

Consulate General of Ireland

Newsletter for the U.S. Southeast

February 2017

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Contact Us:

atlantacg@dfa.ie

Consulate General of Ireland
Monarch Plaza, Suite 260,
3414 Peachtree Road NE
Atlanta, GA 30326
Tel: +1-404-554-4980
Fax: +1-678-235-2201

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sysnet
global solutions.

Message from the Consul General

A chairde,

I am proud of the fact that Irish investment in the U.S. Southeast is surging, demonstrating the reciprocal nature of our commercial relationship with this great country.

Dublin-based Sysnet Global Solutions, a leading provider of cybersecurity and compliance solutions to the payments industry, has just announced that it will create more than [500 jobs](#) and put \$2million into a local contact center in Dekalb County, Georgia.

This follows hot on the heels of [Voxpro's](#) establishment of a new U.S. hub in Athens, Georgia, late last year with an investment of \$4million in a new centre of excellence and more than 500 jobs by 2020. Voxpro is Ireland's largest international provider of customer experience and technical support solutions.

In January I also had an opportunity to visit two other great Irish companies [Mergon Corporation](#) and [E+I Engineering Corp](#) that have their local U.S. HQs in Anderson, South Carolina. Mergon, state of the art innovators in plastics, already employ over 260 people in Anderson and are expanding. E+I Engineering, who provide exceptional switchgear & power distribution systems to data centres and other major clients, now employ over 150 and are on track to build on this dramatically in the next few years.

These investments are just individual examples of a larger pattern that has seen significant numbers of indigenous Irish companies setting up operations in the U.S. Most of these companies are building on established customer relationships with U.S. firms that were initially forged in Ireland. It is my impression that in many of these cases, our firms' American customers have actively encouraged them to set up here because of the quality, adaptability and unique Irish approach that they offer.

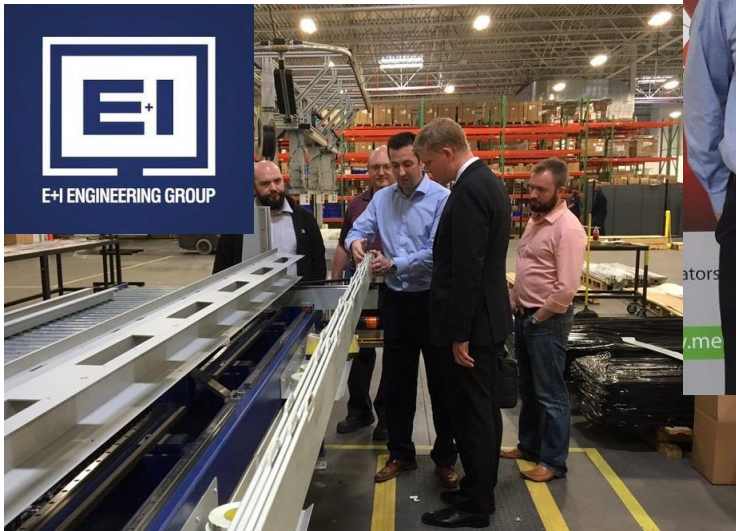
Is mise le meas,

Shane Stephens

Irish Business and Culture Around the Southeast

Two great Irish manufacturing firms with US headquarters in Anderson, South Carolina, a stone's throw from Clemson University

The E&I Engineering team with Operations Director Paul Connolly



Consul General Stephens with Mergon General Manager Nate Dingus and Sales VP Chris Wilson



Consul General Stephens addressed Clemson staff and students on "Ireland, the European Union and Football Diplomacy".

Constructive meetings with Provost Robert Jones and Vice Provost for Global Engagement, Sharon Nagy





Waterford Institute Technology President Willie Donnelly and TCSG Commissioner Gretchen Corbin sign cooperative Memorandum of Understanding accompanied by students and faculty headed to Ireland in March.



CG Stephens attended the inspiring Martin Luther King Day Commemoration at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta.



