

"WHAT A WEEK"

The Ludgate Hub



A LETTER TO OUR FRIENDS

By Grainne O'Keeffe, CEO Ludgate

We knew our summer visitors were planning to return home, back to the cities, the big smokes. That's not so unusual. It is the end of August after all, back to school. What's different this year is Covid. While Covid has had a devastating impact on all our lives & changed everything including the way we work, there have been some diamonds in the rough.

Before I mention those gems in any further detail, just to add to the devastation wreaked by Covid across the length & breadth of Ireland, West Cork has also experienced a double whammy in the battering we got from Storm Ellen & the extreme rainfall we've encountered in the past 10 days. Rosscarbery/Glandore were the 1st victims with homes/businesses devastated by floods & flood damage to property & access. A few days later the town of Skibb & hamlet of Ring in Clon, on the back of high tides, crazy rains & winds with weak defences were subject to extensive flood damage.

All of this occurred whilst the Golfgate unfolded. Skibb hasn't seen this many ministers/TD visits in the history of the state. To be fair to the newly elected local politicians they are highly talented in leveraging social media to propel their messages & the fact that the new Taoiseach holidays a mere hour away yields greater attention, all to be directed west along to distract from the Covid chaotic confusion, fatigue, disregard & dare I say it again, Golfgate.

That's the current environment we are in this week. Pretty upsetting to be honest. We need a bit of good news, something positive to grab hold of. I don't even want to mention Belarus, Brexit, the fires in California, US elections.....no need to open Pandora's Box in full. So what is the Covid diamond you may be asking?

Ludgate normally sees a welcome seasonal spike in desk rental through the summer months. Those rentals can be quick ins & outs, a mere nod of acknowledgement, a fleeting encounter, no long term relationship established. That's ok, those brief encounters pay salaries, the operating costs as well as allowing us to offer a service to the local community that we could otherwise not afford. Although we've been unbelievably fortunate to receive the support & generosity from our philanthropic benefactors as well as state aid and corporate sponsors we are a social enterprise & need to be independently sustainable in the long term. Our revenue streams, like the rest of the nation, have been severely hampered by the pandemic. We have not been exempt from this.

Our goal is job facilitation, job enablement to allow our local economy prosper & thrive. Since inception, Ludgate can claim responsibility for the enablement of 130 direct & indirect jobs. That is enormous. It's easy to quantify the economic impact this has, It's hard to quantify the intangible impact this has, the hope, the optimism, the pride, the entrepreneurial buzz, the sky is the limit feeling, the buoyancy, the confidence. We walk with our heads held high. If we could go to Dublin or London or New York, we would walk with pride. We are no longer the unsophisticated culchie, we are the sophisticated progressive dynamic citizen of West Cork, born and bred boy!



And so the gems, what are these sparkles & #aretheyheretostay?

Our response to Covid was to shut for 13 weeks. When we reopened on June 29th, we felt it prudent to eliminate the hot desk offering but offer a one week minimum stay in its stead. We felt this allowed us offer our service, earn much needed revenue but mitigate Covid transmission risk by reducing the # of people our visitors would encounter in a given week. This would limit interactions & facilitate contact tracing, if god forbid, we needed to conduct it.

By mandating a 1 week minimum, & because many folks moved to West Cork to socially distance & have a life through lockdown we got to know all our visitors personally. Before there is any vitriol of visitors coming to the region, all our Ludgate clients quarantined fully & many were 'coming home', now with families in tow from cities they've migrated to over the years. The 'brain drain' returned, our people coming home, how beautiful, how poignant. What a gem.

Ludgate is a community driven, not for profit initiative, which needs to be sustainable as a viable business. We are fortunate that such a business model allows us to forge those relationships, those friendships. This Summer I feel we've made friends with our visitors, friends for life. It was wonderful to welcome home the 'brain drain.' Over time, my hope is that the Covid workplace revolution will allow us to reverse the decades long trend of exporting our talent to cities many miles away & bring our people home, giving the next generation the option of never having to leave. We don't want the return of the 'Welcome Home' week, we want to replace that annual festival, we want to influence our Covid triggered extended stay visitors with a new, previously unimaginable option, that option being #Heretostay.

#HereToStay