



Bandon residents of various nationalities gather on the town's new bridge for a community initiative organised by Idealist.Org.

Bandon building community spirit

Ailín Qunlan

A West Cork town is planning to bring residents from different cultures together in a series of monthly initiatives aimed at nurturing a feeling of community spirit between local people of different nationalities.

A message encouraging people to turn up was translated into a variety of different languages and posted on Facebook for the latest event — a get-together on the town's

new bridge, which was specially organised for September 9 by the group Idealist.Org — an international organisation whose mission is to make the world a better place.

The weekend event, called Idealist 09/09, saw some 30 Bandon residents from locations such as the Philippines, Egypt, Poland, and Hungary come together with locals to showcase the different nationalities in the town.

A banner carrying the words 'Bandon Building

Bridges, Not Walls' was suspended from the bridge.

A similar project was held on August 8 last and an event will now take place every month for the foreseeable future: "Following the August event, similar events were carried out by members of Idealist.Org at locations all over the world — the Far East, Asia, Europe, the USA," says Tom McCleary, a member of Idealist.Org.

"This is something that communities should do more

of," he said. "Most towns in Ireland now have a diverse range of nationalities living in them and, as of now, they don't tend to mingle enough in terms of community. In Bandon, we have lots of people from different nationalities, and we don't all seem to get involved in community projects together."

Mr McCleary said the Bandon Men's Shed, of which he was the coordinator, had attracted men of different nationalities. On a general

basis, he said, communities of people from different parts of the world did not appear to mingle or participate together in events which took place in the town.

The key, he believes, is language. For the September bridge gathering event, information was put out on Facebook in about eight different languages — and double the numbers turned up. "In August we had about 15 people and this time we had about 30. We will be holding

another community get-together in October — 10/10," he declared, adding that while he was planning something different for October, it would still be community-based.

"We will be putting out advance notice of this event in several languages and advertise it on Facebook. We expect this to gather momentum in the months ahead."

■ See www.idealist.org for more information or contact Tom McCleary on 087 753221

Entrepreneur award for ex-principal Ó Lionáird

Pet O'Connell

GP Dónal Ó Loingsigh took the term 'general practitioner' to its broadest definition, tending not only to the medical needs of his patients, but to the cultural and economic wellbeing of the whole community of Baile Mhúirne.

The doctor, after his return from fighting in the Franco-Prussian war, founded several businesses, a community hall, and a livestock fair in the village, promoting Irish language and culture locally and nationally and founding branches of Conradh na Gaeilge.

Pádraig Pearse, who visited Dr Ó Loingsigh in 1904, at a time when the village had been termed 'Príomhchathair na Gaolúinne' or Capital of the Irish language, noted: "Baile Mhúirne would not be Baile Mhúirne without its doctor. The rise of Baile Mhúirne is the most stirring example of

the influence of a personality over a community."

Four years ago, and 101 years after the doctor's death, his immense contribution to the village was formally recognised when the local cultural centre was renamed as Ionad Cultúrtha an Dochtúir Ó Loingsigh. The centre now hosts an annual gathering in his memory, which takes place this Saturday.

This year's gathering will also pay tribute to a modern-day champion of the area who shares the "entrepreneurial spirit, 'can-do' attitude, and cultural appreciation of the late doctor".

Former principal of Coláiste Ghobnatan secondary school Micheál Ó Lionáird is to be presented with a business award, Gradam an Dochtúra Uí Loingsigh, which celebrates "entrepreneurial enterprise while encouraging future development in the Múscraí Gaeltacht".



Award recipient, former school principal Micheál Ó Lionáird.

Mr Ó Lionáird, whose tenure as principal stretched from 1957 to 1989, "has emulated the key attributes of the late doctor through his time as an educator, helping to bring employment to the area, as well as fostering cultural and

musical appreciation," said Reidin Lynch, great great grandniece of Dr Ó Loingsigh and a member of the event's organising committee.

Indeed, without Mr Ó Lionáird's vision, this weekend's commemoration would not be held in a cultural centre bearing Dr Ó Loingsigh's name.

During his time as principal, the school developed from the one-room Scoil Ghobnatan serving what was predominantly a farming community, to add metalwork, science, and home economics rooms. This allowed students to learn practical skills needed for apprenticeships, office work, and management in the growing number of local factories, as well as learning academic subjects.

Mr Ó Lionáird created strong links with Gaeltarra Éireann, a forerunner of Údarás na Gaeltachta, which led to the establishment of new courses in the school and

employment opportunities for its students.

Originally from Baltimore in West Cork, Mr Ó Lionáird's appreciation of the language and culture of the Múscraí Gaeltacht was enhanced by that of his wife Máiréad, a native speaker steeped in the area's linguistic heritage, and he encouraged music teachers and writers to bring their skills to the school.

With national success at events such as Oireachtas na Samhna and Slógadh, it became clear that a cultural centre was required in order to promote further development, but at the end of the 1970s, funding was tight.

Mr Ó Lionáird combined the building of the centre with a training opportunity, whereby young apprentices working on its construction were instructed by local craft-people. Within two years the community had a facility for cultural events, its own small

theatre, plus an adjoining handball alley.

Mr Ó Lionáird, a father of 12 including singer Iarla and television presenter Páidí Ó Lionáird, saw his son Breandán succeed him as school principal while another son, Peadar, of Folláin preserves, is a previous joint-recipient of the Ó Loingsigh business award.

Micheál, according to Reidin Lynch, always "championed the life and achievements of Dr Lynch in the locality" and was among those who advocated the renaming of the cultural centre that he helped establish in honour of a champion of Baile Mhúirne's community and heritage from a previous age.

Speakers at Saturday's event in Ionad Cultúrtha an Dochtúir Ó Loingsigh are UCC president Professor Patrick O'Shea and Professor Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, NUIG. ■ drylunchballyvourney.ie