

Carn director returns for new Derry festival

By Sue Doherty
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Catriona McLaughlin, who has been busy making a name for herself directing plays in London, will return to the North West later this month for the first-ever Farquhar Theatre Festival.

Catriona, who is originally from Carndonagh, recently received the prestigious Clore Fellowship, which is an accolade given to people making an impression on the arts scene. This is a great achievement for an Irish person working in the UK.

In Derry, she'll be directing one of Farquhar's most popular plays, 'The Recruiting Officer'.

The new festival is the brain child of local man Jonathan Burgess and has been three years in the making.

The Blue Eagle George Farquhar Theatre Festival will celebrate the work of the world-famous Derry playwright. Born in 1677, Farquhar is credited with some of the finest examples of comedy from the post-Restoration era of theatre.

Blue Eagle Productions will produce versions of 'The Recruiting Officer' and 'The Constant Couple', as well as bringing a touring production of 'The Beaux Stratagem' to the city. These productions will be staged in non-traditional theatre venues, thereby engaging the city's first major playwright with some of the ancient architecture of the city.

There will also be two abridged rehearsed readings of Farquhar's four other plays - 'The Inconstant', 'Love And A Bottle', 'Sir Harry Wildair' and 'The Twin Rivals'.

The Festival will also host talks on Farquhar, his life and times as well as on theatre from the period, and will include readings of Farquhar's poetry and recitals of music from the era.

Actors taking part include Nigel Betts, who has recently appeared in 'Emmerdale' as Eddie Hope and was in 'The Bill' just this week, and Emma Thornett, who appeared in the West End production of 'Blood Brothers'.

For more information, see www.blueeagleproductions.co.uk.



Catriona McLaughlin, from Carndonagh, will be returning to the North West this month for the first Farquhar Theatre Festival in Derry. She's pictured here with the festival organiser, playwright Jonathan Burgess.

Derry dominates at national science event

Derry schools have come out on top at a prestigious national science competition.

Ireland's top secondary level science students battled for Gold at the 15th IBM/DCU Irish Science Olympiad (ISO) at Dublin City University (DCU) last weekend.

Over 250 Irish secondary school students, from all 32 counties, were challenged in Biology, Chemistry, Computer Programming and Physics in a competition designed to further their interest in science and technology.

A total of five local students were presented with awards at the event including Ryan Breslin, St Columbs College, (Gold in Biology); Matthew Nicholl, Foyle College, (Gold in Physics); Carol-ann Gallagher, Thornhill College, (Bronze in Biology); Emma O'Kane, Thonhill College, Derry (Bronze in Chemistry); and Thomas McFadden, St Columbs College, (Bronze in Chemistry).

Schools from around the country nominated their leading science students to compete in the annual ISO

finals for All-Ireland Gold, Silver and Bronze medals and, ultimately, a chance to represent Ireland at the International Science Olympiads later this year.

The annual IBM/DCU Irish Science Olympiad aims to stimulate the active interest of students; to promote and reward the pursuit of excellence in the sciences; and to convey the importance of advanced study and progressive learning in science.

The top four students from each subject will be invited to compete at this year's International Science Olympiads, which will be held in India for Biology; Hungary for Chemistry; Egypt for Computer Programming and Vietnam for Physics. Success on the international stage will result in Irish Gold Medal winners receiving a €2,500 IBM University scholarship; silver medal winners will receive a €1,250 scholarship; and bronze medal winners will receive a €750 scholarship. At last year's 2007 International Olympiads, five Irish students were presented with bronze medals and a €750 IBM University Scholarship.



Pictured, from left, are Biology Gold medal winners at the IBM/DCU Irish Science Olympiad in Dublin last weekend. Douglas Temple, Booterstown, Dublin; Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin, T.D.; and Ryan Breslin, St Columbs College, Buncrana Road, Derry.



