

Total Stories: 30

Published: Fri, Jun 22, 2007

Donegal example inspired idea for first gaeltacht outside of Ireland

A NUMBER of students who attended Irish language classes in Glencolmcille saw their dream come true last week when they officially opened the first permanent Gaeltacht outside of Ireland.

More than 200 guests of Cumann na Gaeltachta in Kingston, Canada attended the ceremony at the recently purchased 60-acre parcel of land on Saturday. His Excellency, Declan Kelly, Irish Ambassador to Canada was also there.

The Cumann na Gaeltachta was set up in 1958 when they purchased the lush green site with river frontage in South East Ontario near the American border for \$60,000 to establish their permanent Gaeltacht site.

MacCom Charraite and other members of the Cumann regularly attended Irish language and cultural programmes with Oideas Gael in Glencolmcille. Teachers from Oideas also travelled to Canada twice a year to teach Irish classes.

Aralt Mac Giolla Chainnigh, also a leading member of the Cumann in Kingston, described the event as an "*absolutely tremendous day*". "*The idea was to bring all these people together to see the site see all the possibilities that we have planned for here,*" he said.

He said that two cheques for \$1,000 were presented to them at the opening on behalf of Oideas Gael and Údarás Na Gaeltachta.

The land is a half an hour drive from Kingston, near a town Erinsville (Tamworth), and is situated close to the famous Lake Ontario. Kingston's first five Mayors were Irish and there is a very deep Irish historical connections there, Aralt said. Aralt is a teacher of physics and astronomy in the Royal Military College of Canada and his ancestors hail from Sligo and Derry.

He says they want to develop the site at "the rate of demand" and build 16 cabins and a cultural centre as they go along. They hope to start construction within five years. However, in the meantime, the Cumann plan to run Irish language and cultural weekends on the property by using large marquees.

The Cumann based their ideas on the Oideas Gael concept in Glencolmcille which has attracted hundreds of participants to take part in its highly acclaimed language courses and cultural programmes. They are supported in their endeavours by Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann who promote Irish music, culture and art in Ireland and around the world.

Aralt says he has been to Ireland five times to spend time in different Gaeltachanna and that the Cumann are trying to preserve strong links with the Gaeltacht community here.

The Cumann has accumulated resources to date of approximately \$23,000 and a patron has agreed to put a further \$20,000 forward at low interest, with a moratorium on payments for two years.

Shares continue to be sold in Canada, America and Ireland to make the principal payments, and local members of the organisation have agreed to pay any shortfall. The Cumann also plan to lobby both the Canadian and Irish Governments for funding towards the new Gaeltacht. He added that the Cumann are trying to get official recognition of Irish as a foreign language in Ontario State.

They recently received approval of 20,000 euro from Éamon Ó Cuív, TD, who is the Minister of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs towards teacher training.

For more information on the Cumann na Gaeltachta project, e-mail: kenny-h@rmc.ca

Original article: <http://archive.is/JXQZw>