

Claregalway Firm's UK Success

by Tom Gilmore, The Tuam Herald, July 2013

A Claregalway company ProAir Heat Recovery Ventilation System, set up some years ago by Dunmore native David McHugh from Kiltvna, is now making major strides in markets both at home and in the UK where the development of the firm's eco-friendly system for heating and ventilation of houses has been grant aided to the tune of over €0.5 million by the British Department of Energy & Climate Change.

The company, which is based in the Corporate Park in Claregalway, has been awarded the grant for the purposes of developing its new product. ProAir manufactures heat recovery ventilation (HRV) units in its facility in Claregalway from where it operates an installation service for these systems on a nationwide basis. HRV is a system commonly used in the new style build of today where buildings are very highly insulated and draught-proofed, with the result that they need to be mechanically ventilated in a controlled fashion rather than the traditional hole in the wall system. It works by removing polluted air from bathrooms and kitchens and using that air to warm incoming air to the building as it exits. Ireland is now leading the field in the area of low energy construction standards and in the use of such systems.

Over the past few years, this Co Galway company "has adopted the mantra of innovate or die" in an attempt to beat the recession, according to David McHugh who lives in Corofin. "We are happy that innovation and diversification has been our salvation. Enterprise Ireland have also been highly supportive both in developing our products and markets," says David. He added that the company's product range has been redeveloped and expanded, with a greater emphasis on being much more user-installer friendly and highly efficient. "This efficiency has been verified in the test labs of the Building Research Establishment (BRE) in Watford in England. "A huge company effort has been undertaken to establish a presence in the UK and I spent over half my time since mid 2011 over there. My advice to anyone who aspires to establish a market in Britain is to pack a suitcase and not just for the toothbrush," he said with a smile.

David says that the other elements necessary for success are contacts, partners and a rub of the green which many Irish firms now have in the UK markets. "Some time ago an architect friend based in Dublin spotted an opportunity to apply for what was termed, the energy entrepreneurs' fund sponsored by the UK Department of Energy and Climate Change.

"As it happened, some very interesting ideas had been floating around regarding innovative new products and it was decided to assemble a team and make an application. Five weeks later, a 100 page document was submitted outlining a collaborative proposal which included such prestigious partners as the BRE, Cardiff University, and an English contract manufacturer, with ProAir's UK subsidiary as lead applicant and co-ordinator.

"The consortium is one of the leading 30 companies to be funded. The money will be spent on a two-year project started recently, to develop and test a unit which will heat or cool and ventilate small areas, such as houses, and eliminate the need for traditional heating systems. "It will not only perform these functions within one unit, but will operate with efficiencies at over twice that achieved for similar units to date. This will result in phenomenal energy and carbon savings for end-users as we move forward towards the phase out of fossil fuel use," concluded David.