

Evolve or dissolve!

The Celtic Roots and Shannon Holiday story

- Who we are..
- Celtic Roots Studio create unique sculptures and gifts from bogwood over 5000 years old.
- Our retail store is located in Ballinahown Village near Athlone, Co Westmeath- (I chose this location because I wanted to work and live in a small village and undertake to see if I could make it self sustaining..)
- We retail our work online; in other retail craft stores and we are frequently commissioned to create one off pieces for special occasions.

We have completed pieces as awards for many of Ireland's most important events...from our rural location...

- Ryder Cup trophies during Ryder Cup competition in Ireland.
- Special Olympic's torch during Special Olympics in Ireland.
- Gifts during Ireland's Presidency of EU
- Irish Hairdressing Awards
- Intel Young Scientist of the Year awards

Overseas Awards completed include

- American Newspaper (Invest News) community awards
- Concern Person of year award New York
- Concern Brigid's awards Chicago
- Boyle Sports Cheltenham racing awards

Why evolve if successful?

- While we create unique pieces we are also sensitive to markets - a considerable amount of our work was overseas in US and collapse of dollar has meant no US business for last four years.
- Retail outlets are importing more gift products than stocking Irish made work. Ref CCOI market research figures.
- Many Irish gift companies are getting product made in China and retailing under Irish brand.
- These pressures have resulted in Irish made craft work coming under pressure for sales outlets and large number of crafts people leaving the creative industry.

Create an new opportunity to show people how work is created and sold - a more authentic experience

- CCOI developed new model for how local art and crafts can be sold at a locally with new retail model.
- Celtic Roots with other local crafts people were successful in their bid to become the first outlet using this model. The new retail outlet – Core Crafted Design opened in Ballinahown during summer 2008 thus developing the concept of the craft village and a unique craft experience in the midlands.

- Market discussion with Failte Ireland hugely encouraged us to go down the road of the “Learn to” experience, in that visitors can experience craftmaking themselves - both for children and adults.
- We followed through on this and with relevant research found it an excellent direction to take, thus adding to the overall understanding of what crafts are about and what visitors like to experience.

Ballinahown Craft Village!

- Since the opening of Core Crafted Design (representing Offaly and Westmeath craftmakers) the village has become a hub of craft activity - craft classes for children range from wooden toy making to encaustic wax to summer camps of felt making and Santa Claus craft making experiences.

The Results for Celtic Roots Studio and our village concept..

- The village is now a centre of excellence for crafts and Celtic Roots are an integral part of this dynamic change.
- We also now demonstrate woodcarving techniques to visitors and others complete pieces to take away on request.
- Midlands Tours commenced taking visitors from local hotels on day trips in the region and include the village and the craft making experience as part of their visit.

Meaningful visitor experience

- Ballinahown Village now offers visitors coming into the region the ‘craft experience’.
- They can purchase craft inspired and made within the region in an authentic setting.
- We have moved and continue to strive to making this experience as real and as cherished as possible for both the local and overseas visitor.
- We are assuming that we can do this to this high standard in the toughest market environment in years.
- Ballinahown received their first Bronze medal in the National Tidy Towns competition in 2009
- Westmeath County Council are designating us as an eco village with a craft /visitor development theme for the future.

Shannon Holidays

- Owen (my husband) built his first wooden cottage in 1991 as a means of creating employment for himself at Portlick, Glasson. Prior to that he had spent years overseas on construction work.
- He built it with self catering in mind and to meet the demand for coarse angling fishing on Lough Ree.

www.shannon-holidays.com

- The location is on the lakeshore adjoining 150 acres of woodland walks and is a beautiful quiet place.
- An existing cedar built wooden cottage on the site was an inspiration in terms of building style. He decided to use native douglas fir straight from the local sawmill to build the cottages and so to make them as sustainable as possible.

Self catering through the 90's onwards

- As Owen built each individual house at Portlick (5 in total) he found that there was sufficient business to fill the important months of the season with European fishermen mainly coming from one key fishing agency in Germany.
- I remember mentioning the worry if anything changed with this main agency that it would be tough but “ it's hard to change a winning formula” and the business was steady and the fishermen loved being beside the lake and Owen looking after their requirements including taking them fishing etc.

2000 onwards

- Foot and Mouth in 2001!
- Fishermen who had arrived for fishing in early Spring couldn't fish with the result of large scale cancellations and the start of the demise of fishing on the lake and his business.
- The main coarse angling fishing collapsed on Lough Ree after Summer 2001 for Owen.
- We decided that we needed to broaden his customer base and encourage more families and visitors to stay rather than what was achieved previously.
- Over the next years we developed the website and upgraded the houses in more natural and simple interior to reflect the cottage style in its purity.

Today

- We have completed a marina to cater for people who wish to stay in a cottage while cruising on the lake or for some of the family to just spend time in more spacious surrounding by night.
- The addition of the Thatch for taking group booking for parties and get togethers was completed in 2007.
- We have built a crannog off shore to connect with the thatch building as a small meditation space and a place to experience nature in a unique way. All the building materials were sourced on the lake or locally and totally natural.

The learning

- With Failte Ireland midlands region training support we are now focusing on the overall visitor offering and this year Ballinahown Craft Village advertised craft classes with our self catering accommodation for the first time.
- Owen has had to change from weekly bookings to short term stays and while harder in terms of maintenance it has ensured that at present we have sustained our business in these difficult times.
- We have found the Tourism Learning networks and local networking essential in this process and has helped us both to connect in a real way with our neighbours in the tourism industry .

Creating energy between our separate small enterprise

- We both have learned that our diverse businesses have now more in common than ever before.
- The customer who values crafts and wishes to experience them first hand also likes to stay in the natural environment and sleep in hand built cottages made from native materials. We hope that these key attributes will allow us to be in turn sustainable and relevant in the current climate.

Thank you for listening