

## ECHONEWS

# his plans for his term in office education



**REUNION:** Ted Owens, Kevin Coveny, Dave Cunningham and Joe O'Mahony at a reception for the Glen Rovers and St. Nicks 1976 minor winning team reunion.

our services at any level. We are obviously trying to ensure that there are avenues of progression for people, from our adult literacy and community education service to further studies."

There are many strands to the VEC's work, but one that is very important is community education, according to Mr Owens.

He said: "We provide teaching hours in more than 80 centres for community education throughout the city. We work very closely with community development groups and other agencies.

"A lot of courses initially are of recreational hobby type course, but even that now there is a move towards certificate of all learning.

"Recently the National Qualification Authority set out a framework of qualification which ranges from Level 1 (which is basic learning) up to Level 10 — the idea basically is that a person can progress along that ladder, based on certification.

"We can provide courses for people who already have degree qualifications and who want to further their professional studies. But we also provide courses for those who have advanced from the Adult Literacy Schemes to our Community Education Service, I am very anxious to build bridges between those and our Further Education (FE) colleges."

He added: "Learning is more than getting a certificate, but having said that, certification is important if someone is to progress onto the next level. I believe that education provides people with an opportunity for personal and social fulfilment and we are most anxious to provide those people with opportunities.

"I believe there is the danger that there is a greater social divide than ever before and I believe that education can be a great bridge there."

He said one of the main challenges facing the VEC is to access groups who have not availed of education to-date.

"People have had unfortunately negative experiences and in an era of almost full employment some people don't necessarily see the need to return to learning or to up skill.

"One of the main challenges we face is to try and access these groups and encourage them to re-enter and become part of the system as such.

"Because quite often the groups who could benefit from continuing education are the groups who are least likely to try and access it."

He added that their youth services are of huge importance too, particularly the Youth Research Centres, which provide students who for one reason or another have not succeeded in mainstream schooling a second chance at education and training.

"The teachers in Youth Reach have done a tremendous job in catering for the needs of these students. A lot of these students have benefited greatly and have progressed to good employment."

In terms of the VEC's further education colleges Mr Owens said he believed that they have been one of the great successes of the Irish education sector.

"They have proved hugely responsive to the economic and social needs of the Cork city and indeed county and Munster area.

"The teachers have shown tremendous flexibility in developing a whole range of courses to suit local economic need."

He added that the colleges also provide a tremendous opportunity for students who for one reason or another have not managed to enter preferred course in universities or in Institutes of Technologies (ITs).

"A lot of our courses have given

people the opportunity to progress. We have very close links with British universities and in later years with the Irish ITs and universities.

"What now happens is there is a link scheme between the universities and FE colleges and what has happened is that universities and ITs keep a certain percentage of space on their courses for graduates of FE colleges."

He said another interesting part of the FE colleges is that a huge percentage of students have not come from the traditional second-level mainstream route.

"Approximately 46% of our full-time students are people returning to education. The attraction of the colleges for a lot of adult learners, is that people are enrolled on the basis of interview, their suitability is then judged, rather than points, that's for people who are over 21 years of age."

Mr Owen said the extensive role of the VEC means that almost every citizen in Cork could be a potential customer.

In summation of his and the VEC's hopes for the future, Mr Owens said: "What we trying to do is build avenues of progression, from the most basic of educational levels to as high as people can go. I see that as an integral part of our service.

"Basically what we are looking at, what my main aim is to ensure that we provide quality service and that the emphasis is on the learner.

"I am also particularly interested in co-operation with other agencies, to ensure that Cork city is a centre of learning, and that we bring about in Cork city as fair, equitable and inclusive society as we possibly can through an educated populous.

"I am particularly interested in trying to ensure that groups who have traditionally found it difficult to access or avail of our services."

## O'Shea on Monday



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### Carving up the green cheese of my beloved moon

*'DURING the finale a big screen flashes up images of Irish and Irish-Americans. It culminates in a fake shot of Neil Armstrong planting a Tricolour on the moon'.*

— Yesterday's *Sunday Times* review of Michael Flatley's *Celtic Tiger*, his new show on Broadway.

