

INSIDE THIS WEEK

Banty new Monaghan Manager
Page 44
€400,000 spent on Blayney Market House
Page 5

EirGrid presses ahead with plans
Page 2

Businesses urged to tackle Brexit head on
Page 4

Government working to cushion blow of LacPatrick redundancies - Minister

Peter Hughes

Several Departments of Government were working together to offer every possible support to the 68 workers made redundant at the LacPatrick (formerly Town of Monaghan Co-op) premises at Coolshannagh in Monaghan Town last Friday, Minister for Business, Enterprise and Employment Heather Humphreys TD has told the Northern Standard.

Lakeland Dairies, whose merger with LacPatrick was announced last year and approved by competition authorities in March of this year, announced the redundancies on Friday in a statement detailing what it described as "a plan for the adjustment of processing facilities at its site in Monaghan."

Staff at the Coolshannagh plant were informed of the news on Friday afternoon following board approval of the decision earlier. It is understood that yoghurt production at the Monaghan operation will cease, while the



• "Essential for Lakeland to realise efficiencies" - CEO Michael Hanley

Sinn Féin MEP for the Midlands North West Matt Carthy said that the job losses would be "a huge blow to Monaghan". He said the decision was "particularly galling" for elected representatives who had cautiously supported the merger with Lakeland on the basis that jobs at LacPatrick could be saved.

Mr Carthy called on Business Minister Humphreys to outline any advance detail of the job losses she had received prior to Friday's announcement.

In a strongly worded reaction, SF TD for Cavan/Monaghan Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin described the redundancy decision as "a despicable act".

Monaghan Co Council on Monday passed an urgent business motion calling for upskilling and other supports to be put in place for the 68 employees who will lose their jobs.

(See page 2 for political reaction and a report on the Co Council debate.)

Continued on page 2.

It's ability, not disability, that counts!



• Members of the Co Monaghan Disability Network get the message across at the Ability Event showcase held at the green space in front of Monaghan Courthouse on Thursday last.

The event showcased the achievements and aspirations of the members of the various disability support services throughout the county that are aligned to the network. "The abilities on display here today show that people with disabilities are active and equal citizens," Francis McCarron of Monaghan Integrated Development, which supports the activities of the network, told the event, which attracted the attention of a large number of those circulating in Monaghan Town centre throughout the morning. Mr McCarron said the initiative "encourages people with disabilities to be viewed...as equal citizens in our society." See full story and more pictures on page 6.

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Expansion of MDE Installations brings jobs and opportunities to Monaghan Town

Peter Hughes

The establishment of a Monaghan base of operations by electrical and mechanical engineering contracting firm MDE Installations represented a huge vote of confidence in the town and county with the challenges of Brexit looming, Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation Heather Humphreys TD has said on Friday.

The Cavan/Monaghan Fine Gael TD and Cabinet member was present in the company's new office facility on the first floor of Bogue's Business Park on Monaghan Town's Dublin Road to perform the official opening of the premises, a development that will expand the company's employment by 100 and deliver 40 new jobs in Monaghan itself.

Founded in 1990, MDE Installations has quickly developed into a major player in electrical and mechanical contracting work across the UK and the Republic of Ireland, handling a broad range of projects across a gamut of market sectors encompassing industrial, commercial, education, utilities and public infrastructure work. Recent developments at the St Louis School in Monaghan Town, the facilities of the Monaghan Ambulance Service, Castleblayney Community College and at the Castle Leslie Estate in Glaslough are among the projects that have benefited from the company's expertise.

They have also worked on contracts as Drogheda Train Station, Dundalk Train Station, the Scottish Provident Building and the Deloitte and Touche Offices in Belfast and the city's St Mary's University and City Hospital, Sligo Regional Hospital, Craigavon Area Hospital, the Sharp Building at Dublin's Hogan's Place and Dundalk Racing Stadium.

In the commercial and retail sphere, MDE have successfully completed over 150 Lidl projects throughout Ireland and England, and were the electrical company of choice for Marks & Spencer when the retail giant embarked on a major environmental project to reduce their carbon footprint.

MDE were one of three contractors appointed this year to deliver the National Smart Metering Programme, the rollout of which has been tasked to ESB Networks by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities. Project manager Eoghan Barrett from ESB Networks was present at Friday's official opening.

At the Contact Centre they have established in Monaghan the company are currently seeking to recruit agents on a part-time and permanent basis to provide "an excellent customer service experience" to ESB customers while the programme is being implemented.

They are also seeking qualified



Minister for Business, Enterprise, and Innovation Heather Humphreys TD, cutting the ribbon to officially open the MDE offices in Monaghan Town, with Malachy and Siobhán Donnelly, MDE and some of the staff. ©Rory Geary/The Northern Standard

electricians to act as approved installers for the delivery of the smart meter system into domestic and commercial properties.

Although the pristine and ergonomically functional new Monaghan offices project a go-ahead image in keeping with the company's ascendant stature in its field, with motivational messages on the walls encouraging team members to appreciate the value of teamwork and to "Become The Bridge", MDE is a family business at heart, with the values it espouses comprising its identifying acronym: Manage our projects safely; Deliver quality solutions; Excel in customer care. Founder and Managing Director Malachy Donnelly and his wife and fellow Director Siobhán seem to preside over the enterprise with a paternal, people-first approach.

