

Figures bolster case to keep Valentia open

by Donal Hickey
and Anne Lucey

THE fact that Valentia coastguard station was involved in helping a large proportion of all incidents at sea last year is being used to bolster the case for the retention of the station.

The Kerry station responded to 713 incidents compared with 874 by Dublin and 374 by Malin Head, Co Donegal, according to the latest statistics.

Valentia also dealt with

100 medical evacuations, compared with 71 by Malin Head and 19 by Dublin.

However, the Department of Transport seems determined to press ahead with the setting up of two new marine rescue co-ordination centres, one in Drogheda and the other along the west coast, possibly Galway.

At the same time, Transport Minister Noel Dempsey has said the Valentia station will not close and no jobs will be lost there.

However, the Valentia-based Save Our Station (SOS) lobby group claimed the building would remain open to house radio equipment, but jobs there would be moved to other stations over a period of time.

The lobby group said the loss of 17 jobs in the Valentia station would be a massive blow to the area.

The SOS campaign has become a key local issue for Ceann Comhairle John O'Donoghue, who lives

in nearby Caherciveen.

Mr O'Donoghue has twice written to Mr Dempsey expressing his total opposition to any moves to close down the Valentia station. He said such a proposal ran completely counter to the Government's decentralisation programme.

County councils in Kerry and Donegal are working together to save the stations at Valentia and Malin.

Kerry county manager Tom Curran said the closure of the Valentia station would

be seen as a vote of no confidence in the area and would go completely against what Kerry County Council was trying to do for regional development.

"It is ironic that while this council and other agencies are trying to create jobs, we're getting the rug pulled from under our feet," he said.

Yesterday Kerry senator Mark Daly (FF) said he and Donegal Oireachtas members campaigning for the retention of Malin Head were

seeking that the heads of the Irish coastguard along with the authors of a report recommending closure of the stations be brought before the Oireachtas Transport Committee to answer questions on claims in the report. This should take place "before any decision is reached," said Mr Daly.

The 100-year-old station dramatically perched on a cliff at the edge of the Atlantic on Valentia Island had been earmarked for upgrading under Marine

Minister Dermot Ahern. However under a review currently underway it looks set for downgrading or closure altogether under Mr Dempsey who appears to favour a new west coast or inland centre.

Recently the Spanish Ambassador to Ireland, Dr José de Carvajal, observed a sitting of the Seanad where the future of the Marine Rescue Centres in Valentia and Malin was debated. He attended at the invitation of Mr Daly.

Retail plans granted for Tralee

by Donal Hickey

A CAMPAIGN to breathe new life into Tralee town centre has been boosted by a decision to grant planning permission for a 900-square metre extension to a shopping centre.

Despite local objections, An Bord Pleanála has given the green light to Tralee businessman Donal Horan for a first floor extension to the Central Plaza Retail Centre.

Businesses in Tralee town have claimed they are losing trade to out-of-town commercial facilities, particularly the Manor West Retail Park on the Killarney Road.

Planning inspector Aisling Cunnane, recommending that planning be granted, noted that Tralee town had "significant competition" from out-of-town shopping.

But, she said the town centre should be allowed to grow to its potential and that "retailing in the town be retained as its core function".

Among the objectors to the extension was local resident J.D. Wynne. He claimed his light and privacy would be compromised and that nearby Denny's Lane would be made darker and more attractive for unsocial activity.

Ms Cunnane maintained the increased throughput of people resulting from additional shopping would act as a deterrent to crime and anti-social activity.

An Bord Pleanála granted planning permission subject to seven conditions.

Manor West Retail Park, meanwhile, has been attracting shoppers from many parts of Kerry, Cork and Limerick since it opened in 2001. It boasts a wide range of big name stores including TK Maxx, Debenhams, Harry Corry and Tesco.

In recent years, neighbouring towns such as Killarney, Listowel and Castleisland have been losing heavily to Tralee in the retail stakes.

Leading retail developments proposed for Listowel and Castleisland, to include Tesco, however, have met with objections.

But huge new shopping developments have recently been announced for Killarney, including a €100 million commercial/residential proposal for a 14-acre site in the grounds of the Malton Hotel.

Work has started on a new retail complex in the site of the former Torc Great Southern Hotel, near Killarney town centre, due to open next year.

Also, Marks and Spencer, which was controversially rejected by Tralee Town Council last year, is due to open a store in Killarney in May.

Drivers to adopt military infrared system

by Eoin English

A HI-TECH thermal imaging system based on US military technology is set to make night-time driving safer.

Cork-based Halo Security has just secured a special licence from the US government to export the PathFindIR product, which can see in the dark.

The Forward Looking Infra Red technology is used in military aircraft operating in war zones like Iraq to select targets.

It is also used by police forces to track suspects from the air and it can be used in rescue missions to locate victims lost at sea.

But it has also been adapted for commercial use.

Halo Security had to go through a rigorous background check to secure the export licence because of fears the technology could fall into terrorists' hands.