**ROBERT O'SHEA**  
*on his fascination  
with outer space  
and man's landing  
on the Moon.*

IT IS ten years to the day since the verdict of the OJ Simpson trial. I forget which way it went now, but that does not concern us here.

Mr Simpson found fame in the US as a running back for the American football team the Buffalo Bills, but internationally more so for his eclectic film career, from the wonderful *The Naked Gun* to the abysmal *The Naked Gun 33 And A Third: The Final Insult*, and one fairly funny *Naked Gun (The Smell of Fear)* in between.

One of his first roles was in an underrated gem called *Capricorn One*, which usually airs at 3am on a weeknight on RTÉ2 every couple of years. The film, starring James Brolin, charts the supposed voyage of three US astronauts on a mission to Mars.

The sting is that it's a hoax because they will be recording the landing in a television studio.

The astronauts aren't in on it though and when they resist the idea they have to be killed by the Government, while their relatives and friends will be told they were lost in space.

It's the sort of film that conspiracy theorists adore.

I number myself among those conspiracy theorists. I don't believe Neil Armstrong was the first man on the moon; I believe *Apollo 11* went to the moon all right, but I think Buzz Aldrin was the first guy out. He was wearing Neil's suit. People point out it was Neil's voice on the TV, but he could easily have done that broadcast from inside the lunar module while Buzz was outside prancing about. This is conjecture, of course, but I'd just like to get the debate out in the open and let the public decide.

Like most children, I was fascinated by the idea of space. I'll never forget a night when I was a kid, about seven or eight, I couldn't sleep so I went out into the back garden and looked up at the cloudless sky and saw The Plough and surrounding it were thousands of stars and a luminescent moon.

It was an incredibly humbling experience. Humbling and humiliating, because it turned out I was on a school tour to a planetarium and was wearing only my pyjamas bottoms.

But every cloud has a silver lining, and during the traumatic childhood years ahead, the moon provided that silver lining to those very clouds.

Was the relationship that I developed with the moon unhealthy? Looking back, it is easy to say yes. But

like the tides, I seemed to be drawn to its powerful gravitational pull. The moon was a substitute father-in-law to me. I'd often pray to it, tell its surface disc my secret desires and fears. I grew out of this phase (certainly no pun intended) in my teens though and developed a healthy platonic relationship that any boy should have with the closest satellite to their home planet.

All this may seem confusing to the average reader, but if there is one thing I do dislike it is an average reader. But 500 words in, it is time to make this column topical, before we drown in a sea of tranquil reminiscence.

Last week NASA announced it is planning to send astronauts back to the moon by 2018. And right now, out in orbit, is Gregory Olsen, a 60-year-old US businessman and the third space tourist after paying US\$20 million to spend 11 days on the International Space Station.

Now we all know who the first two men on the moon were (we can leave wrangling over the order to the letters pages later) but how many know the names of the last two men on the moon?

Eugene Cernan and Harrison Schmitt. Anybody?

It's lamentable that there have only been 11 people on the moon and most of the world only know two of them.

That last manned mission to the moon was in 1972. People had seemingly grown bored of lunar voyages by that stage, but Cernan and Schmitt did make one ground-breaking discovery; a reddish soil found in one crater. When tests were later run on this soil it was discovered to contain samples of, yes, OJ Simpson's blood DNA.

No, it was a sign of possible volcanic activity on the moon but obviously no one is interested that there may have been volcanoes on the moon at some stage, as we haven't sent anyone up since.

That's where I come in. I know it might sound ambitious, but if some benefactor (Michael Flatley, perhaps) were to give me €20 million and the Government and EU could match that, and if I could get a loan from the bank, then, well I think my ambition could be realised. Shoot for the stars and you may hit the moon and all that. I'm even hoping to get OJ on board for my project.

The working title is *The Naked Gun 444: The one before Leslie Neilsen dies*.