Pictured, from left, are Chemistry Bronze medal winners at the IBM/DCU Irish Science Olympiad in Dublin last weekend - Eavan Gleeson, Holy Faith Secondary School, Clontarf, Dublin; Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin, T.D.; Emma O'Kane, Thonhill College, Derry; and Thomas McFadden, St Columbs College, Derry.



Pictured, from left, are Biology Bronze medal winners at the IBM/DCU Irish Science Olympiad in Dublin last weekend - Andrea Bickerdike, Ashton School, Blackrook Road, Cork; Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin, T.D.; Stephanie Croghan, Sutton Park, Dublin; and Carol-Ann Gallagher, Thornhill College, Derry.



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Victims commissioner will draw on Bloody Sunday role

One of the newly appointed victims commissioners has described her experience working with the Bloody Sunday Trust as a "huge leg-up" to her new position.

Patricia MacBride worked as the project manager for the Bloody Sunday Trust in Derry for six years and said the experience she gained there had proved to be "invaluable."

"Certainly the six years I spent working with the Bloody Sunday Trust was a huge leg up for this post. Not only was I working with a community based organisation addressing the needs of survivors and victims, but I also had the opportunity to work with people from right across the community and indeed right across the world and see how they try to deal with their experience. I will draw on that experience when I go out into the field with my fellow commissioners and I am sure they will also use their own experience," he said.

Ms MacBride said she expects her new post to be challenging but explained she is looking forward to the task. "We are under no illusions about the nature of this job. I am expecting huge challenges. The first thing the four of us want to do is put the difficulties surrounding the application process behind us and move forward and get on with our work."

"One of the greatest facing us is reaching out to everyone whose views we want to take into consideration. I want to reach out particularly to the people who do not already belong to victims groups and the people who are out there on their own, trying to manage their grief and suffering by themselves."



Patricia MacBride, one of the newly announced Victims Commissioners.

"The main consideration for me and for the other members of the commission will be the needs of victims. We will be meeting to work out our approach in terms of our remit and funding and a number of other issues but it will certainly be a bottom up approach. It will be victim centred and victim led," she said.

Ms MacBride said she is confident all members of the new commission will work well together. "We have known each other for just a week now and in that short time we have already established a good working relationship. We all have a great deal of respect for each other and we are comfortable working together and all of us are looking forward to getting on with what we have been chosen to do," she said.

Strabane moves to set up group on suicide

A large crowd gathered in Strabane on Wednesday evening for a Suicide Awareness Meeting aimed finding ways to help vulnerable people in Strabane District.

The meeting was organised by Madeline McCurdy, whose sister Grainne tragically took her own life eight years ago, and representatives from a number of different support groups spoke at the event.

Madeline said: "When I lost my sister I had the backing of my family but little or no support from counsellors or professionals."

"The problem was that the professionals I spoke to hadn't lost anyone close themselves and so I may as

well have been talking to a stranger."

Madeline wanted to organise an open meeting that everyone was welcome to attend, whether or not they have suffered a bereavement because of suicide or have contemplated it themselves.

Madeline said: "The meeting on Wednesday was just the next step in the process of setting up a group that people can turn to if they are worried or feel vulnerable. Suicide affects people from all walks of life and it is important that they are able to voice their opinions and express themselves. That is why we are doing this."

The meeting was held in the Fir Trees, Strabane, and there are plans for a follow-up towards the end of February.



Pictured are speakers at the Suicide Awareness Meeting in Strabane on Wednesday evening. From left are representatives from the Men's Action Network, Cahal Monaghan, chairman of the meeting, Mickey Cunningham, John Magee and Wendy McColgan.

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Hot tub slashed

Vandals have slashed the cover of a hot tub at a house in Largy Road in Limavady. The damage, which has been estimated at £1,800, was discovered around 7.30pm on Friday, January 25 but may have occurred sometime during the previous day.

Anyone who can help to identify those responsible is asked to contact the police at Limavady on 0845 600 8000, or through the 'Crimestoppers' charity anonymously on freephone 0800 555111.

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