

# New chairman Michael Community Radio into

**Radio Mantra:** This is your radio; it belongs to the community of Kilkenny, said Walshe

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Community Radio Kilkenny City celebrated its first birthday last week, and it was opportune that at its monthly Board meeting, a new Chairman, to succeed Cathal Cullen, who had served in that capacity for over eight years was elected.

Michael Walshe was voted in as chairman in succession to a man who has given more than many to the Radio fraternity of his beloved Kilkenny.

Michael Walshe was very prominent in the effort of providing a Community Radio for his Kilkenny Community.

He recounts the time when the late, lamented Fr Gerry Joyce “ear-wigged” the likes of Michael Minogue, and Liam Carroll (RIP) with the idea of creating Kilkenny’s only Community Radio.

“At the time, Fr Gerry was the engine driver, metaphorically speaking, of the idea”, said Michael. “Michael provided the studio, and the premises, while Liam was the techno guru”, he said.

“I queried the studio reference, with a mischievous smile,” he said.

“Alright, it wasn’t exactly Community Radio Kilkenny City, but it was more than adequate at the time.

“There were pirate radios coming on stream, and in honesty we were classified as one such. Nevertheless the programmes emanating from Michael Minogue’s studio more than caught the interest of Kilkenny people around the place.

“Everything is relative now, but at the time the presenters would have been seen at any event that was perceived as of interest to our own Kilkenny people.

“We had Liam travelling out to games, unloading big boxes of equipment, and the connections were made. Radio Kilkenny was on the road,” he said.

## EXPLODED

The “Ballycallan” wavelength suddenly exploded. Kilkenny was no longer a Radio Eireann satellite.

It was suggested during my conversation with

Michael that the “pirate” element enhanced the attractiveness of the new Radio to Kilkenny folk.

That dear reader is so symptomatic of the Irish psyche - if there is a little nefarious challenge, then “Paddy” is interested.

Anyway, with the listenership going through the roof, and with the nerve ends tingling with the prospect of being closed down at the whim of authority, the lads, and the Reverend Father decided that in the interest of forward planning, a more “legit” form of Radio Broadcasting should be paramount in the plans.

Kilkenny Community Co-Operative Society Ltd. was born. On Sunday October 22, 1989 Michael Lennon announced: “Bail O Dhia oraibh go léir agus faillte isteach go Radio Cill Choimnigh, an chéad staisiún comhphobalach corraithe ar bun anseo in Eirinn.”

This was followed by: “I now hand you over to our Mayor Kieran Crotty” who made his speech. Speeches then followed from P.J. Donnelly, County Manager and Sam Harper Chairman of Radio Kilkenny Board. They were followed directly by Paddy Reilly’s rendition of The Rose of Mooncoin.

“Our Co-Operative of the time undertook a share operation around the County and further,” said Michael.

“Many of us went from house to house imploring people to buy shares in this new Radio at £10 (punt) per share. The response was truly amazing. What it demonstrated to us as we went house to house collecting the money at £1 a

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week in many cases, was that Kilkenny people were quite excited about the prospect of having their own Kilkenny Community Radio, and were prepared to match their enthusiasm with corresponding finances.

It was back-breaking work at the time collecting the instalments, but there were businesses hugely responsive to our idea, and they certainly underscored their enthusiasm with sponsorship,” said the incoming Chairman.

The new Board included a number of high profile business people. The Board meetings originally met in the Club House, with the likes of Jim Brennan, Sam Harper, John Carroll (IFA), Mike O’Brien, Mary McGree, Sheila Dalton and many more equally distinguished people including Fr Gerry.

The mantra at the time was “This is your Radio, belonging to the Community of Kilkenny and the greater Community of Kilkenny County”.

“To say the least Michael” we put to him, “Community Radio Kilkenny City here in the Hebron Business Park has remained true to that ideal? “Unquestionably”, he answered with a stoic, and a very convincing reply.

I suggested to Michael that the success of Kilkenny’s only Community station at the time was a result of all the organisations within the County became acutely aware that the new Radio was the ideal catalyst to promote their ideals, and their messages.

“There is no doubt about that. Organisations like the IFA, Local Authority, Macra na Feirme, Irish Countrywomen’s Association, all sporting Associations, Schools, Parishes bought into the idea, and were active sponsors of the whole concept”.

As the Yorkshire man would say, “There’s nowt for owt”.

I asked Michael about the financial financing of the Radio Station in terms of light, heat etc. at the beginning.

## INTEREST

“There was a tremendous swathe of interest across the four corners of the County. We were lucky in that a few



The new chairman of Community Radio Kilkenny City, Michael Walshe with station manager, Declan Gibbons

major sponsors came on board with considerable investment in shares.

A like interest in the shares issue was embraced by many small family businesses, and the general public were avid investors as well. You must remember that all personnel were volunteers initially, and that was a huge weight off the books”.

Who or where did the techno equipment come from? “Liam Carroll, God rest him, was our technology expert. Practically from the outset he set up the gear for

the transmissions.

