

A love of the ICA, just like her mother had

by Helen O'Callaghan

WHEN Theresa Storey was 16, her friends went to a U2 concert in Croke Park — while Theresa went on an ICA trip around the Burren with her mother.

“Mum was always in the ICA. She was in the Tradaree, Newmarket-on-Fergus guild. ICA was part of our lives.”

Theresa was brought up in Clare, though she lived in Detroit until she was six — her family are from Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Her mum's ICA guild was active. “Every year, they did a flower-and-plant show and competition. My four siblings and I would spend months planning who was going to enter what competition. As soon as I'd finished the novelty cake one year, I'd be planning the next one. We'd be fighting over who'd get to the oven first with the queen cakes.

“I think it's good to have a bit of rivalry in the family. One of us would win first prize in scones, another second prize for the same recipe. We did flower arranging and knitting. It was great, because, all of a sudden, we were winning prizes and it gave us such a sense of achievement. We always knew we were reasonably good cooks. Not too many children know they can do things,” she says.

When Theresa moved to Ballingarry, Co Limerick, in 1995 with husband, Mike Cosgrave, and their eldest son, Alex (she has three children), she intended joining the local ICA guild. “With small children, it's kind of hard. I joined three or four years ago, when they were big enough to mind themselves,” says Theresa, aged 43.

“I joined ICA because my mother had a huge circle of friends through being in the guild in Newmarket-on-Fergus, and the ICA are always the people in the background, taking care of everything. I like the companionship and the opportunity to learn new skills and extra knowledge. When I was at Bloom this summer, I learned chicken scratch — a type of cross-stitch on gingham material. I brought it home and showed it to the ladies in my guild,” says Theresa, who is president of Ballingarry guild.

It has 16 members, four of whom are in their mid-30s to early 40s.

“We have a speaker or demonstration every month, since before I became president. We recently had a workshop on getting to



Theresa Storey is the president of Ballingarry Guild in Co Limerick.

know your sewing machine. I've been using a sewing machine since I was eight, and I know so much after that workshop, about cleaning out the machine and fixing your stitches. I hadn't known what needle to use for different fabrics, and my tension had never been right. A lady from the US, who used to own her own quilting shop, had a whole list of new things she found out at that workshop,” she says.

The monthly demonstrations, which have included textile art, Christmas cooking, culinary herbs for health and how to plant window boxes with salad ingredients, attract non-members too.

Theresa, who worked for

Aer Lingus as a ground hostess, says her parents were hit by the “sustainable living bug” in the 1970s. “They used to grow all their food. Mum would make cakes and jam out of the excess stuff.”

It rubbed off on Theresa, who has been running the Green Apron Artisan Preserve Company out of her kitchen in Derryclough, three miles outside of Ballingarry, since 1996. On “seven acres up a hill”, she has 100 trees in her orchard, and 100 fruit bushes.

“I won a 2010 Blas Na hÉireann award for my raspberry jam preserves, beating the big companies. We teach courses on organic gardening, preserving, bee-keeping, chicken-rearing, building with living willow, permaculture and basic bread-making.

“This summer, each of my children had to do an hour's weeding in the morning and another in the afternoon,” she says. Getting her kids involved has paid off. Alex, 16, won the 2011 Rotary Young Chef of the Year Ireland section award, and competed in the final in London. Athene, 11, won RTE's 2010 Pans On Fire competition, while Isabella, 13, set up her own small business when she was 10, selling tea-lights at the Milk Market in Limerick on Saturday mornings.

“The children are at the market every Saturday. They know every food producer in Munster,” she says.

A woman whose interest in learning saw her study environmental science in London and get a degree in botany and zoology at NUI, Galway, Theresa has also done basket-making and blacksmithing.

“I took a welding course. I do crochet. I taught my kids to do it. I only realised last year that they aren't teaching sewing anymore in schools,” says the woman who keeps a blog at www.greenapron.ie. “It's mostly about the business, what we're sowing this week, what I bought in the market this week, also sharing recipes.”

She's surprised at the number of people, particularly those living in towns, who say, “what's the ICA?” “It boggles my mind. I think ICA has to keep pushing the message,” she says.

Theresa says it would be good for the organisation to get involved in teaching crafts in schools. And, in its search for new members and young blood, she says ICA should focus on giving drop-in workshops, not “sign up for 12 weeks.”



Macra na Feirme's AIB Club of the Year presentation at the annual conference to Best Emerging Club category winners and overall runner-up Mitchelstown, from left, John Farrell of AIB, Niamh Carey, Clodagh Carey, Aisling Lewis, and Macra president Alan Jagoe, and below, AIB Best New Member winner Nicholas Butterly from the Togher club in Co Louth.



Macra news in brief

Ski trip to Soll for Seandún

SEANDÚN Macra are taking bookings for a skiing trip to Soll, Austria, flying from Cork to Salzburg on January 7, and back on January 14. Including breakfast and evening meal, ski passes, boots, skis and beginners' lessons, the trip costs €1,081. It's open to anyone, first come, first served. Check the Seandun Facebook Page for further information.

● **LIMERICK QUIZZES:** Croom Macra stage their annual fancy dress table quiz in Hickeys Bar, Croom tomorrow night (November 4) at 8:30pm. Also in Co Limerick, Shannonside stage a Christmas-themed table quiz on November 10 in Lena's Bar, Adare, at 8:30pm.

● **QUEEN FESTIVAL:** The Queen of the Land Festival takes place in Tullamore, Co Offaly, on November 12 and 13, including the national bowling final on the Sunday.

Macra family's big weekend

ANYONE can have a club, we have a family, said Donal O'Leary, Kilmeen, Freemount Macra chairperson Louise Bourke, in the club's successful AIB Club of the Year presentation in Cork last weekend.

It was the best night in Freemount's history, winning the biggest Macra accolade — and it was a great weekend also for the entire Macra family, with huge attendances at the well-planned and organised rally/conference weekend headquartered at the Radisson Blu Hotel, Little Island.

It was a victory for the organising team from the Seandun region, and for the neighbouring regions in Co Cork, with Freemount winning the AIB Club of the Year title and Mitchelstown the AIB Emerging Club of the Year title for Avondhu. For the Carbery region,

Donal O'Leary, Kilmeen, won the Bord Bia sheep stockjudging, and Patrick O'Connor of Berrings, Muskerry, won the senior beef stockjudging.

Over 40 of Freemount's 68 members celebrated their new status as the best club in Ireland for 2011, as club officers collected the €1,500 winners' cheque from AIB.

Plans are in place for a celebration party in Barry's Bar, Freemount on Saturday night, November 12 at 9.30pm, all are welcome.

Runners-up Mitchelstown and Mountmellick each received €500.

Nicholas Butterly from Co Louth is the AIB Best New Member, and Ballymurphy, Co Carlow won the IFJ Know Your Ag Quiz at Little Island. Tom Dunne from Co Laois won the under-23 beef stockjudging.



The dairy section of the Macra conference, on the Kingston farm near Togher, Cork. Picture: Dan Linehan