliament Buildings in October by a leading producer and food campaigner.

The 'Growing for the Future' schools' initiative, created by Jilly Dougan, was officially launched on Monday, 3 October at a Stormont event hosted by Jo-Anne Dobson MLA. Supported by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) and Tourism NI, the guide will form part of the legacy of 2016's Year of Food and Drink and will give young people the opportunity to learn about growing whilst developing learning embedded in the Northern Ireland curriculum.

The launch was attended by a plethora of food lovers, industry professionals, MLAs from across the political spectrum and deputy First Minister Mr Martin McGuinness.

Jilly, who is also known for creating productive herb gardens for hotels and restaurants, said her 'how to' guide to vegetable and fruit gardening came about as a response to a disparity between schools in their gardening capabilities.

"I have been in and out of lots of schools and some have really fantastic food growing initiatives. However, some have nothing in place or they have a garden which is overgrown and unloved with really keen teachers who don't know where to start. I saw a need for a simple guide, which was specific to our climate and the school year. The guide isn't just about growing though, it's about local food and how to cook simple food from scratch."



Jo-Anne Dobson MLA, who hosted the event said, "Growing for the Future is inspiring a generation of young people to think smarter when it comes to what they eat. This is a fantastic initiative, both online and offline, to engage our young people, increasing their knowledge and leading to healthier and happier lives. It gives me the greatest of pleasure to host Jilly and this initiative at Stormont and to support her in seeking the continued backing of Government to promote a new, fresh and locally grown concept."

Growing food in schools has many benefits, children learn where their food comes from and how it is produced. It encourages healthy and seasonal eating, is great exercise, encourages team work and can double up as an outdoor classroom. These benefits have led to the guide being incorporated into a much larger project in collaboration with Tourism NI and CCEA as a legacy of Year of Food and Drink 2016.

Director of Education at CCEA, Mr Richard Hanna said, "CCEA is pleased to support this legacy piece of the Year of Food and Drink 2016 and to partner with Tourism NI on this project which will see us develop an online education resource to promote healthy eating and growing.

"It will give young people the opportunity to not only learn how to grow produce but to support and further develop important learning areas already embedded in the Northern Ireland curriculum such as literacy, numeracy, science, entrepreneurship, employability, cooking, hygiene and the environment."



Carolyn Boyd of Tourism NI, Jo-Anne Dobson MLA, Jilly Dougan and Richard Hanna of CCEA at the launch

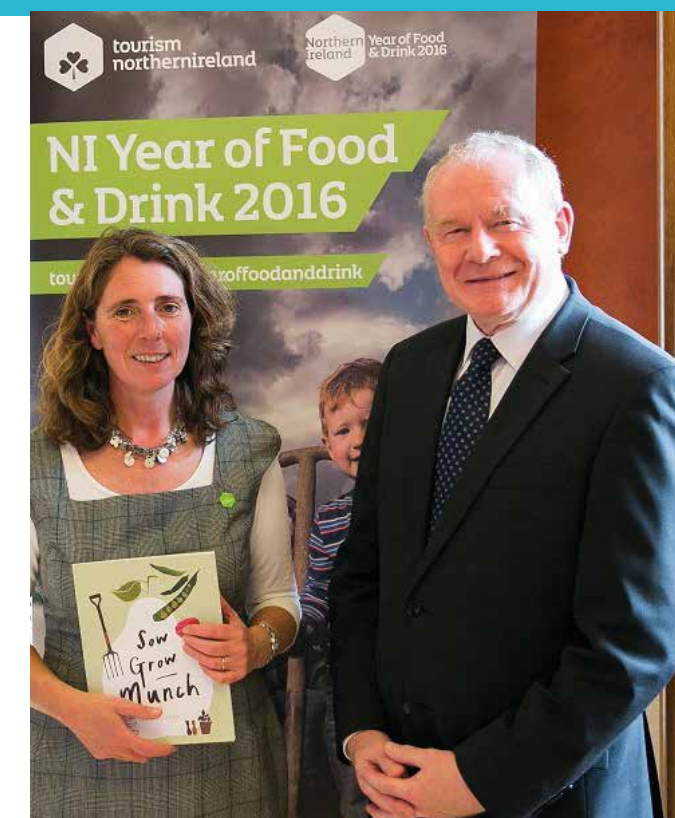
Carolyn Boyd of Tourism NI said, "Tourism Northern Ireland are proud to partner with both Jilly and CCEA to ensure that the Year of Food and Drink 2016 has a legacy beyond the year and far into the future."

Growing for the Future is free to download on both the Eco-Schools NI and Education for Sustainable Development websites.



Jilly added, "It was important to me that the book was free to schools and educators as I know resources are always limited. I am completely indebted to my sponsors who believed in the project enough to pay for the design and printing. It shows great collaboration within our local food supply chain that the sponsors were Irwin's Bakery, Forest Feast, Food NI, NI Stakeholder Potato Promotion Group, Yellow Door Deli, Ulster Farmers Union and Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council's Food Heartland – a combination of private companies and public sector bodies and organisations.

"I am so pleased that CCEA and Tourism NI have taken up the reins and have such exciting plans for the concept, and how it will be used to augment and enhance the curriculum."



Jilly Dougan with Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness





## Richhill pickings at Apple Harvest Fayre

Armagh's famous orchards became the focus for October's Harvest month culminating in the Richhill Apple Harvest Fayre which took place during the month.

Thousands of people flocked to the area on Saturday, 29 October to celebrate the world famous Bramley apple and the best food and drink the region has to offer. A host of food and drink producers gathered in Richhill's historic village square highlighting the varied bounties of the region's 'Food Heartland'.



Mayor Gareth Keating with fruit grower Hamilton Loney

Lord Mayor of Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, Garath Keating, said of the event: "We live and work in a very special place. Our reputation as being the Orchard County has certainly put our special place on the food map.

