

MAY 27TH 2024

CORK CHAMBER 2024 AGM
PRESIDENT'S INAUGURATION SPEECH - ROB HORGAN

Past Presidents, Ladies and gentlemen, esteemed guests, members of our vibrant business community. It is a great honour to step into this role as president of Cork Chamber of Commerce.

Ronan, on behalf of the board, the chamber team and the wider members of Cork Chamber, thank you most sincerely for your dedication through your presidency. Your leadership, and collegial approach, has resonated deeply across the community.

There is another name engraved on this chain today. The weight of these chains, and the great leadership they represent over the decades, is both a legacy and a standard of excellence that has played no small part in shaping the Cork we know and love today.

Cork Chamber sets out a firm, ambitious and determined vision for an invigorating and smart city region. One that is relentlessly progressive, authentic and expressive. A vision which sees Cork as a robust, reliable and grounded environment while remaining innovative and flexible. There is a standard of excellence embodied by our Chamber, its team and board that exceeds the norm.

As the president of Cork Chamber, I look forward to playing my part in representing such a motivated Chamber of Commerce, and Representing YOU, in what I consider to be Ireland's most progressive business community – in the city region that I am privileged to call home.

Like most, I hold great pride in my home county. I grew up not far from here, on the outskirts of the city. What was then a rural, sparsely populated patch, is now an established suburb and part of the bustling metropolitan area.

This city has been my playground, my school ground, my workplace, my homeplace. It has provided me with a wonderful base from which I have been fortunate enough to grow my career and start a business. I have benefited from all that Cork has to offer and this is what makes me determined to support Cork Chamber's ambition to enhance the region's offering. Cork deserves its place as one of Europe's top city regions. As an international hub for business, giving Ireland a second city that punches well above its weight.

Cork City generates the highest revenue per person in Ireland. Cork boasts strong business clusters across ICT, pharma, cyber security, renewable energy, financial and professional services, maritime and agri-food. Our universities & colleges of further education have over 40,000 students and over 10,000 graduates annually combined. With our pro-business environment it is no wonder that Cork was ranked No 1 small European city for FDI strategy in the Financial Times European Cities and Regions of the Future.

It is thanks to our energised, active and engaged business community that Cork Chamber is mandated and empowered to represent the interests of the business community.

There is so much to be celebrated and harnessed. And thanks to you, our energised, active and engaged members, we know what more needs to be done to ensure Cork continues to provide the right ecosystem for business to thrive, to foster innovation and to nurture a balanced society and economy.

Delivery of housing remains a challenge. And while we are seeing some developments come on stream, and these will have the most impact on housing number, we must remain focused on delivery to ensure our economy can continue to grow. With the population of Cork set to grow significantly in the coming years we need to see a pace of housing delivery not witnessed before.

In an era with so much pressure for viable accommodation, we must be relentless in pursuing all the options. Transforming our above shop spaces. Rejuvenating derelict properties. The renovations that are most needed are those to our thinking, if we are to deliver this. Instead of listing the barriers, we need to all list the solutions.

All stakeholders must be determined to seek change in how we think about, use and plan for the urban spaces that we all look forward to having. Thereby making best use of the assets that we have while enhancing the urban environment, in parallel with investing in new developments. We simply must find creative resolutions to the issues that are rendering so much real estate vacant and falling into disrepair.

Our urban landscapes, in the city, the many beautiful towns and communities across the county deserve to be at their best, with bustling streets and green spaces. With a rich mix of offices, retailers, cultural sites, hospitality businesses and importantly, accommodation. Variety is essential, however, and we need to ensure that our city works for everybody. A safe city is non-negotiable. It's no longer acceptable to rely on reported crime numbers as a measure of safety. CORK City centre needs to be a welcoming place where everybody feels safe. There is no doubt that we need greater resourcing for our gardai to support our communities. This resource needs to be a publicly visible Garda presence, not a quoted number.

Fortunately, as our population has grown and evolved, we have gained more champions for brand Cork. Almost half of the current Cork City residents were born outside of Cork. We now live in a multicultural city. This brings a wealth of opportunities to our doorstep; inspiring creativity, innovation and economic growth. By opening our arms to different cultures, we invite new perspectives, ideas, and importantly skills, which fuel entrepreneurship and drive business growth.