He was a genius in that regard. He even did outside broadcasts with his van packed with huge boxes of equipment.

He was a brilliant man”. As a consequence to Michael’s involvement with Youth Clubs, starting in his Alma Mater, St.Kierans College, he was sideswiped into Club Kilkenny and then into the Diocesan Youth movement organised by Fr Gerry at the behest of Dr Peter Birch.

The association with Fr Gerry Joyce was under pinned through the Youth

movement in Kilkenny.

Michael was heavily involved with basketball as a player and administrator. Basketball in Kilkenny that time was a highly regarded, top class national game. So prominent that Kilkenny basketball was a very valuable provider of players to the Irish team. Names like Luke Connery, Noel Scanlon, Joe McKee, Timmy Clifford and Jim Kerwick readily trip off the tongue on recollection.

He was instrumental as Chairman of the Kilkenny County Board; he was closely positioned to influence the

# is ready to lead the future



at the station on the Hebron Road Industrial Estate

O'Loughlin's committee to accommodate basketball in their plans (Luke Roche is his brother-in-law).

The decision greatly enhanced the interest in the game within the county. The energetic Michael was also a Director of the St Canice's Credit Union for a decade. In like mode he was instrumental in setting up MABS, the iconic Money Advice Budgeting Service, which does wonderful work for the people it serves. Michael got himself involved in Ladies soccer.

He was national chairman

of the Association before it was eventually taken over by the FAI.

"We provided many great players to the Irish International team at the time.

Names like Kay Brennan, (Kay B Community Radio presenter), Ursula Mulcahy, a daughter of the GAA County Secretary, Paddy Grace; Ann Power; Connie Jordan (twin sister of the lamented Eugene) also donned the Irish green on a tour of European Capitals.

Stories of playing a Cup Final in John's Park caused

uproar in the national papers. The story was certainly fanned by the Grace sisters playing a "foreign game", on a GAA pitch, and given who their father was. The European Ladies Champions, Stade de France came to Kilkenny.

I crafted a team together for the occasion. The game took place inside the Greyhound track. A good crowd witnessed the Irish girls creating an unbelievable shock when winning 2-1.

We played all over the country, winning plenty, and hugely successful", said

Michael.

When Fit Remoulds was sold to the Cork Company, and subsequently closed down, it was a savage blow to the economy of the City and further.

**BRETT'S**

However the ambitious Michael Walshe acquired gainful employment with the Brett Brothers Group; redundant on a Friday, employed on the first day of a new week - the shortest redundancy on record.

"They had just built their milling plant in Callan when I joined. I enjoyed 30 odd years in their employment. You would have to admire them for what they have achieved", he added.

"I enjoyed every moment I had in Bretts. There was a terrific work ethic inherent in the staff that had a great pride in being as good at their jobs as they were.

That fact was reflected in the loyalty of staff and Management which was very much a two way street."

Michael enjoyed many years of association with playing and subsequently refereeing in the Kilkenny & District League.

"I loved every minute of my time with great people", he smiled.

It must please you that the ideals and aspirations so pertinent to the initial drive for a radio for Kilkenny movement back with Fr Gerry Joyce back in the late 1980s have been realised again with the full-time license for Kilkenny for the next ten years? "It is brilliant

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to say the least.

Great credit is due to all of the people who carried the torch for the past 15 years. Their dedication and determination has been rewarded. It wasn't an easy journey, but eventually they came through.

I must acknowledge the contributions made by many. There were times when it was easier to walk away, but they carried the hope that one day we would get back our own Kilkenny Community Radio for our own people.

**DIFFICULT TIMES**

We are facing difficult times but the ambitions and dogged determination of our Presenters, Administration staff, and Board members I feel will take this Radio to where it rightly belongs - serving the people of Kilkenny.

It really is brilliant that through all of the hard work of so many we are where we are. Community Radio

Kilkenny City 88.7FM is on the air with a seven day schedule.

"Presently we broadcast midday until 7pm Monday to Thursday, and 9am until midnight Friday to Sunday. In a very short time we hope to extend our broadcasting hours from 9.0am until midnight for the entire week.

"It's a huge challenge for everybody, but I feel sure that we will get there, producing a high quality of broadcasting for our own Kilkenny people."

Michael singled out his predecessor, Cathal Cullen for special mention. Cathal was a leader of this radio in very tough times. It needed safe hands to keep the ship afloat. Despite many hiccups, and setbacks he never lost sight of the main focus of the effort.

"I am delighted that he was still chairman when the full-time license was secured. He deserved nothing less. I hope that I can continue the great work and ethic that he brought to the table."

The Manager of Community Radio Kilkenny City, Declan Gibbons, said, "I am delighted that a man of the experience and business calibre of Michael Walshe has been elected by the Board to lead our Radio.

"His track record in business Management is exemplary. I am confident that his obvious enthusiasm will be infectious, and like the rising tide which lifts all boats, Michael will be a terrific fit for our emerging Kilkenny Radio."



The Community Radio float at the St Patrick's Day Parade