"The Richhill Apple Harvest Fayre is a fayre which is now in its third year and its success continues to build year on year. Here in Armagh we are very proud of our heritage so this is a fantastic day out in the rural Food Heartlands where we

can all celebrate our world famous Bramley apple and celebrate all of our other local producers. I am delighted to support the Richhill Apple Harvest Fayre."



Mayor Garath Keating praised the Richhill Apple Harvest Fayre

Joining Mayor Keating in his orchards recently and at the official launch of the fayre in Richhill's Cafe Casa was fruit grower Hamilton Loney who said there had been a big crop this year.

"The harvest is a very busy time for fruit growers like myself. There's so much work to do and this year there has been a fantastic crop. The Richhill Apple Harvest Fayre celebrates the work we do. It celebrates our connection with our land. It's an opportunity for families to come out and support the rural community's efforts. We enjoyed welcoming families for the third year in a row. The Richhill Apple Harvest Fayre is fast becoming a date in everyone's diary."

The fayre gave visitors a chance to sample the delicious produce on sale, enjoy cookery demonstrations, sample locally produced ciders and juices, take in the live entertainment on offer and avail of a host of activities for children.

The cookery demonstrations ran throughout the day with some of Armagh's finest showcasing their talents and showing the amazing dishes which can be prepared using finest local ingredients especially the Armagh apples.

The fayre was organised by Richhill Buildings Preservation Trust and a dedicated team of volunteers. It received financial support from Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and local private businesses who also sponsored the event.

## First NI BBC Good Food Show hailed a huge success

The first ever BBC Good Food Show Northern Ireland, which took place as part of the Year of Food and Drink 2016 in October, was hailed as a huge success with over 12,500 visitors through the doors during the three-day foodie event.



Tourism NI chairman Terence Brannigan, chef Paul Hollywood and Tourism NI director of Business Support and Events Aine Kearney

Over 100 exhibitors and some of the biggest names in cooking attended the Tourism NI supported event at the Belfast Waterfront between Friday 14th October and Sunday 16th October.

Following the winning food and entertainment format of already established BBC Good Food Shows in Scotland, London, Harrogate and Birmingham, visitors to the Belfast show enjoyed live cookery demonstrations from TV favourites Paul Hollywood, The Hairy Bikers, James Martin and local chefs Paul Rankin and Paula McIntyre.

Other highlights included a Tasting Theatre, sponsored by Discover Northern Ireland and led by Paula McIntyre, where visitors could sample and learn about local producers. The Food NI Pavilion, also gave visitors the opportunity to taste

and buy from local producers first-hand. The Interview Stage, sponsored by Moy Park, and book signings sponsored by Eason, provided visitors with the opportunity to find out more from their cooking heroes and have their favourite cook books signed by the authors.

Aine Kearney, Tourism Northern Ireland Director of Business Support and Events said the success of the event signified Northern Ireland's growing reputation as an exceptional foodie destination.

"Events of this type further enhance our tourism offering and encourage visitors to enjoy the Northern Ireland food and drink experience, taking in our Michelin starred restaurants, award winning food tours and Gold Star Great Taste Award winning products," she said. "There were over 40 international buyers attending the event over the course of the weekend with many of our main suppliers keen to expand and grow into new markets. Tourism NI is a proud supporter of the BBC Good Food Show Northern Ireland and look forward to welcoming this popular event back to our shores next year."

River Street Events, who organise the Good Food Shows, said they were thrilled with its success.

"We were overwhelmed by the response to our launch of the BBC Good Food Show Northern Ireland in Belfast," said River Street Events Managing Director, Laura Biggs.

"The Waterfront provided the most spectacular backdrop for our live cookery demonstrations from top celebrity chefs, shopping from the very best regional producers and fantastic culinary inspiration. We are looking forward to an even bigger and better Show next year."





## Food and drink element boosts tourism and economy

Around 3,000 people gathered on the banks of the River Blackwater at the start of October to take part in the Caledon Village Georgian Festival, a community initiative which highlighted the importance of food and drink to grassroots tourism and economies.

The event, which demonstrated how a small rural community can make a big impact economically and socially, was officially opened by The Earl of Caledon KCVO and attended by the chairman of Tourism NI, Terence Brannigan.

Along with marquees for arts, crafts and children's activities, crowds enjoyed the bounties of a walled food and drink courtyard. Producers in attendance included Mac Ivors Cider Co, Digby's Bar & Restaurant, Bellingham Cheese, Papa's Cordials, Burren Balsamic, The National Trust, The Fluffy Meringue, Long Lane Pantry, vegetable farmer Henry Halligan and Glaslough Chocolate Company.

Speaking at the event, Lord Caledon, said: "This year is the Year of Food and Drink in Northern Ireland and the courtyard behind this building is a demonstration of what can be achieved by food and drink producers.

**"I would like to thank Terence Brannigan, the chairman of Tourism NI, for coming to our village to see how small communities can make a big impact."**

Lord Caledon added: "The purpose of the festival is to help the village celebrate its natural and built heritage and also celebrate the people living and working locally, who contribute to the economy of the village and surrounding areas.



From left, Richard Stubber of Burren Balsamics, Terence Brannigan, chairman of Tourism NI, the Earl of Caledon KCVO, William Beattie of the Caledon Regeneration Partnership with organiser Eleanor McGillie from MGMPR LTD

"Steeped in historical context the village now has a growing population. Here, and, in the surrounding areas, there is a wealth of small and large rural businesses ranging from equestrian, agriculture, arts and crafts, media and PR, food and drink, experiential tourism led businesses, retail and more.