Great discussion on Ireland & EU with Mike McCarthy and other senior executives at CNN World Headquarters



Consul General Stephens was honored to meet Ambassador Andrew Young for a conversation on commerce and diplomacy.



Very productive coordination meeting at the Consulate with representatives of Irish organizations in Atlanta including Arís Theatre, the Atlanta St Patrick Parade team, Clan na Gael, Gateway Performance Productions, the Hibernian Benevolent Society, the Irish Chamber, IrishFest and Irish Network.

Irish News

Mr Charlie Flanagan, T.D., Ireland's Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, has just completed a packed [three day programme](#) of high level political meetings, engagements with the Irish community and business meetings supported by the Embassy of Ireland in Washington. His discussions dealt with issues including ongoing US support for the Peace Process; Ireland's approach to Brexit; the prospects for immigration reform, as well as concerns with regard to recent immigration related measures announced by the US; and economic links between Ireland and the US. His [op-ed in the Independent.ie](#) explores Ireland's unique relationship with the U.S. which, he noted, "runs deeper than politics."

Taoiseach Enda Kenny welcomed Prime Minister Theresa May to Ireland on 30 January for a [Summit meeting](#) to exchange views on issues including developments in Northern Ireland, the UK/Ireland Joint Work Programme and key bilateral interests in the context of Brexit. Following PM May's January 17 speech, the Government issued a [statement on Brexit](#).

In an [address to EU Ambassadors](#), Minister Flanagan underlined the importance of the British market for Irish companies and concluded "The UK will remain our closest neighbour, and the European Union will remain our political and economic home."

Fresh elections for the Northern Ireland Assembly will take place on March 2 and Michelle O’Neill has replaced Martin McGuinness as the leader of Sinn Féin in the Northern Ireland Assembly. Minister Flanagan made a full statement on these and related developments before our [Seanad](#) on January 26.

On January 29, the Tánaiste and Minister Flanagan attended our national Holocaust Memorial Commemoration. Minister Flanagan read from the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust. Here in Atlanta, CG Stephens attended the Am Yisrael Chai Fortitude and Endurance holocaust memorial lecture one week earlier.

Ireland maintained its impressive position as the best country in the Eurozone for doing business in the Forbes magazine rankings in 2016, coming in overall [4th in the world](#). Our GDP is forecast to grow by 3.5% in 2017 following strong growth of 4.2% in 2016. Our unemployment rate in December 2016 was 7.2%, down from a peak of 15% in 2012 and well below the Eurozone average.

Our capacities as an international financial service hub were highlighted during the [European Financial Forum](#) held in Dublin on January 24. At the session, the Taoiseach announced that Ireland’s financial services sector is “Brexit-ready”.

Enterprise Ireland, the Government agency responsible for developing Irish business globally, exceeded its 3-year (2014-2016) [job creation target](#) with 45,000 new jobs and aims for 60,000 in its 2017-2020 Strategy.

Minister Flanagan criticized recent announcements by Israeli authorities [of further settlement construction](#) in the occupied Palestinian Territories.

[Passport Service customer service enhancements](#), including an enhanced on-line application tracking service as well as a web-chat social media service to facilitate real-time communication between the Passport Service and passport applicants have been announced.

We were delighted to hear the news of this year’s [Irish Oscar nominees](#): Ruth Negga in the category of Best Actress in a Leading Role for *Loving*, Consolata Boyle for Best Costume Design for *Florence Foster Jenkins*, and the Irish Film Board supported film, *The Lobster*, for Best Original Screenplay.

Irish author Sebastian Barry also made headlines, winning the [2016 Costa Book of the Year](#) award for his novel *Days Without End*.

Expressing pride in introducing to his audience “the greatest team dancers in the world,” Michael Flatley’s Lord of the Dance troupe [performed at the inaugural ball](#) for President Trump.

The Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Heather Humphreys launched the [Creative Ireland Programme](#) / Clár Éire Ildánach at the Irish Consulate in New York. In addition, she unveiled details of Culture Ireland’s US programme for 2017 which, in total, will provide €1m to Irish artists to showcase their work in the United States throughout 2017. These include performances in the Southeast by The Outside Track (details below), McPeake and Mairtin O’Connor Trio (tour schedules forthcoming).

