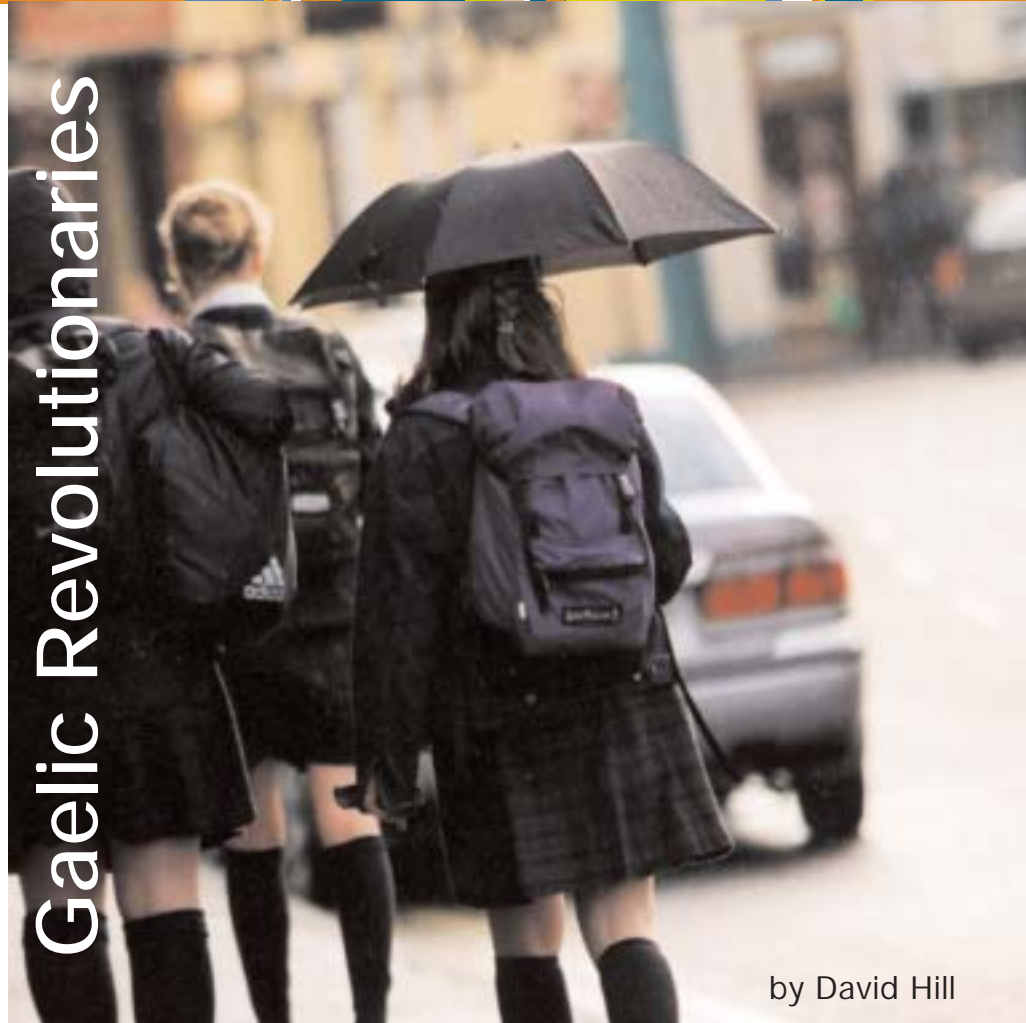


March, 1997. Ireland's state-owned telecommunications company invites towns with fewer than 30,000 residents to vie for the title, "Information Age Town," and the 15 million Irish pounds (about 17 million euros or US\$15 million) that accompany it. Fifty-two towns compete in all.

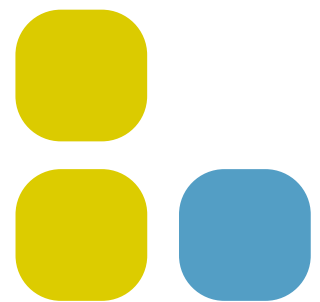
September, 1997. Ennis, a community of 17,000 in County Clare on Ireland's West Coast, wins the prize. Over the next five years, some 80 percent of Ennis householders welcome unfamiliar technology into their lives, persisting until they swap e-mail, surf, buy, sell and learn online with all the ease of a chat over the fence.

You're about to meet some of them. Here's how they use technology to do what they always did — to build a community, enhance lives and enjoy a traditional Irish pleasure: each other.