**"The festival is about bringing all of these people together and using their skills to celebrate our village and celebrate everyone's contribution to the community."**

Speaking about the success of the festival, Sandra Mortimer from the Caledon Regeneration Partnership said: "From a tourism perspective, we were delighted to welcome so many new people to the village. From an economic perspective, we are delighted with feedback from local traders in the village, and from food and drink producers, who mostly sold out of product during the festival."

## Oats company reaps what it has sown over last 175 years

A market leading company which celebrated its 175th anniversary in the Year of Food and Drink marked its amazing milestone with an appropriately timed event at the start of Harvest month.

White's Oats, which was founded at Tandragee in County Armagh in 1841, is the largest oat mill in Ireland and part of Fane Valley Co-Op group. The company, which is Northern Ireland's only porridge producer, hosted a special anniversary event at the Grand Opera House, Belfast on Wednesday 5th October.



In attendance at the celebrations were Michelle McIlveen MLA, Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Fane Valley directors, oat growers, suppliers, customers and past employees. Guests were entertained by local playwright, Dan Gordon, who gave a unique take on the company's history, and local food ambassador Jenny Bristow who cooked up an array of oat-based recipes inspired by White's history.

In 1841 the company's founder Thomas Henry White set out his vision to modernise oat milling using ground-breaking techniques for the time, and to promote oats as a healthy and convenient food. Over the course of the last 175 years, White's has made its founder's vision a reality and has been at the forefront of developing many new product categories evolving into the market leading company that it is today. In addition to its renowned Speedicook Porridge Oats, White's

has pioneered instant oats, granola and toasted oats as well as championing the development of the organic sector within the industry. The company markets its products throughout Ireland and Great Britain and has a growing international presence.

Speaking of the special celebrations Trevor Lockhart, CEO, Fane Valley said it was important to acknowledge the remarkable endeavours exercised by White's over its 175 years. He said that over the years the company had continually invested in its supply chain, production facilities, people and consumer led product innovation, investments which had cumulatively reinforced the commitment to, and passion for, the company's future.

Whites employs over 50 staff at its site in Tandragee and has worked hard at forging alliances with local oat farmers who grow to exacting standards. The company has also garnered a host of awards including a Chartered Institute of Marketing Ireland award for Impact within the Food and Drink Industry 2015; Ulster Grocer Marketing Award for best new product launch 2015; UK Great Taste Gold Awards; Blas na hEireann Silver and Bronze Awards and the Irish Quality Food and Drink Awards Winner in the cereal category.



Trevor Lockhart of Fane Valley, actor Dan Gordon, Jenny Bristow and James Mathers, White's Oats



# Spotlight on industry activity at packed Stormont showcase



A Tourism NI showcase event hosted by the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for the Economy in Stormont heard of the 'huge successes' of the Year of Food and Drink during November's 'Legacy and Learn to' month.

The event, which took place in the Long Gallery on Tuesday, 29 November, was addressed by Tourism NI chief executive John McGrillen and the Economy Committee's vice chair Steve Aiken.

Designed to highlight the successes of the 12-month-long initiative, the event showcased award-winning local produce from hand-made butters to craft brew beers. The sampling and legacy showcase also provided a valuable networking opportunity for a range of stakeholders including producers, hospitality providers, tour operators and trainers.

Leading producer and food campaigner Jilly Dougan was just one of the 200 or so guests in attendance. Jilly, who in October launched the 'Growing for The Future' initiative, said the event had demonstrated how the key objectives of the year had been achieved, not least the enhancement of skills and capabilities which her guide is promoting. The guide, which is supported by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) and Tourism NI, will form part of the legacy of the Year of Food and Drink by giving young people the opportunity to learn about growing whilst developing learning embedded in the Northern Ireland curriculum.

"Enhancing the experience and quality of our local food offering is of benefit to us all and encouraging school children to grow, cook and eat local produce is a crucial

part of this," said Jilly. "This event has shown just how the Year of Food and Drink has promoted those aims and the importance of the partnerships and collaborations that have already grown from it."



Caroline Wilson of Taste and Tour with Linda Dillon MLA

Caroline Wilson of Taste and Tour said one of the Year of Food and Drink's key objectives 'to tell our food and drink stories, enhance our reputation and celebrate our successes' had aligned closely with her business objectives. Caroline's food tours focus exclusively on premium local food and drink and the stories behind the people and the produce.

**"The event really brought home the wealth of high quality food and drink being produced here in Northern Ireland and it was brilliant to see it being served up in Parliament Buildings," she said. "I was delighted to be given the opportunity to speak to the Ministers and guests about the produce they were enjoying. The Year of Food and Drink gave me the confidence to take the leap and launch my new business and I wouldn't have a tour as successful as it is without the incredible produce that we have here in Northern Ireland."**

Tourism NI Industry development manager Carolyn Boyd said the event managed to pull together all the Year of Food and Drink 2016 key messages which have been highlighted throughout the year and firmly set the scene for some lasting legacy projects for the future.

## Economy Committee commends 'NI Year of Food and Drink' success



Deputy Chairperson of the Economy Committee, Steve Aiken, Tourism NI chief executive, John McGrillen and economy minister, Simon Hamilton

The Assembly Committee for the Economy supported November's legacy event at Parliament Buildings marking the success of the Year of Food and Drink initiative.

Deputy Chairperson of the Economy Committee, Mr Steve Aiken MLA said the Committee had been 'delighted' to host the event and to commend the tourism and hospitality sectors on its endeavours.

"Tourism NI have worked tirelessly with local producers and the hospitality sector to ensure that the quality of our local food is worthy of competing on a global scale," said Mr Aiken. "The tourism and hospitality sectors are thriving and have been given a fantastic boost with the success of the Year of Food and Drink campaign. The year-long celebration of our food and drink has taught many of us more about our culinary history and the growing, breeding, crafting and cooking elements.

