

President Mary McAleese paid a glowing tribute to National Learning Network graduates on a recent visit to Bantry

It was “a bright and shining day, when the sun shines down on achievement and opportunity and ability,” said Mary McAleese, President of Ireland, as she addressed a large crowd of well wishers who had gathered at National Learning Network Bantry last summer to welcome the President and her husband, Dr. Martin McAleese, on their official visit to the centre.

The sun certainly shone on the crowd, which included trainees and staff of National Learning Network Bantry; the Mayor of Cork County, Cllr PJ Sheehan, and Mayor of Bantry Cllr Letty Burke; along with representatives of FÁS and members of the Health Services Executive. Families of trainees and representatives of businesses who have contact with the centre were also in attendance as the President expressed her pleasure at being in Bantry for such a special occasion.

Following a tour of the centre’s new extension and photographs in the recently completed garden centre, which had been designed by trainees and staff, the President spoke to the assembly of her delight in sharing the graduation day with the graduates and their families.

Eighty-two people had received FETAC awards in Horticulture, Literacy, Numeracy, Art, Work Orientation and Personal Development as well as the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) earlier that day from Cllr Letty Baker, Mayor of Bantry.

Congratulating the trainees, the President said that the certificates were a symbol of



Shining Through

what they had achieved. “These certificates say a lot about who you are. They say that you are a person worthy of enormous respect, who has worked hard. They show not only the subjects which you have studied hard and achieved good marks in and mastered, but also a strength of character and of ability,” she said, before leading the crowd in a round of applause for the graduates, and wishing those leaving the centre well in their futures.

President McAleese’s visit also marked the official launch of the National Learning Network name in West Cork. The President

spoke of her appreciation of the work that National Learning Network does in West Cork and throughout Ireland. She paid tribute to the organisation and its staff for their determination in ensuring that people have “a place and a space to blossom and to show what they are capable of” before they go out into the world to meet its challenges.

The President unveiled a plaque to declare the new extension and garden centre officially open, enlisting the help of a young member of the crowd who enthusiastically counted down with her.



Following her address, President McAleese was presented with a book of short stories written by trainees of National Learning Network. A Bantry bay rose, grown by trainees in the garden centre, was also presented to the President by Bridget Hayes, the Chairperson of National Learning Network's student representative organisation, the N.R.C.

As part of her tour of the centre, President McAleese viewed the 'Illuminations' and Clonakilty Focus art exhibitions both of which were on display at the centre. The exhibitions showcased the many creative talents of National Learning Network students from the West Cork region and nationwide, including a piece by former Bantry student, Sean Healy, who was a finalist in the prestigious nationwide 'Illuminations' competition. Praising the creativity and talent expressed in the exhibition, President McAleese warned the audience not to miss it!



Above left: President Mary McAleese and her husband, Dr Martin McAleese, pictured enjoying the West Cork sunshine with new found friends at National Learning Network Bantry. During her visit to the centre, the President officially opened the centre's new extension and garden centre (picture left).

For anybody who has ever dreamed of packing in their career and pursuing a life in the arts, Roslyn Park College graduate, Tim Harden's story is an inspiration. Here he tells Rehab News of his journey from archaeologist to artist, and his delight at securing a place to study Fine Arts in the prestigious National College of Art and Design

Portrait of an Artist

After graduating with a degree in Irish and Greek and Roman Civilisation from UCD, Tim Harden embarked on a career as an archaeologist, working on a number of excavation sites in Germany and France, before returning to Ireland to work on the controversial Carrickmines site in Dublin.

But throughout this period, Tim had a sense that his chosen career was perhaps not for him. "I began to get the feeling that something was lacking. I wasn't fulfilled in what I was doing."

A brief stint in hospital reaffirmed these feelings, and a psychologist suggested that Tim should look at National Learning Network's Roslyn Park College. In 2002, Tim enrolled in the college's 'College Start' programme and quickly settled into student life at Roslyn Park College. He particularly enjoyed the flexibility and freedom that the college offers its students.

"With school and university you are restricted with set hours and timetables, but Roslyn Park College offers students much more flexibility. Importance is placed on students timetabling their own day with subjects and activities that they enjoy."

Having successfully completed the 'College Start', Tim progressed to the Foundation Level 3 programme, and it was while he was on this course that he began to avail of art classes that were offered to all students in the college.

