

In brief



# Boom times

Evening Echo reporter Kevin O'Neill looks at the Marina Commercial Park, a breeding ground for start-ups and innovation

## Work to start on new playground

● WORK on the new playground in Fitzgerald's Park will begin in the coming weeks. The new playground will replace the existing playground located at the western end of the park. Following a query from councillor Kieran McCarthy officials said work will begin in late March or early April with an estimated completion date of late June or early July. The Bon Secours Hospital Cork is to co-fund the design and construction of the playground, which will be suitable for all children, including those with disabilities.

## Blackrock walkway

● THE access points from Skehard Road onto the Blackrock amenity walkway will be resurfaced this year. In response to a motion from city councillor Des Cahill, officials said resurfacing works on the access paths are scheduled to commence in September. They also said that the signage in the area would be changed.

## EPS in Europe final

● WATER and wastewater treatment solutions company, EPS Group, has been named as one of the final 110 businesses and Ruban d'Honneur recipients in the 2014/2015 European Business Awards. One of just five Irish companies to make the final, Mallow-based EPS has been nominated in the Environmental and Corporate Social Responsibility category. EPS was shortlisted alongside Irish companies Paypal, Morgan McKinley, Dawn Meats and Version1.

## Bandon flood works

● FINE Gael TD for Cork South West, Jim Daly, met this week with Minister for the Office of Public Works (OPW), Simon Harris TD, to discuss progress of the Bandon Flood Relief Scheme. Deputy Daly said: "The OPW is not in a position to provide an update on the timescale for the appointment of a contractor." He said the Government remains committed to the scheme.

## Musical auditions

● CORK City Musical Society is holding open auditions for its musical *Sweet Charity*. Auditions take place in Firkin Crane on Saturday, February 21 and Saturday, February 28, from 1pm to 4pm. See Cork City Musical Society on Facebook for more.

**B**OOM times are returning to Cork's Marina Commercial Park with the site housing some of Cork's biggest industrial lettings.

Huge units from 20,000 to 50,000 square feet at the park are being snapped up. The park's prime location is viewed as an essential gateway to the city centre.

The two biggest units on the site at 50,000 and 35,000 sq ft have been let recently and are due to reopen in the coming months. A third available unit, at 20,000 sq ft, is currently being targeted by a leisure operator and brings the promise of a further jobs boost to the area.

The Marina Commercial Park, a 25-acre site sitting just off Centre Park Road on the city's south docks, occupies the former location of the Ford and Dunlop factories.

At one time Cork's biggest employers with 1,500 people commuting to and from the area, economic troubles in the late 1980s left the site temporarily vacant.

Its subsequent purchase and redevelopment by Gerry Wycherly has turned it into a breeding ground for start-ups and innovation.

Recent figures estimate that there will be more than 1,500 people working in the park this year, and it will soon be a location for more jobs than were lost with the closure of Ford and Dunlop. There are over 150 businesses occupying the units. Dozens of enterprises planted their seeds in the park and have grown to serve customers all over the world.

The facilities on site were exactly what popular city centre micro-brewery the Franciscan Well needed to upscale operations. Since being purchased by North American brewing giant Molson Coors in a multi-million euro deal in 2012, the beers produced by the Franciscan Well can be found in the UK and



A view of Marina Commercial Park, which is located on the former Ford and Dunlop sites.

Picture: Larry Cummins

look set to increase their reach even further.

A deal was struck to take a 50,000 sq ft site on the quay, previously a Beamish and Crawford distribution depot.

Shane Long, founder of the Franciscan Well, said that the increase in operations is necessary to meet demand both in Ireland and internationally with interest in the craft beer market growing. Craft beers now account for as much as 5% of all beer sales, up from just 1% in 2012.

"We reached maximum capacity here at the brewery years ago. It is needed for the Irish market but will also serve the export market."

The new facility will be operational this summer and will house a 50-hectolitre brewery and could employ more than 20 people.

Currently, demand for the versatile units in the park is high. Site manager Diarmuid O'Sullivan said there are always new businesses opening. As well as the go-kart track now under construction, ve-

getarian cuisine producers My Goodness opened its doors shortly before Christmas. Within the last week, a further three lettings have been agreed by the park and Mix & Cuts barbers opened its doors.

There are just 10 unoccupied units, including two that are currently unavailable due to being damaged in a fire in May 2014.

Mr O'Sullivan said that a conscious decision was made to support start-ups and innovation at the site.

"We don't get fazed by what comes in. We have a lot of start-ups and a lot of 'coming out of home' business — people who have worked from their kitchen taking their first steps out with us."

Among these is award-winning Bia Beauty which, in two years, grew from the kitchen table of founder Tracey Ryan to winning the coveted €30,000 Cork innovates bursary last November.