"There is no doubt this year has been a huge success – it has raised our tourism product profile and created a strong legacy going forward. Food tourism already contributes significantly to the economy here and we must work hard to build on that success and create a sustainable legacy for the local tourism and hospitality sectors."

The Deputy Chairperson went on to thank the many producers and growers who attended the event adding, "The success of the Year of Food and Drink is testament to all those involved in the industry, from breeders to chefs, and we should be extremely proud of what we can and have achieved."

Tourism NI Chief Executive, John McGrillen, commented: "The Northern Ireland Year of Food and Drink has been embraced across the tourism and hospitality industry, the food and agri-food sectors, internationally and across social media, and as a consequence of this cross-sector collaboration the initiative has been a great success to date.

**"Tourism in Northern Ireland generated £764 million last year, a third of which was spent on food and drink. The Northern Ireland Year of Food and Drink has been a prime opportunity to showcase to the world, ourselves and our visitors the unique food offering we have and this will only serve to increase Northern Ireland's reputation in food and drink both at home and with our visitors. 2016 leaves us with an excellent foundation upon which to build further tourism success."**





## Cider maker presses ahead with latest business expansion

AN award winning Irish cider maker, who featured in the Year of Food and Drink Starter Course magazine, announced a £250,000 investment in his blossoming business during Legacy and Learn to... month. Profiled as part of Brewing and Distilling month in April, Greg MacNeice of Mac Ivors Cider, capped a successful year with his latest expansion.

The fifth generation apple grower, who also launched a new product during the Year of Food and Drink, invested in a state-of-the-art German apple press and the planting of a new 10-acre heritage orchard. The investment in the new Flottweg cider press was essential for the development of the business, said the ambitious businessman who has also targeted markets for export.

Mr MacNeice, whose family already manage 100 acres of apple orchards opposite the National Trust's Ardara House, said the new press crushed 60 tonnes in its first week, nearly half a million apples.

**"There is a new generation of cider drinkers in Ireland and the market is booming," he said. "Times have changed so much and people are connecting with the land and it tastes good. There is a huge appreciation in the market for our heritage, provenance and craft."**

"This year alone, all of our ciders have received awards. We got a silver in Blas na hÉireann for our Traditional Dry and our new Plum and Ginger. We have been voted best artisan producer in Armagh, joint best in Ulster and joint best in



Greg MacNeice (left) of Mac Ivors Cider oversees work in his expanding orchards

Ireland. We have also picked up a Great Taste Award for our Traditional Dry and Medium ciders and we got a silver medal at the Irish Quality Food and Drink Awards.

"The market is exploding and people in our cities, towns and villages, the length and breadth of Ireland, are enjoying our great tasting ciders. We are a key producer in the Irish market and our ciders will also soon be distributed in continental Europe and we continue to look towards the American market."

Of the latest quarter of a million pounds investment, Greg said that for production capacity to keep up with sales growth, it was imperative they continue to reinvest.

"For Mac Ivor's Cider Co that means making significant investment in state-of-the-art machinery which complements the planting of a further 10 acres of orchard to satisfy a growing demand for heritage cider varieties. The Flottweg belt press is a great addition to our process. Beautifully perfumed apples are being turned into great tasting cider and the team is delighted to have this facility on site in Co Armagh."

**Twitter @MacIvorsCider and on Facebook at Mac Ivors Cider Co**

## Region's food and drink the star in 'foodie films' and WorldHost training

A WorldHost Training programme for tourism and hospitality staff from the Causeway Coast and Glens area in November coincided with the launch of a series of short films celebrating the region's food producers.

The 'foodie films', which also showcased some of the area's incredible scenery, were premiered in the Still Room Cinema at the Bushmills Inn on Tuesday, 29 November following the WorldHost Food Ambassador Training organised by Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council in association with Tourism NI.

The region's fabulous reputation for its food and drink was celebrated at the training which was part of an ongoing programme of events to mark the NI Year of Food and Drink. Course trainer and local food ambassador Wendy Gallagher said: "I am a proud Food Ambassador for the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council area, which drove me to develop my food and drink tour business, Causeway Coast Foodie Tours. I look forward to showcasing the world-class food and drink produce available within the region."

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council's Tourism Development Officer Zoe Bratton said: "We were delighted with the response to this WorldHost Food Ambassador Training course. It is a true example of how those involved with the tourism and hospitality sector are passionate about learning and selling the stories of the fabulous food and drink produce we have in our destination and right across Northern Ireland."

Of the foodie films developed by Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council's Tourism Team - also as part of the Year of Food and Drink - the borough's Mayor Maura Hickey said,



Presenter Sarah Travers with local food producers and representatives from Causeway Coast and Glens and Tourism NI

**"It is fantastic to capture on camera the passion and skills of those involved in our local food industry. It's the range of locally created produce available in our Borough which I found to be most remarkable. We are certainly leading the way in this regard. It is a very important sector of our economy and one which we want to showcase during the Year of Food and Drink."**

The three-minute films are presented by Sarah Travers, and aim to give some insight into the processes behind local food production. The films have been shared across various social media platforms and have also been used to showcase the Causeway Coast and Glens as a tourism destination to Tourism NI, Food NI and Tourism Ireland.

**All films are available on the 'Causeway Coast and Glens' YouTube channel.**





## Craft beer festival raises a glass to legacy of Year

A craft beer and distilling festival which took place in Derry at the end of November raised a glass to the legacy of the Northern Ireland Year of Food and Drink.

The second annual Sippy Fest got underway in the city's historic Guildhall on Friday, 25 November with organiser



Connor Doherty hailing the two-day celebration as yet another 'LegenDerry' event for Ireland's second top Foodie Destination and an important part of the Year of Food and Drink's legacy.

