

2016 Experience gets set for entrepreneurs

BY COLETTE SEXTON

Emerging entrepreneurs are being called on to take part in the 2016 Entrepreneur Experience. The event brings 24 emerging entrepreneurs together with 24 seasoned entrepreneurs over 24 hours in Ballymaloe, Co Cork each year. In 2016, the event will take place on April 15 and 16. Some 43 companies have raised a total of €24.6 million after taking part in the event, which will take place next year for the sixth time. More than 120 emerging entrepreneurs, including start-ups, investor-ready companies and scaling companies from ten countries have participated in the Entrepreneur Experience in the past. Some 60 seasoned entrepreneurs have previously signed up, including Jim Barry of the Barry Group; Larry Bass of ShinAwil; Liam Casey of PCH; Sean O'Sullivan from SOS Ventures; and Peaches Kemp of Itsabagel. While the event is organ-



From left: Colette Sexton, The Sunday Business Post; Fionnuala Wall, marketing manager, CorkBIC; Pete Smyth, chief executive, Broadlake; Darren Daly, partner, ByrneWallace; Tom Lyons, The Sunday Business Post; and Gerry Prizeman, head of enterprise development, Bank of Ireland

ised by CorkBIC, it is open to companies across the country and around the world. Entrepreneurs have come, not only from Ireland, but also Britain, Spain, France, Chile and the US to take part. Speaking at the launch, Michael O'Connor, the chief

executive of CorkBIC said: "Over the past five years the Experience has grown to be a life and game-changing event. It has assisted 26 companies in getting Enterprise Ireland high potential start-up approval and 43 companies have raised €24.6 million."

Also speaking at the launch, Pete Smyth, chief executive of Broadlake and captain of the 2016 Entrepreneur Experience, said: "The event has become one of the key pillars supporting Irish entrepreneurship in recent years. It's high-impact and not for

the fainthearted." Current partners with CorkBIC for this event are Bank of Ireland, EY, The Sunday Business Post, ByrneWallace and Google. For more information on how to apply, see corkbic.com.

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Helping an entrepreneur to see wood for the trees

Name: John Fagan
Company: EirEco
The Pitch: high-efficiency wood burning stove

BY ELAINE O'REGAN

Mentoring support from his local enterprise office in west Cork gave EirEco founder John Fagan the "kick" he needed to knuckle down and develop a sound business plan for the wood-burning stove he had invented for eco-conscious homeowners. Originally from Dublin, Fagan lived in Germany for 26 years before returning to Ireland in 2004 and settling in Ballydehob. By the time he approached his local enterprise office two years ago, he had developed prototypes for a stove that, he believed, could use fuel more efficiently than existing options on the market. What he was less sure about was how to turn his idea into a viable business. "I went to them with three prototypes and a CAD drawing," Fagan said. "They partnered me up with a mentor,



John Fagan of EirEco
Emma Jervis

who was an engineer and gave me a lot of hours. "Basically, he played the 'bad guy' - I'd been in business in Germany for a while, but I was out of that mode. He gave me the kick I needed, and that was really good for me. It made me wake up and look not just at the product, but how to get it to market." Fagan has since finalised designs for two EirEco stoves priced at €1,480 and €1,750. They use wood gasification - also known as "rocket stove" technology - to convert wood into a flammable gas that can be used as fuel. "If you see smoke coming out a chimney - grey smoke, black smoke - that is fuel that has not been burned," said Fagan. "With wood gasification, the inside of the stove gets so hot that it burns those gases before they go up the

chimney. You use up to 40 per cent less fuel, because it's all being turned into heat." Fagan sells online at Eirecostoves.com, and also has a showroom in Ballydehob. "Building regulations are getting more and more strict, and we're well placed for that," he said. "Our efficiency rate has been certified at 89.5 per cent, compared to 70 to 75 per cent for most stoves. Our CO emissions are 0.16 per cent." Fagan plans to establish a network of retailers and wholesalers within three years, to market EirEco nationwide. "We work with a manufacturer in Cork, so our stoves are made in Ireland, and I hope that we'll be able to stand alongside the bigger manufacturers with a strong, Irish-made product," he said.

Trailblazer finds that Ireland is a bit of what the French fancy

BY ELAINE O'REGAN

Sheena Dignam is hoping to attract more French tourists to Galway and surrounding counties with luxury escorted holidays showcasing the best of the west. Originally from Ireland, Dignam lived in the Loire Valley for 13 years before returning home at the age of 20.

Name: Sheena Dignam
Company: Merveilles d'Irlande
The Pitch: luxury holidays in the west for French tourists

Her new venture, Merveilles d'Irlande [Wonders of Ireland], was inspired by her quest to encourage more

French people to visit Ireland to experience the country's gastronomic culture. "When I moved back to Ireland, I found the French were giving Ireland - the food, the accommodation - bad press. I really wanted to show them that we have great places here to see and visit, and great food to eat," said Dignam, who has been running Galway Food Tours since 2013.

She devised two Merveilles d'Irlande itineraries, for four and seven night stays. Costing between €495 and €795 per person excluding flights, they include trips to Galway city, Connemara and the Burren. "They might go fishing on a private lake, and then have a tasting at a local whiskey distillery. The idea is for them to absorb the culture and the people," said Dignam.

Before visitors arrive for their holiday, Dignam sends them a personalised itinerary, with details of their accommodation, information on the sites and attractions they will visit during their trip, and suggestions for additional activities. "I give them a food dictionary so they can understand the culture behind our food, and a map with GPS tracking

trails so they can get from one B&B to the next without any hassle," said Dignam. Dignam works with luxury establishments, such as Gregans Castle outside Ballyvaughan in Co Clare, Galway's Corrib Guesthouse and Dolphin Beach House in Clifden. "These are all beautiful places to stay," she said. "The idea is to feature luxurious, quirky and friendly places. It

took me two years to finalise my guide book and I personally met everyone in it - the B&Bs, the guesthouses. I have every faith in what they do." Since launching Merveilles d'Irlande.com last December, Dignam has hosted five French couples. She has seven bookings confirmed for 2016, and has plans to expand into other parts of Ireland in the future.



Sheena Dignam

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