Mr O'Sullivan said that the park hosts everything from one-person operations to companies that operate all over the world. Flexibility in

the units has attracted many enterprises, and management encourages people to grow if they need bigger units.

He said: "A lot of people grow sideways in here. That's why we have a multiplicity of people doing all sorts."

Celtic Tiger-era plans for an ambitious redevelopment of the Marina Park were put on hold, though they are not entirely off the table. The original plans included building a bridge from Water Street across the river and through the commercial park, and the addition of 2.5m sq ft of space. It would include 800 apartments and areas for shopping and recreation. The plan, if realised, would turn the Marina Park area into a huge population centre. Park management are realistic though and indicate that while they still harbour ambitions for the development, it is not something that will happen in the immediate future.

Mr O'Sullivan said: "It's effectively a new town. But it all depends on the economy."

## Karting a big attraction for public

THE opening of Cork city's first go-kart track is expected to increase public interest in the Marina Commercial Park.

Site manager Diarmuid O'Sullivan said that the park has found success in moving towards retail-orientated businesses that bring people to the area.

"We are trying to move a bit more public-friendly. Historically, it was a lot of heavy plants working down here but we're moving from that with go-karting, airsoft and others. It's probably the best kept secret in Cork," he said. Work is ongoing on a 35,000 square foot unit that will house the city centre's first go-karting track. Operated

by the company that runs Limerick's National Kart Centre, the track should be operational within six weeks.

Colm Wright, owner and manager of National Kart Centre Limerick, is confident that the Cork operation will be successful.

"We deal a lot with stags and hens in Limerick. A lot of Cork people come up too — so now we're bringing the karting to them. This will draw people to Cork. We will tie in with local hotels to offer deals," he said.

Mr Wright also explained that the Cork centre will be just the second in Ireland to offer drift-karting.

National Kart Centre Cork joins Munster Airsoft in the retail park.

Munster Airsoft has been based in the park for three years offering airsoft and archery.

Existing businesses, like Service Assured Maintenance Audio Visual also saw the opportunity to adapt for retail. They provide audio visual support for multinationals and whiteboards for schools. Mark Hickey said they moved to a bigger unit to capitalise on walk-in business.

"We buy for corporate. We look after Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson. But we thought we might as well move into a bigger place and open it up to the public," he said.

In addition to those, the Marina Commercial Park houses a number of

the city centre's most popular food and drinks businesses. Cork Coffee Roasters, Filter Coffee and O'Flynn's Gourmet Sausages all take advantage of the park's storage facilities.

Bubble Brothers wine merchants also operate through the park, using it as both a storage facility and a retail outlet, in addition to the English Market location.

The park is also host to three gyms, a diner and three churches, as well as numerous mechanics and crash repair businesses. There is also a very busy second-hand furniture store and a range of artisan businesses that sell through the internet, such as Ruby Robin handmade jewellery.

# returning to park



A view of Marina Commercial Park, which houses some of Cork biggest industrial lettings.

## Cutting carbon footprint

CUTTING-EDGE industries that work to tackle Ireland's carbon footprint have made the Marina Commercial Park their home.

Ecocel is leading the charge for the reduction of the country's carbon footprint through environmentally friendly insulation. Rather than importing fibreglass or other insulators, Ecocel recycles locally sourced paper.

Owner John Egan explains that it is the only company in Ireland pursuing this proven method of environmentally friendly, cost-effective, low-tech insulation.

"No other business in Ireland does it. We are the only insulation manufacturer in Ireland that sources our materials in Ireland," he said. It is a small-scale operation in terms of manpower, requiring just two people on site to manufacture up to 12.25 tonnes in 10 hours. More than 20 installers operate nationwide, including in Sligo, Galway and Donegal.

Mr Egan said that if the process was adopted by city councils or private developers in the city, it would make a huge difference to positioning Cork as a green city.

"What we create here would give Cork the chance to be a European leader in sustainability," he said.

In its Marina Park premises, JB Roche manufactures inflatable shelters that work as

pop-up airline hangars. The hangars are 100% fabric, containing no metal parts whatsoever, making them much easier to transport to remote parts of the world.

They are largely used by airlines to work on engine repairs.

Recent changes to the product have seen it used off the coast of northern Scotland on oil and gas rigs, eliminating the need for scaffolding and making repairs much easier.

This revolutionary technology is in demand all over the world, with orders coming in from northern Canada and the South Pole.

The company works with several of the world's biggest airlines, including Qatar Airways and Lufthansa, as well as airplane manufacturer Boeing.

Its products are also used by the US and Canadian air forces.

Also operating out of the park is Doodle Creative, graphic design and website design consultants who have been used by Fota Wildlife Park, Irish fraud protection service Trustlev, and Disney.

There are also post-production and film editing studios that have worked with RTE, as well as a space for Cork Community Art Link to put together some of its eye-catching creations for the St Patrick's Day parade and the Dragon of Shandon festival.

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