

Tullamore Town

Compiled by Nick Miller

Rainforest Week Launched In Flurry Of Excitement

A packed Bury Quay was the focal point for the start of Rainforest Week on Saturday morning when Tullamore was treated to a host of information that would have made the Internet blush with envy.

By Nick Miller

Proceedings began with a march from O'Connell Square to Bury Quay made up of local school children bearing placards describing the importance of trees.

It had been anticipated that Minister of State Joan Burton would be in attendance for the launch of the 'Wood of Life' exhibition but she was unfortunately engaged in talks in Washington with the President, Mary Robinson. Local TD Pat Gallagher did the honours and was a fitting candidate with his seat on the Dail sub-committee on Development Co-operation.

The exhibition in Bury Quay covers issues as broad-ranging as the need to conserve rainforests, travellers' rights and issues, and protecting children the world over. Several national bodies including Concern have set up stalls while local group One World is also featured.

Other stalls include Crann, the broadleaf tree movement, which has some fascinating information on all aspects of their campaign as well as examples of wood craft, while even the Offaly Beekeepers Association is represented.

The man behind Rainforest Week is Tullamore man Tom Roche, the driving force behind locally based Irish Woodworkers for Africa. His aim is to stop the importation of precious tropical and hardwoods into Ireland and replace them with domestically grown woods.

Tom was the first individual to highlight the fact that Ireland is the only EU country not to have ratified the convention on international trade in endangered woods. The convention aims to



Some of the attendants at last Saturday's Rainforest Week launch pictured with Deputy Pat Gallagher, who officially opened the event.

curb the destruction of the third world's native timber forests.

Citizens of countries such as the Cameroon are furious that their timber is exported for Western profit and not retained for the domestic market. Plundering natural resources is a recipe for economic devastation.

In Ireland it is important to build up a culture of sustainable wood use, he said, with an emphasis placed on recycled paper and wood products. There is absolutely no point in importing tropical wood when home grown wood can be just as profitable.

Pat Gallagher TD followed Tom's speech with one of his own after apologising for Joan Burton's absence, and ex-

pressed his delight at being present at the exhibition. The motto of Irish Woodworkers for Africa (IFWA) is 'working locally for global development' and emphasises the interdependence of today's world. Even in Laois and Offaly it is possible to have an effect on the rest of the world.

'Tom Roche has brought a "piece" of the developing world here for us to see and touch', he said. 'In so doing he has also brought the concerns of the world home to us, in particular, those arising from the rapid depletion of the world's tropical forests'.

Mr Gallagher spoke of Tom's time spent visiting aid projects in Africa where he heard the concerns of local people over

deforestation. The forests are a source of food, fuel, materials and medicines and are vital components of their lives.

Furthermore, the 1992 Rio summit established that rainforests are a vital part of the fragile world ecosystem and brought out Agenda 21 to pursue a policy of sustainable development for trees.

'The Wood of Life Exhibition has been a very valuable exercise in raising public awareness', said Mr Gallagher. 'As the reality of the developing world is brought before us here at home we have to face up to the challenges presented by underdevelopment'.

The Wood of Life Exhibition will run in Bury Quay until this Sunday.

World Rainforest Week launched in Tullamore

The ninth annual world rainforest week was launched by Mr. Pat Gallagher T.D. in the Offaly Cultural Centre, Bury Quay, Tullamore on Saturday.

The launch got off to a colourful start with 200 children of all ages bedecked in leaves and branches, with some dressed as forest animals, marching from O'Connor Square to the Cultural Centre. The children were joined by activists from organisations such as Greenpeace, Crann, Concern and Irish Woodworkers for Africa as they stopped the Saturday morning traffic.

Mr. Tom Roche, the man whose brainchild rainforest week was, said that he was delighted to see so many children and national organisations travelling so far to attend the event.

Mr. Roche, an apprentice cabinet maker, called upon Offaly County Council to keep up and expand their re-cycling policy and asked shopkeepers to cut back on the amount of tropical woods they use for their shopfronts. "It is an insult to my trade to see beautiful tropical woods painted over by shopkeepers," he said.

"We in Ireland do have the power to force change. We as consumers make choices and if people stop buying goods made out of wood from the rainforests and use Irish wood instead then fewer and fewer companies will use tropical wood," said Mr. Roche.

Mr. Pat Gallagher T.D. apologised for the absence of Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Ms. Joan Burton, T.D., who was asked to accompany the President to the United Nations to report on their visit to Rwanda.

In his speech Mr. Gallagher paid tribute to Mr. Roche and Irish Woodworkers for Africa for bringing home to the visitors that development and the issues affecting development countries are issues which affect us all.

"Tom Roche has brought a 'piece' of the developing world here for us to touch and see. In so doing, he has also brought the concerns of that world home to us, in particular,

those arising from the rapid depletion of the world's tropical forests," said Mr. Gallagher.

"Those forests play a vital role in maintaining the harmony and balance of the global ecosystem and contribute greatly to the beauty and diversity of our world. As such, the current unsustainable exploitation of their resources has serious implications for us all."

Mr. Gallagher pointed out that for those who live near forests, they provide a source of food, fuel, construction material and medicines. "Deforestation, while perhaps producing an immediate cash benefit, has a detrimental impact on the lives of the local people and affects the long term capacity of these countries to develop."

Deputy Gallagher said that in some areas significant progress is being made to halt the decline. The UN has increased its forestry activities and reoriented them to bring them into line with the goals set out at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The World Bank, in a change of policy following the summit, has increased funding for projects that conserve forests and the Irish Aid Strategy Plan, launched in 1993, pinpointed environmental concerns as one of the key issues for the expanding Irish Aid programme.

Deputy Gallagher also had welcome news for Mr. Roche, who for many years has been campaigning for the Irish Government to ratify the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) like the rest of the EU has. Deputy Gallagher said that legislation dealing with the Convention will be presented before the Dail before the end of the year.

Deputy Gallagher also congratulated Mr. Roche on his presentation to the Oireachtas Sub-Committee on Development Co-operation last year. "That presentation drew attention to a wide range of interrelated issues concerning development and the en-

vironment and initiated discussion and consideration of these issues," said Deputy Gallagher, who is Chairman of the Sub-Committee.

"The importance of raising environmental and development consciousness at this level is clear, given the need to take a long-term view with regard to both development and the environment. I am confident that the work of Tom Roche, and of the many others active in this area, can, if heeded by the rest of us, ensure that the needs of each generation can be met without diminishing the beauty of the world we live in or compromising the future of succeeding generations," concluded Deputy Gallagher.

Rainforest Week runs from the 21st to the 29th October from 10.00 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. There are a number of exhibits to see and touch, admission is free.

To coincide with the week there will also be other events occurring outside of the Cultural Centre. On Wednesday, October 25, there will be an Ecumenical Service in the Church of the Assumption at 8.00 p.m. Nenagh born Columban missionary and Chairman of Greenpeace Ireland, Father Sean McDonagh will be joined by local clergy in prayer and reflection on the spiritual significance of the natural world with particular emphasises on the role trees and forests play in the lives of millions of the world's inhabitants.

On Thursday, October 26, there will be an evening of music in the Bridge House, Tullamore at 8 p.m. Local classical guitarist Mr. Conall McKay and the Tirando Guitar Quartet will play a selection of pieces. Tullamore craftsman and musician Mr. Val Hughes will play "Music of O'Carolan" on his own hand-crafted Appalachian Mountain Dulcimer.

And to round the week of, on Friday, there will be a presentation of life in the rainforests of Zaire. The slide show starts at 8.00 p.m. in the Offaly Cultural Centre.