Derry City and Strabane District Council funded craft beer production demos at the festival which, through the Tier 2 programme for NI Year of Food and Drink 2016, aligned with November's 'Legacy and Learn to ...' theme and featured around 15 local brewers paired with artisan food producers.

Connor Doherty, said: "The event brought together 15 brewers from across the north of Ireland, with a large cohort of those based here in the North West who are playing a key role in driving the city's food tourism offer. As well as promoting the great work that companies in the city are doing, Sippy Fest also introduced customers to other regional suppliers and is a fitting showcase for NI Year of Food and Drink."

A large range of craft beers was available to sample as well as locally produced cider, whiskey, gin and vodka produced by companies including the city's award-winning Walled City

Brewery, Northbound Brewery and Quiet Man Whiskey as well as leading craft brewers from across the region.

Connor Doherty continued: "We wanted people to learn from the brewers directly at the event, most of whom have studied their craft for many years. The legacy of the event is to help change people's perceptions of beer as a mass produced product and to showcase the tastes and flavours that are available to customers across Northern Ireland, produced from the best locally sourced ingredients, with brewers on hand to guide their choices and palates."

Mary Blake, Tourism Development Manager with Derry City and Strabane District Council, said they were delighted to support Sippy of Culture which also helped to deliver the first ever Big Cheese and Beer Expo organised by Council in April 2016 which attracted 15,000 visitors to Guildhall Square as part of NI Year of Food and Drink's 'Brewing and Distilling' month.



Adam Lightbody (Urban Tonic), Ciaran Mulgrew (Niche Drinks), Brian Rainey (Sippy of Culture), Rachael Parkes (Dopey Dick Brewing Company), Connor Doherty (Sippy of Culture), Martina Rogers (Northbound Brewery), Kathy Coyle (Airporter), and James Huey (Walled City Brewery)

[www.sippyfest.co.uk](http://www.sippyfest.co.uk)  
[www.derrystrabane.com/food](http://www.derrystrabane.com/food)

## Opportunities in tourism and hospitality highlighted at careers event

As the Year of Food and Drink moved into the 'Legacy and Learn to...' month of November, Tourism NI was in attendance at a major careers and skills event to highlight the opportunities available in the tourism and hospitality sectors.

Skills Northern Ireland, which brought together 14 to 19 year olds with people that can help and influence their future job and career choices, took place at the Titanic Exhibition Centre on Tuesday and Wednesday, 8th and 9th November.

Almost 7000 visitors from schools and colleges across the region signed up for the event which was organised by Prospects Events, sponsored by NIE Networks and supported by Ulster University.

Skills Northern Ireland offered young people the opportunity to discover careers in a unique and practical way and with many exhibitors from colleges, universities and various industries, including hospitality and catering and tourism.

The hospitality and tourism sectors have a unique opportunity to contribute to economic growth via a range of collaborations across education, local government and private sector and by their contribution to capacity building and by creating a sustainable legacy.

Currently the sectors support over 43,000 jobs. Research shows that this demand will sharply increase with a number of new hotels planned and ambitious growth targets ahead.



Tourism NI Industry Development Manager Carolyn Boyd

Tourism NI Industry Development Manager Carolyn Boyd who attended the event said, "An event of this kind is crucial for encouraging, inspiring and educating young people about the career options available to them. Given that we are experiencing such growth in the hospitality and catering sectors as part of our expanding tourism offering, it was important for TNI to be represented at the event. We hope our talented young people took away from the day what a diverse and interesting industry hospitality and catering can be and how that feeds into the wider tourism proposition."

Visitors to the two-day event had the opportunity to explore various features including the Showcase Stage that hosted practical demonstrations and Get Skilled stands offering activities in robotics, computing, automotive, theatrical make-up, IT, product design and much more.

The Skills Showcase provided an area within an inflatable dome showing the incredible work of those who have produced creations for work or training, and was sponsored by Belfast Metropolitan College.

Attendees were also able to view current job, work experience and apprenticeship vacancies featured on the Live Opportunities Board.





## Hilden brews up series of events to mark 35th anniversary

The Year of Food and Drink coincided with a significant milestone for Ireland's founding independent craft ale brewers, Hilden Brewing Co. which is celebrating its 35th anniversary having created and bottled its first brew in November 1981.

Hilden Brewing Co. has expanded significantly since its inception and now boasts a new state-of-the-art brewery, restaurants and the prestigious Hilden Beer Festival, which this year was one of 48 food and drink related events to be supported by Tourism NI.

To celebrate their 35th anniversary Hilden Brewing Co. will be hosting a series of additional special events and performances on into 2017. And whilst independent breweries, craft beer businesses and associated events are now experiencing a boom, three and a half decades ago Ann and Seamus Scullion were blazing their own trail.

The company was established by the couple in 1981 in the courtyard of Hilden House, the former home of the Barbour linen barons. Here the Scullions reintroduced into Ireland the tradition of a local brewery making beers of distinctive character and taste. Hilden is now the oldest independent brewery in Ireland.

The company has adapted its business model over the years to suit an ever-changing market, expanding the brewery in 2014 increasing output from 7000 litres to 14000 and exporting their craft ales worldwide.

Hilden Brewing Co. owner Seamus Scullion said reaching the 35-year anniversary was "an incredible achievement".



Seamus Scullion of Hilden Brewing Co.

"We started brewing in 1981 and have adapted the business model throughout the years to develop the brand and our range of ales," he said.

"Hilden was the first independently owned brewery in the whole of Ireland for more than half a century. Whilst other breweries that started after failed in very tough trading conditions, we prospered. In recent years the interest in craft beers has grown dramatically along with many new breweries. Our beers, restaurants and events are now at the heart of this movement and we look to the future with confidence."