They company has begun to import the product for sale here.

Its wide-angle camera, about the size of an orange,



Greg McGarry, managing director of Halo Security Ltd, using a thermal image camera in his car.

Picture: Provision

can be mounted inside the grill on the front of a vehicle. It picks up infra-red heat signatures and transmits images to a 7" screen, on the dashboard.

It allows motorists to pick out hazards beyond the range of their headlights, see more of the road and eliminate the danger of being blinded by oncoming lights.

Halo Security's managing

director Greg McGarry said the device is ideally suited to large commercial vehicles with long stopping distances, or emergency vehicles like fire engines.

But the device, which costs €6,000 fully installed, can also be used in private vehicles.

"We would see this as another natural checkpoint for drivers," said Mr McGarry.

"You should rely on it like you would your rear-view mirror or side mirrors.

"It can pick out pedestrians in total darkness before your headlights pick them up."

Halo Security was founded in 2005 and is based in Glanmire. It specialises in commercial and domestic security, providing CCTV and other security products.

It pioneered the introduction of fleet management tracking systems, and supplies GPS technology to emergency services for the mapping of fatal road traffic accident sites.

It has also fitted thousands of vehicle tracking systems, anti-theft and anti-hijack devices to company vehicles.

Halo also launched a road

safety device earlier this year that allows parents monitor how fast their child is driving.

The Italian-made MetaSat SMS Safety Route product can be set to restrict the speed at which the car can be driven.

When the driver exceeds that speed, a text message is sent to the parent's mobile phone to alert them.

Parents can then choose to send a text message to disable the car the next time the engine is turned off.

The company also offers a child-tracker device, about the size of an iPod, which has a panic button to alert parents, as well as the capability to make an emergency 999 call.

● www.halosecurity.ie or 1890 882 999.

Paris link helps Shannon Airport bounce back

by Jimmy Woulfe
Mid-West
Correspondent

SHANNON is successfully managing the connectivity crisis triggered by the January 1 termination of the Aer Lingus Heathrow service, the airport director said yesterday.

A replacement service to Paris is being well received by people needing long-haul connections in and out of Shannon.

Shannon Airport director Martin Moroney said: "It is not all solved, but I think the vast majority of customers say the replacement CityJet service to Charles de

Gaulle is fine and we are over the hump... CityJet and Aer France are very happy and they are getting a high 70% load factor."

Mr Moroney expects CityJet to grow the Shannon/Paris service, which provides two flights a day on a 50-seater aircraft. He said it would continue to work towards acquiring other key hub connections through Amsterdam and strive to win back a Heathrow connection.

Mr Moroney was speaking at a Ryanair press briefing at the Clarion Hotel in Limerick at which the airline announced a route from Shannon to

Berlin to start on May 30.

Ryanair marketing manager Caroline Baldwin said: "To mark the opening of the route we are releasing 10,000 seats from Shannon for just €10."

Under a five-year deal struck in 2005, Ryanair gets cut rates at Shannon in return for delivering two million passengers by 2010. Last year it accounted for 60% of the airport's 3.6 million passengers.

Mr Moroney said: "We are thrilled at the manner in which Ryanair have built up their numbers at Shannon."

Despite the economic slump in the US, Mr Moroney said he was confident



Martin Moroney: We are over the hump.

transatlantic numbers would hold up over the coming months.

Shannon has drawn up an expansion programme with the goal of achieving one million transatlantic passengers within five years and a further four million to EU destinations. A €3 million marketing strategy has been drawn up to promote Shannon as a gateway to the Western seaboard.

Views differ as councillors divided on Killarney tower

by Anne Lucey

KILLARNEY Mayor Niall O'Callaghan took a bird's eye view of the town from the top of a 100-metre crane to preview proposals for a giant tower of the same height.

The event, to which all councillors were invited, was co-ordinated by the backers of a €100 million retail and leisure project known as Station Square, near the Malton Hotel.

Mr O'Callaghan (Independent) said the views were "spectacular" and that the tower would be a significant development, but he conceded that there

would be objectors and the way forward was to "let the people decide".

Twenty years ago, a similar proposal by the O'Donoghue-Ring hoteliers group met with huge controversy and stiff resistance from nearby hoteliers, from jarveys and conservationists.

Padraig Treacy of the Killarney Park and Ross Hotels and Mike O'Shea and Risteard O'Lionáird of Sunday's Well Properties, who are jointly involved in the new proposal, have promised a public consultation process before submitting plans in May.

Yesterday Councillor

Donal Grady (Ind), who did not go on the crane, said he was "sceptical" about the proposal but if the tower was to go ahead the town "would have to get a benefit" in the form of some of the entrance charges.

Mr Grady is one of a number of councillors to express concern about recent high-rise building in the town, including a development rising in part to six storeys, also by Sunday's Well Properties.

An Taisce has called for a "maximum height" of three to four storeys in future developments, depending on location.

