



Finding your tribe

When Tara Flynn started out, she had no intention of pursuing a career in construction.

THE FORMER legal executive – now director of Paul Flynn Construction and chair of the Construction Industry Federation (CIF) western region – says, however, that after a bit of gentle ‘arm-twisting’ by her beloved dad and founder of the company (Paul Flynn), she joined the family business and has never looked back.

“With his guidance and encouragement, I grasped all aspects of the job,” she says.

Although Paul sadly passed away earlier this year, the business he and his wife Mela started in 1975 is thriving, with three of their children – Mark, John and Tara – at the helm. Their other three children also work in construction; this is a family very much steeped in this particular industry.

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Apart from her dad, Tara says she was also fortunate enough to meet many other great leaders and mentors throughout her career to date, each of whom helped foster her own drive and passion. Either way, it was a career segue about which she has never had any regrets. She loves working in the sector and is a strong and vocal advocate on issues pertaining to construction in Ireland. As well as being the first female chair of the CIF western region, Tara is now taking on the mantle of President of the Master Builders’ and Contractors’ Association (MBCA) – only the second female to take up this role – a position she says she is honoured to assume.

There is, of course, a common thread connecting everything Tara and her co-director siblings do both in and beyond the business. That is a strong desire to follow

through on what their father started all those years ago.

“We got the very best teaching from my dad, and we hope to continue on with the amazing legacy he left,” she says.

On that note, major projects currently in hand include a large-scale school extension in Dunboyne, Co Meath and an extensive fit out and refurbishment for TSL on a distribution and logistics centre in Dublin. Meanwhile, the firm hopes to start work soon on a housing development in Malahide, Co Dublin, as well as a major extension and refurbishment to a family home in the same area.

Although there was a time when Paul Flynn Construction would have focused heavily on the residential sector, the recession

spurred a strategic move to diversify into commercial and school projects. Now the company has the knowledge and experience to work across all these sectors.

According to Tara, the demand on the residential side in Galway is high, with a number of developments of varying sizes underway. There are some impediments, however, she notes, including the lack of water/wastewater facilities on zoned land, the impact of judicial reviews and the long standing problem of traffic congestion.

The demand for commercial premises is equally high. Two of the bigger commercial ventures under construction in Galway at the moment are Bonham Quay and Crown Square. Add in the

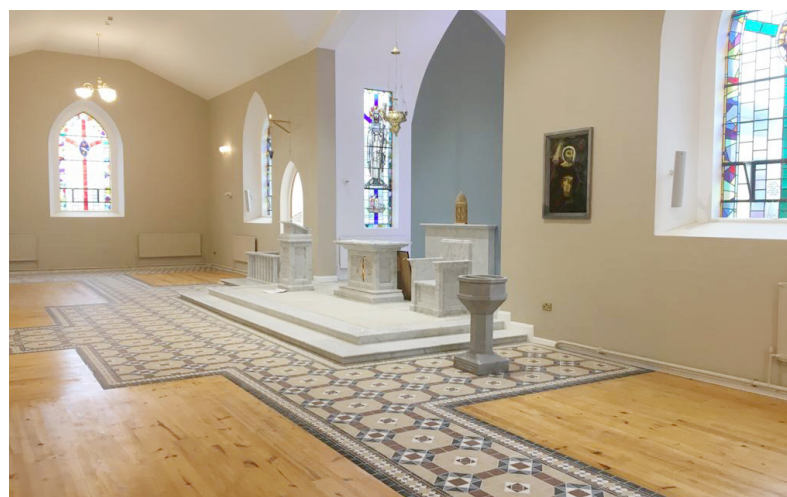
Ceannt Station Urban Quarter, the Port of Galway redevelopment and the work at North Point, and it’s clear that there’s no shortage of commercial work afoot in this part of the West.

Looking back over the past 18 months, Tara is grateful the company was able to keep its head down and work through the pandemic.

“We were resilient because we had essential projects underway that kept us working,” she says.

She says she was also surrounded by the kind of people who will “ride out storms with you.” A firm believer in the power of collaboration, she says that if you truly collaborate with everyone involved in a project – from clients to the design team to the people on the ground – there’s no obstacle you cannot overcome.

One project finalised during Covid stands out from the rest, says Tara, though not for any of the usual reasons. That was the completion of works to the heritage site of Our Lady of Clonfert Church, and it was special because it was a project that was very close to the late Paul Flynn’s heart. Work to the building,





Rockwell College

which dates from the 1850s, included the replacement of the roof, as well as major refurbishment, works such as a complete redesign of the sanctuary, the home to Our Lady, and the altar; a curved feature wall behind the latter finished off the project to perfection.

Overall, says Tara, the pandemic was an eye-opener in more ways than one.

“Our industry is generally a very hardy, dynamic, get-it-done kind of industry, which is a good thing. But on the other side of the coin, we sometimes neglect our own health and wellbeing, and Covid brought this to the fore.”

She says it prompted her to take a long, hard look at her own work-life balance.

“We can all let our busy lives get on top of us, but if you’re not performing, you’re no good to your colleagues or your family.”

It’s with this in mind that the CIF partners with the Lighthouse Club charity, which offers free support to construction workers struggling physically, mentally or financially.

Tara is living proof that women can have long and fulfilling careers in this sector; the mother of four says there is still work to be done to overhaul the perception of construction as being all “hard hats and mucky boots.”

“If we bring efficiency and certainty to planning, zoning and infrastructure, it will promote greater delivery, and hopefully this will become evident in the NDP.”

“There are huge opportunities for both men and women,” she says. “I can attest to that; I love my job and have been involved in this sector for over 30 years.”

Efforts are being made to tackle preconceived notions about construction. Earlier this year, for example, Tara chaired an online building equality event and was buoyed by the 600-strong attendance. She was also fortunate to be invited to speak at the Chartered Institute of Building Construction Manager of the Year awards launch; she took great pleasure in inviting both male and female entrants for these coveted awards.

“Events like these will show women that our industry is much more diverse than they perhaps think and will promote our industry to the next generation of people we need to grow and develop.”

This, she adds, will be for the benefit of everyone. “A diverse workforce is more productive, and we also need more female leaders because they have been shown to be more empowering and inclusive, which is very important in business today.”

Meanwhile, the CIF runs a competition called Building the Future for secondary-school pupils, with the goal of attracting both males and females into the industry. There is also, says Tara, a major push for change in the apprentice model which, if successful, should hopefully encourage both boys and girls to pursue construction-related apprenticeships.

In terms of the general outlook for the construction sector here, Tara says there is much to take encouragement from, not least the fact that there is a steady pipeline of work available. This, she says, means certainty – and certainty is one of the most important aspects of a construction business.

There are caveats to this optimism though, she adds.

“There are certain things that are not within our control which are hindering our progress as a company. These include supply chain difficulties and the continuing inflation in the price of materials. It’s also very apparent that employees are jumping ship for better rates, and this results in companies not being able to take on as much work as planned.”

She is also calling for an overhaul of the current planning system which is, she says, simply too slow.

“Housing developments being subject to a wave of judicial review challenges has impeded the delivery of housing. It’s also imperative that we get the proper infrastructure in place in terms of transport, waste and water, as not having those hinders projects. If we bring efficiency and certainty to planning, zoning and infrastructure, it will promote greater delivery, and hopefully this will become evident in the NDP.”

She is also firm about the need for a review of the standard fixed-price contracts used for school projects, which unlike private projects allow no wiggle room for inflation. ■