Located in the outbuildings of historic Hilden House, Hilden is still under the Scullion's watchful eyes along with their brewery manager son, Owen and daughter, Frances Maguire who is the general manager.



For more information go to [www.hildenbrewery.com](http://www.hildenbrewery.com)

## Two new academies launched during Legacy and Learn to... month

The launch of two new academies was announced in November bolstering the crucial 'legacy' element of the Year of Food and Drink.

The Walled City Brewery in Derry and the Belfast Hospitality Employment Academy both announced the new schemes during 'Legacy and Learn to...' month.

The Walled City Brewery revealed it was to open what is believed to be the first Homebrew Academy in Ireland in response to demand from visitors to the Brewery keen to learn how to brew their own craft beer.

The Homebrew Academy, which is scheduled to open in January 2017, will take the form of an intensive one-day boot-camp run by owner James Huey at his Ebrington Square brewery, with each participant receiving a graduation certificate and a gallon of their very own brew.

Meanwhile the new academy launched by Belfast City Council to help prepare unemployed people for jobs in the city's burgeoning hospitality sector was looking for local hospitality businesses with full or part time entry level vacancies.

Partners Belfast City Council, Belfast Works LEMIS+ project, People 1st and Belfast Met joined forces to create The Belfast Hospitality Employment Academy to train job seekers to take up entry level positions in the hospitality industry, with a view to developing rewarding careers.

The Belfast Hospitality Employment Academy is targeted at those interested in working with people and willing to provide fantastic customer service, but who currently lack the experience and qualifications to get a job.

Participation in The Belfast Hospitality Employment Academy is free and provides accredited training for 120 participants



Belfast Hospitality Employment Academy participant Martine Boyd learns the art of coffee making from Tim Smith, Barista Training Manager, Johnson's Coffee

in food safety, health and safety, customer service, team working and an induction to the hospitality industry including Barista training. It includes a taster session, either a two week intensive or a four-week part-time training programme and an interview session with employers who have open job vacancies.

Councillor Aileen Graham, Chair of Belfast City Council's City Growth and Regeneration Committee said: "We've developed a fantastic programme of support with our partners which includes training in skills required by the sector, personal development mentoring and interview skills training.

"We've also engaged with employers to ensure that their needs are met and that the Academy is fit for purpose."

The first two-week training course has been completed and courses will run until March 2017 at Belfast MET campuses and venues across the city.



## Collaborations the key to establishing food tour business

As 2016 drew to a close a tourism entrepreneur who launched a new food tour at the start of the Year of Food and Drink spoke of the importance of partnerships and collaborative working in establishing her fledgling business.



Tracey Jeffery of NI Food Tours was profiled by tourismni.com in February as she was completing the final test stages of her food tours of County Down. Ten months into her venture we caught up with the teacher turned producer, whose passion for local food and drink led her to launch the business venture.

Having initially planned to offer three tours targeting home and overseas tourists as well as corporate and conference visitors, Tracey explained where that had diverged and what had driven the change.

"When I think of the business plan I did with Invest NI last year, you just wouldn't recognise it," she laughed, "I am working much more with international tourists and with corporate clients who are looking for a unique and very authentic experience.

"Companies realise that it makes good economic sense for them to come to Northern Ireland as we are better value. Visitors are also looking for something different. That's what we're offering when they come and spend time here."

The creation of a County Down 'product' is integral to encouraging visitors into the region, says Tracey who recognises that attracting sustainable levels of visitors depends on an overarching and cohesive offering from businesses across the area.

"I realised very early on that I could only be successful if I was working in collaboration with others so I have worked tirelessly at building relationships with key players in County Down. I am working closely with other tourism providers as well as producers etc. This is key to my success. I can only be successful if I can work in partnership with others to the benefit of all of us. We have a hidden gem in County Down and those of us who are working closely together realise that."

Consciously or not, that collaborative aspect was in Tracey's approach from the outset as she set about recruiting producers to include on her tours. Originally planning two itineraries down each side of Strangford Lough, her aim of providing authentic food and drink experiences is one to which she has adhered. However, the flexibility required to deal with altered plans has proven as important as the determination to meet her clients' needs.

"The tours are now distinctly an Ards Peninsula tour and a Mourne and St Patrick's trail. What has really set me apart though has been the tailoring of any tour to satisfy guests' wishes. Being able to meet those needs also depends on

www.nifoodtours.com, Facebook NI Food Tours and @FabFoodieTours on Twitter



contacts and partnerships. I am offering a very tailored and bespoke service depending on whether it's a corporate, leisure or incentive client."

To that end Tracey has created a bespoke Irish jewellery-making tour for the partners of a golfing contingent and is organising a dinner tour with a traditional music family in the Mournes. Throw in sheep herding and bodhrán making and you get an idea of the range of experiences her guests are demanding.

"These unique and bespoke offerings are being tailored for the 'virtuoso' tourist who is willing to pay more to really get underneath the skin of a place," said Tracey. "They are desperate to meet local people and get to places others can't access. When I've brought these visitors to my home as part of the bread making element of the food tours they're asking 'can we see your dogs?', 'do you have pictures of your kids?' 'can we come back and meet your family?'."

**"In terms of authenticity, the family hosting us for the Mourne Mountains dinner are proper dancers and musicians who also make hurls and bodhráns. They will have the guests making their own bodhrán sticks and are only too happy to do it. The guests on the other hand are getting the stories and that real connection with local people that they really want and that you simply wouldn't get on a normal holiday here. In addition, we have stunning scenery, coastline and mountains, amazing food products and we're not bumper to bumper with coaches."**

Tracey's trailblazing in this area is already paying off with more and more individuals seeing the opportunities on offer. That turnaround, she says, has been one of the major progressions as well as one of the main challenges she faced as a start-up operator.