Upcoming Events in the Southeast

The College of Charleston’s impressive Irish lecture series will kick off at 7pm on February 3rd with [Ireland on Screen](#) a lecture by University of Notre Dame Professor Briona Nic Dhiarmada – writer and producer of *1916 The Irish Rebellion*. It will continue with [History and Destiny in the Making of Ireland’s Spiritual Empire](#) (February 23), a lecture by Galway native Irene Whelan at Addlestone Library; and [The Real St. Patrick](#) (March 9) a lecture by Belmont Abbey College’s Patrick Wadden at Addlestone Library.

The first annual [Lowcountry Irish Fest](#) takes place February 11-12 at the Omar Shrine Convention Center in Mt. Pleasant, SC, near Charleston, in cooperation with *The Charleston Irish Historical Society*, *The Ancient Order of Hibernians*, *College of Charleston Irish Studies* and *The Hibernian Society*. This family friendly musical and cultural festival is celebrating all things uniquely Irish in the South Carolina Lowcountry.

The South Florida Irish American Chamber of Commerce is co-sponsoring a high level [Winter Business Lunch](#) on Friday 17th in Palm Beach, Florida with guest speaker Kieran McLoughlin, President and CEO of The Worldwide [Ireland Funds](#).

Clan na nGael GAA Club Atlanta will host clubs from the Southeast and New York to play in the first official [Youth Gaelic football tournament](#) on Feb 25 from 1pm to 3pm at Agnes Scott College, 141 E College Ave, Decatur, GA 30030.

The 2017 Hibernian Benevolent Society of Atlanta St. Patrick's Day Ball, in partnership with Irish Network Atlanta, will be held on Saturday, March 4, 2017 at 6:30 pm at the Ansley Golf Club. [Click this link](#) for tickets.

The US tour of Irish band The Outside Track includes [3 performances in the Southeast](#): Jacksonville, FL (March 4, Mudville and March 5, Cullane's Irish Pub), and Savannah, GA (March 11, Tara Feis).

Atlanta's annual [Father Thomas O'Reilly](#) ceremony will be held on March 10 at 1:00 pm at City Hall following Mass at 12:10 pm at the [Catholic Shrine of the Immaculate Conception](#).

Nashville will host its 3rd annual [Music City Irish Fest](#), a 17-day city-wide celebration of Irish culture March 1-17, including world-class Irish bands Altan and The Chieftans, film festival, storytelling, theatre, hurling demonstrations.

While details are still emerging on regional St. Patrick's Day events, the links below take you to information on some great Parades. The Savannah Parade will be city's 193rd. The Atlanta parade will be number 135.

March 11: [Atlanta](#) [Fort Lauderdale](#) [Huntsville](#) [Tallahassee](#)

March 17: [Savannah](#) [Charleston](#)

March 18: [Charlotte](#)

On March 11 in Atlanta Gateway Performance Productions will present *The Daughters of Ireland in America*, a tribute to Irish and Irish American women writers (details to follow)

On March 17th at 10:30 am Atlanta's annual St. Patrick's Day Mass will be held at [Cathedral of Christ the King](#)

The University of Georgia's Willson Center for Humanities and Arts will welcome three outstanding figures in Irish culture to their campus for a St Patrick's Day programme on March 15-17. For details [click here](#).

Mar 15, 6:30pm: Screening of the film adaptation of Colm Tóibín's *Brooklyn*, with reception & book signing

Mar 16, 3:30pm: Tóibín reading and talk followed by book signing

Mar 17, 7:00pm: Public conversation with Tóibín and leading Irish writer/editor [Fintan O'Toole](#) followed by a performance by the outstanding Irish singer [Iarla Ó Lionáird](#).

[Arís Theatre](#) presents *Celtic Shorts* on Tuesday, March 21 at Atlanta's [Shakespeare Tavern](#), a sampler of four plays from source countries of the theatre's literary inspiration: Wales, Ireland, Scotland, and England.