Contracts Manager Frank McKillop heads up the Monaghan team, which recently added to its ranks Tara Kenny as Health & Safety Manager, Clare Sherry as Reports & Office Administrator, Stephen Rhodes as Technical Manager and Stephen Mackie as Warehouse Manager. These and some of the key company senior personnel such as Business Development Manager Donna Donnelly (Friday's convivial but efficient MC), Contracts Director Martin Conway, Estimating Manager Rob Deane, HSEQ Manager Geraldine Bradley and Design Manager Michael Daly were on hand to greet the Minister and the other invited guests to the pleasant official opening festivities.

THE JOURNEY

In his words of welcome to Minister Humphreys and the other guests, MDE Installations Managing Director Malachy Donnelly said, "It has been a journey to get to where we are - we have worked very hard to get us to this stage, and the people who have come on board with us have been absolutely brilliant."

Interim examiner appointed to Celtic Pure

By Veronica Corr

An interim examiner was appointed to Celtic Pure at the company's request in the High Court last week. National media reports stated that Mr. Justice David Barniville, having read an independent expert's report, felt that the company had a good chance of surviving as a going concern, if the examiner could come to an arrangement with creditors on its behalf.

It was also reported that the company had claimed that its sales for August were down 75% and that it had to absorb an estimated €3 million in one-off costs. Having appointed an examiner, the judge adjourned the case until later this month.

In response to a request from this newspaper, Celtic Pure issued a statement last Thursday, August 29th, in which it was confirmed that the unlimited company had made an application to the High Court requesting that it be placed in examinership. Subsequently, Mr. Declan McDonald of PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) was appointed.

This appointment was hailed as "the end of a difficult time for the company." The statement went on to reiterate that subsequent to two product recalls in recent weeks, (arising from a mechanical issue with the filtration of Well 3) one well remained decommissioned while the other six functioned without issue.

The firm was also pleased to announce that the HSE had signed off on the quality of the water and gave Celtic Pure the green light to continue production as normal, which would allow the company to re-engage with its key customers and continue to supply a high quality, approved product.

The statement explained that examinership gives a company protection for a period of up to 100 days and that it would give Celtic Pure breathing space to regain the confidence of its customers.

The company further committed to working with the examiner to secure external investment that will put it on a sound financial footing when it emerges from the process. The firm is confident that it can attract investment given its past track record and consistent profitability, in addition to the steps it took since the product recall, the quality of its production facilities and its excellent workforce. It is understood that the shareholders believe that the firm has a very strong future ahead.

The press release also noted Celtic Pure's contribution to the local economy over the last two decades and the local employment it provides, 75 direct jobs and others indirectly through its supply chain. Celtic Pure sponsors national and local sporting programmes alike, as well as being involved in charitable fundraising on an ongoing basis too.

Celtic Pure's statement concluded by expressing gratitude to its customers, suppliers, funders and employees who have been supportive of the company in recent weeks, adding that the bottled water producer looked forward to their continued support in the weeks ahead.

"Small pain for big gain" argument holds sway as Local Property Tax increased by 15%

Peter Hughes

The members of Monaghan Co Council on Monday voted 9-8 to increase the rate of Local Property Tax levied in the county by 15%.

The Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael members of the local authority combined to carry the proposal, advancing the rationale that the extra revenue generated would enable the county's three Municipal Districts to significantly increase the funding at their disposal to support local projects and provide match funding for developments advanced by community groups.

The Ballybay/Clones, Carrickmacross/Castleblayney and Monaghan Municipal Districts will each receive €330,000 for discretionary spending as a consequence of the decision, the proponents of which argued that the "big gain" from which would more than offset the "small pain" of the increase, which would work out at an extra 25c and 64c per week in additional payments for those who fell within the two main Local Property Tax bands in the county.

Sinn Féin adhered to its traditional stance on the issue by opposing the increase, Colm Carthy proposing instead that the tax be cut by 7.5%. The party's representatives contended that the people were taxed enough and accused the Government of squandering large amounts of taxpayers' money on projects such as the National Children's Hospital.

They were joined in their opposition by Independent councillors Paudge Connolly and Seamus Treanor, who both felt that the increase should have been introduced last year before the local government elections rather than in the immediate aftermath of a new Co Council taking office.

Comprehensive documentation circulated to the members in advance of Monday's debate and decision provided a welter of statistical information on the proposed increase - which was recommended to the members by Co Council Chief Executive Eamonn O'Sullivan - and detailed the financial effects of the Local Property Tax variance.

In his report to the members, Mr O'Sullivan stated: "The Budget adopted for 2019 used the discretionary element of the Local Property Tax as the main support in the weeks ahead."



NON-POPULIST APPROACH: Fine Gael's Sean Gilliland proposed the 15% Local Property Tax increase

contributor to the Municipal Allocation to each of the Municipal Districts. This ensured that each Municipal District has a discretionary budget that the members have direct control of.

"It is envisaged that the same approach will be adopted in relation to the 2020 Budget. However, it is recommended that the Local Property Tax be increased by 15% in order to provide additional resources to the Municipal Districts to increased their matched funding potential for the upcoming Urban and Rural Regeneration projects, Town and Village Renewal projects, tourism projects and economic development projects within the Municipal Districts and also provide for additional discretionary spend in the Municipal Districts such as the provision of public lighting and general improvement works for which a specific budget has not been provided.

"By taking this approach, it is proposed that a discretionary Municipal Allocation of €330,000 will be allocated to each of the Municipal Districts in 2020 and an allocation of €150,000 be set aside to service borrowings for industrial developments throughout the county. Any unspent portion of the Municipal Allocation at the year end will be transferred to Capital Account and will be available to the Municipal District in the following or future years. This will enable a Municipal District to generate a fund for a specific project that the members may want to develop."