"It was difficult at the start trying to get people and producers to see what I was talking about as I was selling

the idea without any real client base. But the producers that bought in from the start have already seen the financial benefits and probably more so than me at the minute."

As regards to those bottom lines, Tracey is being pragmatic and sees her first year as laying the groundwork for a solid business proposition.

"I haven't done extremely well financially but am looking to the bigger picture as I've done a lot of site visits and fam visits and from that I have bookings going forward. Things have developed and diverged considerably from the beginning of the year. I am very happy with the way in which it is progressing. I really enjoy and get a buzz from working with a wide client base and I do get job satisfaction from the venture."

The Year of Food and Drink, she adds, also provided a welcome boost in helping people make the link between great local food and tourism.

"The Year of Food and Drink definitely helped with all the media attention and things like the write ups and fam visits have been brilliant for profile.

"It was lonely at the start though as it's easy to feel you're on your own and I could have used some help with things like pricing and itineraries. It's all a learning process though and doing the best with what you have so I'm continuing to focus on those core products and enhancing them the best I can."







## Tourism NI awards event celebrates successes of the year

A brand new awards event celebrating the many successes of the Northern Ireland Year of Food and Drink was launched by Tourism NI at the start of December.

The Northern Ireland Year of Food and Drink Awards celebrates both food producers and experiences and is also supported by Food NI in association with the Belfast Telegraph with winners announced at a glittering awards ceremony at the Culloden Hotel in February 2017.

Organisations and producers who are not just making food but who are creating unforgettable food experiences for tourists and for the people who live here entered the competition. Entries were judged by a panel of distinguished experts including food critic Charles Campion, food author Georgina Campbell, Belfast Telegraph restaurant critic Joris Minne and Professor Una McMahon-Beattie, head of the Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management at Ulster University.

The eight categories for the awards included: Best Food Event or Festival; Best Local Market; Best Tours and Trails; Best Marketing Achievement; Best Food Innovation; Best Food Story; Roots to Market; and Growing for the Future.

Tourism NI's Director of Corporate Development, Susie Brown said the awards celebrated the best of the local food and drink industry, recognising excellence and collaborations dedicated to placing Northern Ireland firmly on the culinary map.

"The Year of Food and Drink has been welcomed, embraced and widely implemented right across the tourism and hospitality industry and food and drink sectors here at home as well as overseas," she said. "As the year drew to a close we



Susie Brown (Tourism NI), Jackie Reid (Belfast Telegraph), Paul McKnight (Culloden Hotel), Michele Shirlow (FoodNI)

focused on creating a lasting legacy for the initiative and the Year of Food and Drink Awards helps us to do that.

"The quality and variety of local produce in Northern Ireland has helped enhance the food and drink experiences for visitors, with figures showing that overnight visitors to Northern Ireland from all markets spent an estimated £751m last year, of which approximately one third was spent on food and drink.

**"We will continue to strive to further develop Northern Ireland's reputation in food and drink both at home and with our visitors, with our tourism industry growing as a consequence."**

Jackie Reid of the Belfast Telegraph said: "The food and drink sector is a vibrant part of our local economy and is becoming an ever-greater draw for visitors. We are delighted to have assembled a distinguished panel of judges who cast their eye over the many entries to these awards."

## Northern Ireland's new signature dish helps put place on a plate

'Born and Braised' was announced as Northern Ireland's new signature dish at a grand unveiling in December after Tourism NI tasked four top chefs with creating 'place on a plate' as part of the Year of Food and Drink.

The four creative minds who created a shortlist of three dishes were Niall McKenna from James Street South; Ian Orr from Browns Restaurant and Ardtara House; Kelan McMichael from Bull and Ram and Chris McGowan from Wine and Brine. The 'cooking collective' created the dishes 'Born and Braised', 'Jowled Eel' and 'Buttermilked Lamb' which battled it out in a public poll with the beef shin dish 'Born and Braised' named the winner.

Naomi Waite, Director of Marketing with Tourism Northern Ireland said: "The winning dish, 'Born and Braised' will appear on restaurant menus and dinner tables across Northern Ireland, but as the final three were all so delicious there really isn't any downside for food lovers.

**"The three dishes prepared by the 'cooking collective' are completely new to the dining scene in Northern Ireland and are made from only the best of our local produce. While the Born and Braised, Buttermilked Lamb and Jowled Eel dishes are of restaurant quality the recipes are available on the Discover Northern Ireland website and can easily be cooked, adapted and enjoyed at the dinner table at home."**

Ian Orr, Browns Restaurants and Ardtara Country House Hotel, said: "It's been lots of fun working with the other guys to come up with a new signature dish for Northern Ireland. I am really pleased with how all the dishes have turned out and



Kelan McMichael from Bull and Ram, Chris McGowan from Wine and Brine, Niall McKenna from James Street South and Ian Orr from Browns Restaurant and Ardtara House

delighted that the people of NI have chosen the winning dish for themselves."

Chris McGowan, Wine and Brine, said: "The diversity and quality of produce available across Northern Ireland is astounding and we showcased just some of it in our three finalist dishes. We hope that everyone enjoys making the winning dish at home - and remember to support local producers when buying your ingredients."

Kelan McMichael, Bull and Ram, said: "We chose the final three dishes because they bring together the very best local produce we have on offer but also because the ingredients are affordable and accessible for people to buy in their local butchers, delis and shops."

**Niall McKenna, James Street South Restaurant Group, added: "All three dishes really embody a taste of Northern Ireland and are stellar examples of the quality, flavour, value and diversity of the amazing produce we have on our doorsteps."**





# Festive food tour came out of its shell in honour of Foyle Oyster



Festive foodies had their appetites whetted with a unique alternative to traditional seasonal fayre thanks to a food tour celebrating the legacy and delicacy of the native Foyle Oyster.