Gaelic Revolutionaries



by David Hill



David Hill is the author of two books *Great Corporate Ads are Made, Not Born* and *Getting Heard, The Science and Art of Effective Communication*. He is the founding head and only employee of Yonder, "for people who know how much good thinking and writing can help."



Triona McInerney

I felt like we'd won the lottery."

Lessons in Learning, continued

Triona McInerney left her position as the Development Officer of Ennis' Chamber of Commerce to devote herself to the competition, under the direction of Chamber president T. J. Waters. The two recruited 12 of their neighbors to a task force that met daily at 7:00am and 7:00pm to prepare Ennis' entry — which Triona delivered dressed in a silver space suit. Her outfit earned her a page one photo in a leading Irish newspaper, the Independent, and won Ennis something it had to have: publicity that distinguished it from its many competitors. Today, Triona is the second in command of Ennis Information Age Town, Ltd. (EIAT), the enterprise formed to manage — and build on — the victory.

EIAT laid the foundation when it offered computers and software at a steep discount to each of Ennis' 5,300 households, as well as free training, Internet access and enhanced telephone services. Schools, churches, community groups and the Clare County Library received similar packages. Businesses were invited to submit plans that could win them grants of up to 15,000 Irish pounds (17,000 euros).

EIAT's stated purpose is "to place the tools of the Information Age in the hands of the largest possible number of citizens and to teach them how to use them."

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Anne Walsh

Speaking for himself.

Special education teacher Anne Walsh understood that computers could help her engage her easily distracted students, so when her school, St. Clares, received its allotment, she got “computer literate” in a hurry — she even figured out how to program one.

Her first program, “Speaking for Myself,” which incorporated pictures of familiar objects, prompted another first: One of her students saw a familiar object on his computer’s screen, and spoke for himself...for the very first time.

“Bus!” he cried...and so did Anne.

Lessons in Learning, continued

Rosemary O’Mahony spent her formative years working in retail and perfecting the art of organic farming, but when Ennis’ senior citizens decided to launch an online newsletter, “Sunset,” she was pressed into service as an editor. Soon her long dormant muse awoke, and Sunset’s readers were treated to “My First Poem,” an evocative elegy to Ennis.



Rosemary O’Mahony

Awake, muse! Awake!



John O'Connor

It was a dark and stormy night — really!

The long November night began when a cold, wet John O'Connor, co-owner of Custy's Traditional Irish Folk Music shop walked into Gerard Commane's farmhouse kitchen, tape recorder in hand. John's goal: produce a CD that would capture for posterity this 86-year old concertina master's extraordinary music. Two nights later, he departed with a tape that would become "Two Gentlemen of Clare Music," featuring Gerard and his friend Joe Ryan on the fiddle.

"Listen closely," says John, "and you can hear the wind whistling in the chimney." And listen closely you can, thanks in great part to EIAT, whose financial and technical support enabled Custy's to offer its unique inventory online — to hear and to purchase.

www.custysmusic.com is more than an online store, however. It's Mecca for people the world over who have a passion for Irish folk music.

You can't beat his products, prices, delivery times and guarantees — no matter where in the world you are.

Lessons in Learning, continued

If you suffer from hay fever, prevention is the only treatment, so it's useful to know ahead of time what pollen counts are likely to be. Brendan Rochford and Audrey Kinahan have turned this desire into a marketing opportunity for their three pharmacies.

With EIAT's support, they invested in focus groups to identify pharmacological subjects people wanted to know more about, then created a Web site that addressed them...and increased the number of people who visit their stores.

They also took advantage of Audrey's expertise — she has a Ph.D. in pharmaceutical chemistry and was a lecturer at Trinity College — to add an unprecedented service: Give them your email address or mobile telephone number, and they'll give you tomorrow's predicted pollen counts at 9:00 tonight.



Predicting pollen counts

Brendan Rochford

Lessons in Learning, continued

Margaret Cooney, newly installed as the Holy Family Senior School's principal after 30 years of teaching, saw immediately the benefits an Ennis victory would bring to her alma mater. So she joined the initial task force, and spoke at the final presentation to the judges.