BUSYTODAY:

Yvonne Clarke, Blarney Golf Resort

Happily hooked on the glamour and fast pace of hotel business

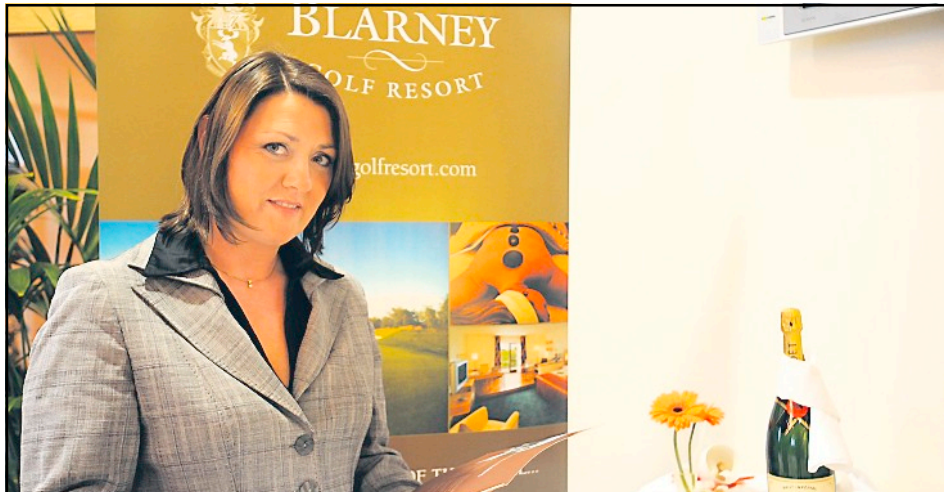
by Jo Kerrigan

YVONNE CLARKE, sales and marketing at Blarney Golf Resort, has come home to roost. "Ever since I was knee high to a grasshopper I wanted to work in the hotel business. I loved the notion of people on the move, the lives they might lead, the perceived 'glamour' of it all." The reality might be harder work than she had anticipated, but she still loves it.

Yvonne moved to London in the '80s. "Originally I intended a six month stint, to gain some work experience, but I ended up staying for 17 years!" From her first job with a small travel agency she moved on to hotel chain Accor International, then to big players like Park Plaza and

Platinum Events as well as, more recently, a small exclusive hotel group. However, she felt it was time to come home to Munster and to the dream job at Blarney Golf Resort. "It feels great to be back, and in a location like this it's even better!"

Outgoing, and very much at ease in her job, Yvonne tends to get in about 9am, "or before that if there are international agents to be looked after who like an early start." At this spring season, weddings are a big feature at the Golf Resort, with all the attendant demands, but Yvonne says they're great to work on. She says she is amazed at the way men have changed their attitudes in relation to the finer points of a wedding. "In my time all they had to do was get the tuxedo and turn up



Yvonne Clarke: 'It feels great to be back, and in a location like this it's even better.'

but now they're very style-conscious and so much more flamboyant." You get couples too, she says, who want to arrange every minute detail of the whole wedding weekend,

turning it into something of a full activity break. "They might want to block book the spa, arrange golf the day before and after, and have activities such as water

polo matches in the pool, treasure hunts around the grounds. Chocolate fountains, ice sculptures, gifts for the guests and a free bar — they want it all. We've had some

enquiries lately about civil weddings on the 18th hole, complete with flower pergolas." That's fine by Yvonne, she can provide it all, and more. "I can visualise lovely civil ceremonies down in our woodlands too — I have plenty of ideas."

Tact and diplomacy are very much part of her job, especially where weddings are concerned. "We had an incident recently when a Mammy called wanting to know all the details of her daughter's big day — we could see the war looming so had to politely decline to divulge details — Darling Daughter would have thrown a fit! She Who Must Be Obeyed and Loved was not pleased. I suppose it's hard not to be involved in your baby's wedding — I'd imagine I would want to get my mitts into the nitty

gritty of it too."

What Yvonne loves most is the variety. "One minute I'm speaking with the head of a multinational bringing in a group of 200 colleagues from abroad for a three-day conference, next minute I'm talking with the lady captain of a golf society up the country who wants a barbecue after the golf game, and next minute I could be extolling the virtues of the Cork region to international booking agents who require group rates and details of our 167-acre destination, or handling enquiries from golf journalists looking for details on our John Daly-designed golf course." So how about lunch breaks? "It's often 3pm before I realise I haven't eaten, as there's so much happening, but by

the end of the day I'm pretty bushed, so I use the short trip home to listen to music [Michael Bublè and jazzman Jamie Cullum] and enjoy the open road."

It's exciting and rewarding work, she says, with never a dull moment. "Most of my workmates are local to Cork and are a great bunch of people. Our GM, Conor O'Toole, is a powerhouse and he keeps us all motivated and interested in our work." She is particularly thrilled Blarney Golf Resort has been recommended in the Michelin Guide 2008 as well as obtaining the coveted Irish Accommodation Services Institute Award for Excellence in Services Standards recently. "These accolades give us all a boost and make us work even harder!"