We must all continue to ensure that Cork is an attractive place to come to – whether that is to study, live, work, visit or invest in. Fostering inclusive, dynamic communities is essential; where everyone has the chance to thrive. Our local representatives must do all in their power to preserve and enrich the multicultural fabric of our towns and communities, helping them to grow and evolve, thereby ensuring social cohesion, deep integration and balance. A thriving society supports a thriving economy.

The talented, skilled and available workforce is the lifeblood of our region's economic vitality. Cork's ability to nurture, attract, and retain talent is central to foster growth and innovation. Continued investment in higher and further education, and expansion of apprenticeship programmes is necessary to support our international competitiveness. We must also better support that same pool of employees through the provision of a more accessible, better functioning, and affordable childcare. If we are to retain talent we must ensure they have real choices when considering their participation in the workplace. It is simply unacceptable that lack of childcare is holding back parents from reaching their full potential.

Some changes to our city are more readily visible than others. The plans set out in Cork's transport strategy have the potential to transform the metropolitan area. How wonderful will it be to see light rail up and operating in the next 10 years? Delivery of smart, connected multi-modal transport options will help the people of Cork to be better connected, to live more sustainably and importantly to reduce our heavy car-dependency.

We don't expect to drive when visiting London, why do we expect it in Cork?

This will help our streets to be calmer and to be more people-oriented.

No doubt it will take adjustments to transition our behaviours, to create new habits.

But it is necessary if our metropolitan area is to continue to grow and do so sustainably.

Cork has the opportunity to be a key driver in Ireland's domestic energy production. Leveraging our strategic geographic location, existing ecosystem, talented workforce, and infrastructure, we stand poised to unlock this potential and foster its growth at every juncture.

But we must act now to ensure that this opportunity does not escape our grasp and we extract the full value of the energy and wider sector.



While Cork should not be the only region supporting renewable energy in Ireland it has to be the first.

Transforming our energy and transport systems will be key drivers in decarbonising our economy and supporting the journey to climate neutrality. This marks an exciting moment for Cork, and we must fully embrace it.

The Cork Chamber Board has shown outstanding commitment to the betterment of our business community. To outgoing members Thia Hennessy, CUBS UCC (Honorary Secretary), Gerard O'Donovan MTU (Honorary Treasurer), Maxine Hyde, Ballymaloe Foods and Debbie Power Future Planet, thank you for your time, dedication and service.

Today we have newly elected members Dr Jean Van Sinderen-Law, UCC, Conor O'Toole, Clayton Hotel Cork City, Carmel Lonergan, Trigon Hotels, Garrett O'Keeffe, Solarwinds, Gillian Bergin, Dell Technologies, Honorary Secretary, Susie Horgan, Springboard Communications and to Honorary Treasurer, Michael Nolan, Grant Thornton. I look forward to continued collaboration with the board, team and membership over the coming years.

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In closing, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the upcoming local and European elections. I urge each and every one of you to use your votes wisely. The candidates we elect will be entrusted with the responsibility of shaping the social and economic landscape of Cork for the next five years. I ask you to engage these candidates on the issues that are affecting your business. Your business is a valuable contributor to our local economy and it is in all our interests that our elected representatives are as ambitious for Cork as we are.

The Chamber is currently investing in making Fitzgerald house a more accessible, inclusive and sustainable workplace into the future.

We need to keep sustainability and inclusion to the front of every decision we all make in our businesses. It's leading by example like this will continue to keep Cork Chamber as the number one Chamber of Commerce in Ireland. Last week I met incoming President of Chambers Ireland, Margaret Considine.

When you hear first hand the high esteem that Cork chamber and the team is held in nationally, it brings home the weight of the office I'm stepping into.



Standing here as having been elected as custodian for the chain of office for the next two years is a very proud moment for me and my family. I am the third generation of the Horgan family who are active members of Cork Chamber of Commerce. I can assure you that I will work with the entire Chamber team and membership to ensure that our city continues to prosper through the Chambers engagement with key stakeholders.

When our city does well we all benefit. Thank you.