Business Profile - Rochie Holohan

Written by Graham Lynch, Thursday 03 April 2008.

"In today's society, people are great for saluting the work of the Gardaí and teachers and doctors and nurses. That's all well and good, but no one is out there saying thanks to the business people which, in my personal opinion, is totally wrong," says Rochie Holohan, Chief Executive of the North Cork Enterprise Board, with no small amount of gusto.

"In some circles, people in business are even treated like lepers, but the reality is that it's these very people that run successful businesses who essentially make local communities tick. We would be nowhere were it not for them - they create the jobs and provide invaluable services, which leads to a better quality of live and helps communities to grow."

Call this a prevailing sense of injustice, or simply chalk it down to a passion for good business, but there's no certainly no doubting the commitment Rochie has to his role with the NCEB, a position he has held for the past 15 years.

In addition to the long and distinguished list of qualifications he has amassed over the years, including a Master Degree in Management Training and a Master Practitioner Certificate in Neuro Linguistic Programming, Time Line Therapy and Hypnosis, to name but two, Rochie has also undertaken training work with many groups and companies in Ireland and Northern Ireland, in addition to completing several consultancy assignments in Albania, Denmark, Greece, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, the UK and Zambia.

"All of those," Rochie says, "were focussed on the strengthening of critical organisations, on working with and training Senior Managers and on the training of Trainers." He continues to do about twenty days a year as a consultant trainer, mainly leading in-company workshops on strategic planning, leadership skills and communication skills.

But it is in his role as the Chief Executive of the public sector 'not for profit' NCEB that Rochie derives the most job satisfaction, for it is in this role, he says, that he is best equipped to make businesses in his local community better, more cost-efficient and crucially more profitable, resulting in more sustainable, thriving, productive communities.

The NCEB was one of 35 'not-for-profit' companies set up by the Government throughout the country in 1993 in order to 'promote enterprise and employment at a local level' and 'to fill a gap in the support services to local enterprise activity'. The NCEB works in the northern division of County Cork, which includes the five local areas of Charleville, Duhallow, Fermoy, Mallow and Mitchelstown - a total population of 80,795, which represents a huge increase of 10.56% from 2002.

"This," Rochie says, "is indicative of the work being carried out by the NCEB - proof of a growing community with increased business opportunities.

In the first years from 1993 through to 2000, the NCEB approved almost €3 million in grants to 168 new start up businesses with a potential of 538 additional new jobs. As of 31 December 2007, 508 of those 538 jobs were in place on the ground, up 81 on the same figure as of the December 2006 projects.

As its long-term Chief Executive, Rochie has overseen a period of great change not only for the local community, but also of the NCEB itself. While in the first few years the enterprise boards were seen by many as no more than grant agencies, those behind the NCEB initiative saw the greater longer term potential for roles such as that of provider of top quality support services to existing, new and potential Business Owners, local business lobby group and local culture change agents - promoting a pro-business culture via publicising those roles. That in turn resulted in the NCEB choosing to focus on these four key activities.

The Board's growth is represented by the increase in the number consultations that take place every year. "The top priority of the Executives is to meet quietly with existing, new and future Business Owners, who are starting or growing their own business. What is offered is a one-to-one 'first port of call' business information and guidance service with support in the development of business proposals; in the planning of marketing strategies, in networking, in sourcing new linkages, new contacts and research facilities. Last year some 680 of these consultations took place, compared to a high of 1,000 in 1999 and an average of 500 in recent years. After these initial consultations our next most important priorities are the provision of business training and education, support to business networks and our school's business enterprise programme."

For the next national planning period, Rochie says the Board Members are committed to building an Enterprise Action Plan for each of the five local areas, where this proves feasible - this approach, he says, should maximise the potential for consultation in the planning phase and for the implementation of agreed actions in partnership with the Business Community in each of those local areas.