"I had never taken any art classes before,

but within two or three lessons I had discovered that I could draw. The art instructors at Roslyn Park College – Paula Metcalf and Paula Erraught - were extremely supportive, in fact they spotted my talent before I even recognised it myself.

With their encouragement, I joined the college's Artlink Programme in March 2003. Finally, I had found something that I loved doing, and something that I was good at. From the beginning I had a sense that this is it, this is what I'm looking for."

According to Tim, learning to be creative and to have fun with his considerable artistic talent was a battle.

"During my time in school and college, I was always taught that there was only one right way of learning. At Roslyn Park College, I was encouraged to embrace a new way of working. The college's Artlink programme places a big emphasis on creating and developing an individual's personal style. It is so different from what I experienced in school and university. I have learned that there is no set or 'right' way of doing things. I have learned how to let go, to expand my horizons, and to have fun with my art.

"Art has made a huge difference to how I feel about myself. I have grown in confidence so much, and there is a real sense of achievement in creating an artistic piece and seeing it on show."

Tim's talent was quickly recognised

Tim Harden discovered his artistic talent while studying at National Learning Network's Roslyn Park College. Tim recently graduated from Roslyn Park College and is currently studying for a Fine Art degree in the National College of Art and Design.





within Roslyn Park College and he was one of a group of students commissioned to do a large 'Nature Panel' for the college canteen. The highly intricate plaster cast panel features scenes of Irish birds and wildlife. According to Tim, his art has helped him develop a stronger connection with nature, something that he is passionate about. In fact his portfolio, for which he was awarded straight distinctions by FETAC, featured many drawings and artistic pieces based around nature. Given his obvious talent, and the quality of his work, it was hardly surprising that Tim was offered a place at not only at the National College of Art and Design (NCAD), but also at DIT and Dun Laoghaire College of Art.

Tim is now half way through his first year studying for a Fine Art Degree in NCAD. It is 'a dream come true' for the young artist, and one which he admits would not have been possible without the support of staff and his classmates at Roslyn Park College.

"Through art, I have regained my confidence. I have learned how to have fun again and to see the world with fresh eyes. I really feel like I was given a second chance at Roslyn Park College, and I was sad to leave. However, having been given such a wonderful opportunity, I'm determined to make the very most of it.

"Thanks to my experiences at Roslyn Park College I no longer feel daunted about the future – I feel like I have something to offer and I'm determined to make my mark!"



Eastern Promise

Fancy a taste of the Orient? Rehab Foundation are looking for volunteers to join them on an unforgettable adventure - as they explore two beautiful and exotic countries - Thailand and Vietnam - in March 2006.

Rehab walkers will spend eleven glorious days exploring the many delights that these charming and picturesque countries have to offer. The trek begins in the bustling Thai city of Bangkok, where walkers will spend two days visiting the sights of the city, including the magnificent Grand Palace and the Wat Phra Kaeo, the holiest Buddhist site in the country and home to the Emerald Buddha. Walkers will also have plenty of time to shop for bargains in the city's colourful shops and markets, including the world-famous Damern Saduak Floating

Market in the Ratchburi province. Outside the bustle of the city, a stunning landscape of limestone mountains, hidden coves, sandy beaches and uninhabited islands await as trekkers visit Thailand's first Coastal National Park - 'The Three Hundred Peaks Park' - home to a large number of exotic and endangered plants, animals and birds.

The inhabitants of Kareng village near the Burmese border continue to live a lifestyle immersed in ancient traditions. Little has changed for the hill tribe villagers in the 200 years since the village was first settled. Rehab Foundation trekkers will be given a wonderful opportunity to visit the hill tribe village, which is nestled in the jungle close to the magnificent Pala-u Waterfall, and see how villagers live.

The beautiful and historic Vietnamese city of Ho Chi Minh (Saigon) is the final destination on the Rehab Foundation trek. Here, trekkers will experience a day trip to the Mekong Delta, as well as visit the renowned Cu Chi tunnels which offer a wonderful insight into the experience of Vietnamese guerrilla fighters during the long struggle for independence.

This eleven-day trip of a lifetime to Thailand and Vietnam will take place in March 2006 and participants are asked to raise €4,500 in sponsorship. To join Rehab on this once in a lifetime adventure and sample all the delights that these ever-surprising countries have to offer, contact Kevin Bourke, Rehab Foundation, telephone: 087 2439748 or e-mail: eileen.rowland@rehab.ie