

ECHOOPINION

FIGURES from the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) which show absenteeism costing Irish business in the region of €1.5 billion a year are deeply worrying.

Alcohol — as with virtually every other problem in this country — has been linked to the trend, with one-eighth of companies citing alcohol-related illnesses as a cause of short-term absence for males.

However, in real terms the number of drink-related absences from work are

WE SAY

The Echo's viewpoint

probably much higher.

A survey of 557 firms found that 40% of short term absence occurs around the weekend, and that the problem is at its worst in large companies and in the manufacturing sector.

An estimated 14 million working days — or eight days per employee — are

Drink-linked work absence is serious

lost every year as a result. IBEC director Brian Geoghegan rightly describes the problem as a serious economic and social issue.

Apart from the direct impact on the

workplace — lost productivity and increased pressure on colleagues — the cumulative effect of absenteeism on the wider economy is serious.

Ireland prides itself as a know-

ledge-based economy at the cutting edge of the international marketplace.

A serious problem with alcohol-related absenteeism could cause untold damage to our reputation, discouraging foreign investment and bringing a halt to our development as one of the world's foremost economies.

It took a long time to cast off the old cliché about drunken, unreliable Paddies who don't turn up for work on a Monday. It's time to tackle drink-related absenteeism.

TALKING HEAD

A real guide for Cork's foreigners



NEW LOOK: Cork city is on the up after recent works.

IT'S time for a few home truths. Last Thursday in this newspaper an article appeared manifesting itself as a guide to Cork for foreign students — foreign students being anybody arriving from outside the county bounds.

This article from the peoplesrepublicofcork.com caught my eye because I had been preparing and researching a similar guide for today's column and as guides are one of the easiest things to do in journalism, I'm going to plough ahead and do it anyway.

Coincidences like this are more common than you think in the newspaper business. The weekend before last the Cork and Dublin media, out of jealousy, tried to hijack Kerry's All-Ireland win by choosing the very same weekend to splash across their front pages stories about a pop star called Kerry breaking up with her husband and the Democratic candidate's poor polling in the run-up to the election in America, so they could balance the one positive story about Kerry with two negative ones.

From that rant, you've probably guessed my conception, birth and suckling took place in the Kingdom.



ROB O'SHEA has a few home truths for Cork people...

More recently though, I had found myself residing in Midleton: So good they named it so because it was between two other towns.

I'll have nothing bad said against Midleton, hear me, it is a fine town, with many off licenses and bookmakers and so forth.

Commuting to and from the city was taking its toll however, and after being downwind of one too many inane conversations on the bus home, I decided it was time to make the move.

Therefore, as a new foreigner in the city of a few weeks' experience, I feel I am better positioned to offer advice about Cork city to new arrivals than the locals with their propaganda.

As was plainly obvious to anyone reading the article last week, the people of Cork think they're great, which they will spend no end of time telling you.

I will agree that Cork people are a friendly bunch in the main; welcoming, effusive and a bit clingy. This makes orientating yourself

with the place easier.

The city has also provided you with cultural officers who patrol the streets, ready to help you with any enquiries you may have. They are easy to spot: Teenage girls travelling in pairs, whose uniforms are Fila tracksuits of pastel blue and pink and large gold earrings. Want to know where Jack Lynch is buried? just ask one of these helpful girls.

Remember that for the first month the taxi service of Cork is free to new college students, to further help you get to know your way around the city. Although the taxi-men don't expect a tip, I think it is only fair that you give them one. Before the protesting driver can refuse you, just drop a euro into his front shirt pocket, say, "there you go now, no arguments," and hop out of the car before he can catch up with you and give it back.

The run away from the taxi will probably have made you thirsty. Thankfully, there are no end of good watering holes in Cork. Try all of them until you

find one that suits you.

Pray don't think Cork is all about drinking. Father Mathew stands proud looking up Patrick's Hill, a man who stood for temperance, a leader of pioneers. I often found myself standing beneath him asking for forgiveness, but I find aspirin works better now.

Have a walk around. The city may seem in chaos, but with a little imagination it's plain to see Cork is a town on the up.

Patrick Street is finished and looking fine. Notice the courthouse on Washington Street. This isn't an actual development site, but where apprentice builders learn their trade before moving on to do actual work on other parts of the city.

There is a new pedestrian bridge across the Lee on its way too at the Coal Quay. This will allow folk from either side of the Lee to cross and mingle with each other for the first time.

Soon you will be able to

follow the Frank O'Connor walk from the house he was born in on Morrison's Island, up to the northside where he grew up, down to the bus station where he got on the first bus out of here when he was old enough.

Ah, the bus station. It too is undergoing redevelopment, but the old one will always have a place in my heart, a part of Cork that was forever Sarajevo.

You needn't wait until 2005 for a bit of culture either.

This is a great time of year for cultural stuff in Cork. Next Bank Holiday weekend we have the jazz festival, where Cork takes its yearly quota of jazz, blues and soul, freeing up the rest of the year for other music.

Before that is the film festival starting next Sunday. I'll tell you more about that next week. Unless somebody else in the paper wishes to publish a tongue-in-cheek look at it before me.

In which case, you'll find me under Father Mathew.

YOU SAY

Swap the ghosts for saints

● ONCE again, it's the season for Halloween parties. Since it will be on the eve of All Saints Day, will we be dressing our children in saints' costumes? No, they will be dressed as ghosts and demons, complete with pitchfork and horns.

Many of them will turn up like this for the party at their local Catholic school.

Since Halloween means 'eve of All Saints', I wonder how Our Lord and his saints in Heaven feel about this, since the celebration is supposed to be in their honour?

I would like to suggest to parents either to hold an All Saints Party at their own home or to consider asking their child's teacher to try having one and the children could come dressed as a saint.

It can be an interesting project for each child and their parents to find out about a particular saint and to make a costume themselves, or they could have a class play.

Some of the interesting ones that come to mind are St Ignatius Loyola, St Bridget or St Philomena.

S O'Farrell, Cork (full address supplied).

● FINE Gael leader Deputy Enda Kenny must be given credit for the recent new admission to the Fine Gael Parliamentary Party of Wexford Deputy Liam Twomey.

This is another example of Mr Kenny's leadership in his ability to attract support towards a common cause — removing this awful Government from office.

The Government was given much more than a reprimand in the June elections — it was told by the people to prepare to leave office and be replaced by a more compassionate and prudent Fine Gael-led coalition with Enda Kenny as Taoiseach after the next General Election.

Mark Wakefield, Fine Gael youth officer.

** All letters must include a full name and address, which may be withheld on request. We reserve the right to edit letters. Our contact details are at the foot of the page.*

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HOW TO CONTACT US

PHONE
Newsdesk: Cork: (021) 4802142 or 4802154
Limerick: (061) 414495
Sportsdesk: Cork: (021) 4802228
Features: (021) 4802162

WRITE
 Evening Echo, Academy Street,
 Cork or 89 O'Connell Street, Limerick.

E-MAIL
echo.ed@eecho.ie

FAX
 (021) 4802135

THE LAST WORD

"Stupid is forever, ignorance can be fixed."

Don Wood