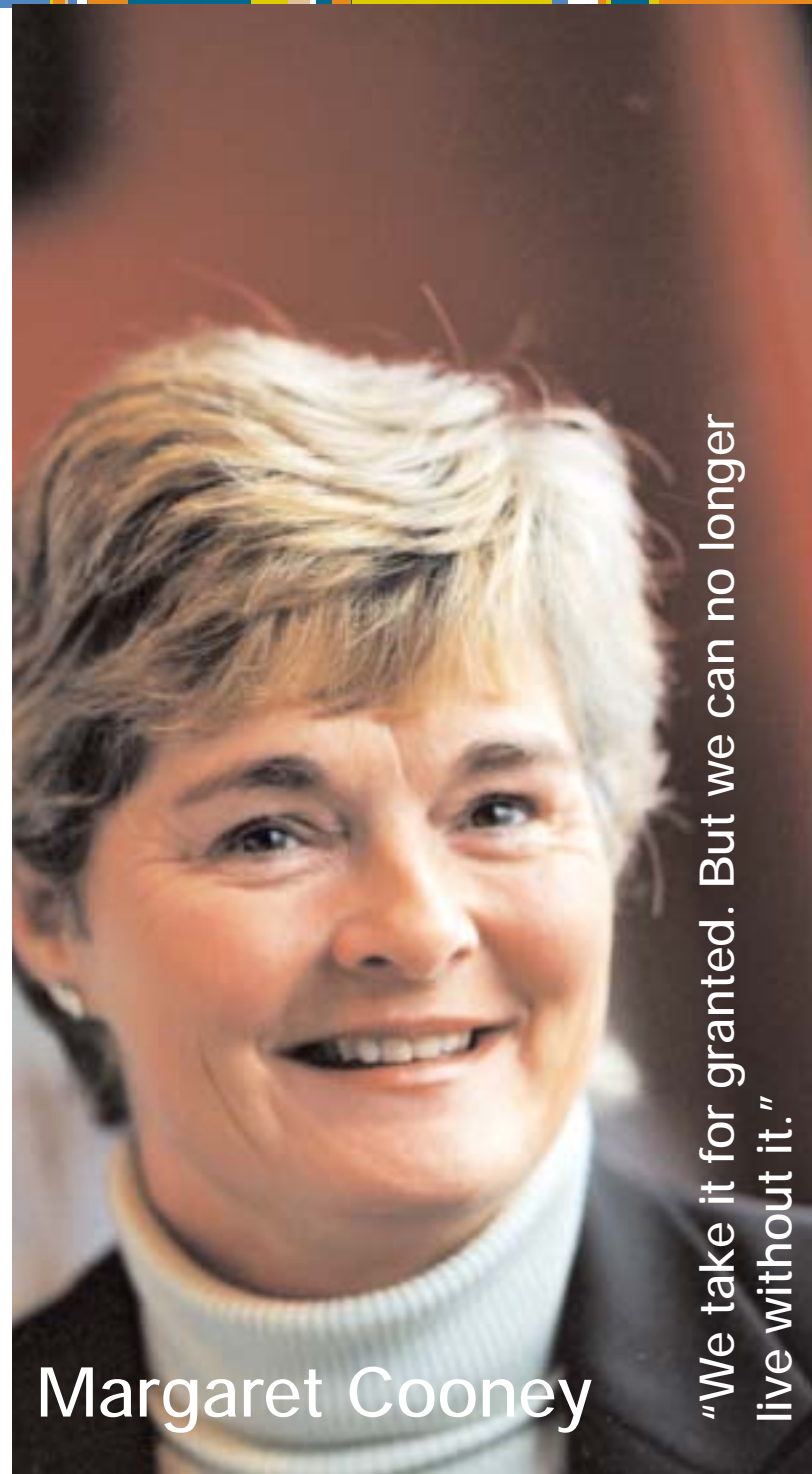
As soon as Ennis won, Margaret started work on what has to be the world's most spectacular computer lab. It's radiators are painted day-glo turquoise; its Ferrari red and royal blue walls display outsized surreal images. No student is likely to doze off in this place!

Most importantly, Margaret led. She explained, cajoled, nudged and encouraged her teachers — some of whom were in their 50's and 60's — to embrace what was for them an unfamiliar and intimidating technology.

The pay-off: A visiting college professor who, after watching an eight-year old girl nonchalantly wend her way through a complex program, said, "What will we teach her when she gets to college?"

Another, less obvious pay-off according to Margaret and others: The conspicuous fall-off in computer-related conversations of late. Teachers, students and nearly everyone else in Ennis have simply incorporated the technologies into their everyday lives — and become habituated to them. They've gotten hooked. This may be the surest sign of EIAT's success.

Ennis go brag!



Margaret Cooney

"We take it for granted. But we can no longer live without it."