The event, which took place in Derry on Sunday 11 December, was organised by an innovative seaweed food adventure company based in the city. Led by guide and seaweed chef William McElhinney, aka 'The Seaweed Man', the tour was funded by Derry City and Strabane District Council through the Tier 2 Industry Engagement Programme for the Year of Food and Drink and celebrated Tourism NI's theme of 'Legacy and Learn to...'

The Foyle Oyster is the pearl of the North West food scene, a gourmet delight, but rarely experienced here because of its esteemed market value internationally, explained William from Wild Strands Ltd who hosted the tour.

"The intention was to create a multi-sensory festive celebration of locally sourced seasonal and wild produce," he said. "The tour also explored the Foyle Oyster's heritage as an important food resource for past generations and explained how Irish emigration influenced the food culture of America."

Mary Blake, Tourism Development Manager with Derry City and Strabane District Council, said the event offered an exciting new gourmet experience based around the iconic Lough Foyle Oyster originating from the largest native European oyster bed.

"We were delighted to be supporting Wild Strands who provide a unique opportunity to experience the native Foyle Oyster. This creative and innovative event helped enhance our region's reputation as a world class food destination."



William McElhinney aka 'The Seaweed Man' who hosted a festive gourmet wild food tour in December



## Cultural calendar of 2017 opened with an invite 'Out to Brunch'

The boutique festival that traditionally marks the start of the year's cultural calendar, issued an earlier than usual invite to audiences thanks to support from Tourism NI.



A series of events designed to mark the NI Year of Food and Drink, 'Out to Brunch' is an offshoot of the Out to Lunch festival which kick starts 2017's cultural offering. Supported by the Year of Food and Drink Tourism Events Scheme, a £300,000 pot funded by central government, Out to Brunch was just one of 48 events that benefitted from the support.

Presented by Seedhead Arts, the 'Brunch' menu offered an eclectic range, from a Breakfast Stout Club and Electro Fry Up to Mark Kermode talking movies over a muffin. There was Early Morning Tales with Jan Carson, gorgeously evocative sounds with the Darkling Air and Réalta, The Complete History of the Beatles...Sort of... with George Firehorse and the rapier rhymes of performance poet Mike Garry.

The Out to Lunch festival, which is now in its twelfth year, ran from 6th to 9th January, and offered audiences a chance to blow off the Christmas cobwebs, banish New Year blues and feast on an array of culinary and cultural delights with generous helpings of music, comedy, spoken word and literature.

## Local producer signs new deal with key YoF&D supporter

The partnerships and collaborations cemented during the Year of Food and Drink were highlighted at the start of December when a County Down food producer signed a major deal with one of the initiative's key supporters.

Family owned TS Foods signed a £600,000 deal with Tesco that saw the creation of six new jobs and more than a 50 per cent increase in its business. The company is producing a hot deli range for the supermarket, which played a major part in the Northern Ireland Year of Food and Drink. At the start of the 12-month long initiative Tesco announced a £500,000 programme to provide a platform for the local food and drinks industry to engage with the scheme. Their year-long programme included involving local suppliers and artisan producers in in-store food fairs and multi-store sampling as well as radio and press advertising and the hugely successful Taste Northern Ireland Festival in September.

The deal with the Castlewellan based company underpins an ongoing commitment to local produce that has been at the heart of the Year of Food and Drink campaign.



Anna Hazzard and David Steele of TS Foods with Aiden Furey of Tesco NI



Dec

## Christmas market set out its stall for local producers

The annual continental Christmas market, which was celebrating its ninth year at City Hall during the Year of Food and Drink, featured a strongly local presence as part of the initiative.

At the invitation of Food NI, producers from across the north showcased their exclusively local products at 10 additional stalls. Located just outside the main entrance gates and supported by Tourism NI and Ulster Bank, the stalls also featured a number of councils keen to show their support for local food companies. Ards and North Down, Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon, Newry Mourne and Down and Fermanagh and Omagh councils were also joined by Ulster Artisans who took a chalet dedicated to artisanal producers.

Companies taking advantage of the trading sites ranged from meat, fish and preserve producers to confectioners and bakers who applauded the initiative and the opportunities it provided.

Owner of Granny Shaw's Fudge Factory, Glen Houston, who took a stall from 27th to 29th November and from 21st to 22nd December, said he was keen to take advantage of the number of potential customers at the hugely popular continental market.

**"We wanted to help promote and sell our fudge to the wider footfall that the continental market in Belfast brings. We had a terrific response and had such rave reviews about our product and indeed all the local artisan food and crafts that were on display."**

Of the Year of Food and Drink (YoF&D) overall he added: "The Year has undoubtedly helped launch our fledgling business to



the general public and we are already reaping the awards with our fudge and brand now instantly recognisable."

Cavanagh Free Range Eggs, who have embarked on a host of YoF&D activity throughout the year, were at the market from 24th to 26th November. Although not hugely successful in terms of sales, director Eileen Hall said the opportunity to raise the profile of the award winning free range eggs was welcome. She added that the increased awareness of local produce as a result of the YoF&D had also been very important.

"People are more conscious of buying local and supporting our industry here in Northern Ireland and they seem to enjoy what we have on offer. The supermarket and food-service buyers are also a lot more aware because of the Year of Food and Drink and are very passionate about supporting their local producers. They definitely "get" the whole provenance issue that perhaps wasn't as high on the agenda for some a number of years ago."

Michele Shirlow of Food NI said she was delighted market organisers had encouraged more involvement from local producers saying, "Our participation at the Christmas market was one of the final events in the Year of Food and Drink. There will be further initiatives in 2017 and beyond to carry forward the many achievements of the campaign particularly in Northern Ireland and abroad through the activities of Tourism NI, Tourism Ireland and Invest Northern Ireland."



