



Unfortunately, this will be the last copy of the Mayo Echo you will be reading, as we have decided to close.

In 2004 a number of people took the notion to open a free newspaper for Mayo. This wasn't as novel an idea as it initially sounded. Mayo was one of the first areas to get a free newspaper when the Mayo Post was opened many years before, but unfortunately the Post ceased publishing much to the sorrow of its avid fans and readers.

So in 2004, it was decided that Mayo needed another free newspaper. The people behind the venture didn't have a whole lot of money to invest, so it was decided to bring out a small publication, and to distribute it door-to-door in Castlebar, and in the shops throughout the county.

It was also decided that the Mayo Echo wouldn't have a sports section, as the existing newspapers covered sports extremely well, and advertisers don't like to advertise in a sports section of a newspaper.

After much planning, and re-planning, and canvassing the business people of Mayo to see if they would support a free newspaper, a launch date of December 2004 was decided albeit (from a kitchen table).

Many people contributed to that first edition, and it hit the streets just before Christmas, with a distribution of a little over 6,000.

Within months it was judged a hit, and as the advertising grew, the circulation was increased, with door-to-door distribution expanding to Westport, Ballina, Claremorris and Foxford. The insatiable demand from shops was impossible to satisfy, but we kept growing the circulation, eventually reaching more than 24,000 copies every week.

As the kitchen table was no longer able to cope, Eddie and Rose McNulty offered the newspaper a home in a small office beside their shop in Moneen, Castlebar, at a nominal rent, and for that I am deeply appreciative. We got comfortable, and we improved our product.

Very early on we took a decision that we wouldn't cover petty court cases, where Mrs Murphy was caught speeding, or where young Sean was caught somewhere he shouldn't have been late at night. We felt that to go through the ordeal of appearing in court was enough punishment for these unfortunate people, without having their petty misdemeanours splashed across the press.

Instead we took a good look at the larger institutions around us. We attempted to expose our greedy politicians, our wasteful and corrupt county council, our incredibly incompetent health service, the many taxpayer-funded local quango's that have sprung up in recent years, and other suspicious or dangerous activity being carried out by big businesses or other local agencies.

It is important to point out that when we criticised the likes of the HSE, or Mayo County Council, it wasn't the ordinary staff we were having a go at, but the management. Indeed, many of the goings-on in these institutions have been brought to our attention by conscientious staff who actually want conditions and service levels to improve.

As time went by, we began to annoy certain people. Senior management in Mayo County Council decided that they didn't appreciate our exposing their mistakes, so they decided to punish us, withdrawing advertising support, and on one occasion physically removing our staff from their premises.

However, despite our limited resources, we persisted with our attempts at investigative reporting, exposing some quite serious activities, such as underage prostitution, illegal dumping of asbestos, allegations of corruption in the county's waste collection privatisation, children exploited by drug dealers, and the wholesale dumping of poisonous sewage into our county's rivers.

Despite annoying quite a few powerful people over the years, we are incredibly proud of what we have achieved, and greatly value the support shown to us by our loyal readers. Of course we wouldn't have those readers without the

very generous support of retailers who stocked our newspaper, and the hundreds of advertisers who supported us through thick and thin.

We have a fantastic team of staff, including the many who go out in all sorts of weather every week to deliver the newspaper door-to-door.

Unfortunately, the Mayo Echo has decided that it is to close. Three things have happened of late to bring this about. Firstly, local businesses are finding trading extremely difficult as the economy has collapsed. Local businesses are our bread and butter, and if people aren't spending, then businesses aren't spending, and so we don't have the advertising revenue. Secondly, the three-year-old boycott by Mayo County Council is having an effect. The Council is Mayo's largest employer, and the largest spender on advertising, and by starving us of that income, it offers our competitors a commercial advantage. The council clearly uses our taxpayers' money to discourage negative press coverage, against all principles of good governance.

Finally, in the last number of months the Western People, owned by the Cork-based Thomas Crosbie Media conglomerate, has launched a significant campaign to close us down. It has contacted many of our advertisers calling into question our distribution figures, and has repeatedly called into question our integrity. It has effectively bullied us out of the market using tactics that can only be described as sharp practice. Given that we are a small, independently owned publication, it is almost impossible for us to withstand such an onslaught, and therefore it is with the greatest of regret that we have been forced to take the decision to cease publication.

No doubt there will be many who celebrate our closure, and many who exhale a sigh of relief. I am encouraged though to hope that there will be just as many who will miss our weekly edition.

You may, in the distant future, see us return in another format, but for now at least, I wish you a fond farewell.

Tony Geraghty – Editor.

**“The test of
democracy is
freedom of criticism”.**
~David Ben-Gurion

Dancing in the Face of a Recession

With all the doom and gloom of the recession, people are searching for fresh, affordable ways to let loose and forget about their troubles. Dancing is one way this can be achieved. Caitriona Nic Ghiollaphadraig recently launched her dance workshops Deora De, a practice of the 5 Rhythms movement which is being rolled out nationwide over the coming months. This type of dance can help people to de-stress, get fit and build confidence, as seen on Nationwide and The Seogie Programme.

Caitriona says that people need to relax and take care of their physical well being during difficult times. “The recession is taking its toll on everyone and people are feeling stressed and under pressure. This dance can help people to relax and focus on their physical well-being. It's fun and perfect for people who simply love dancing.”

Practising this dance can strengthen and tone muscles, improve flexibility and cardiovascular fitness, as well as supporting good posture. “At this time of year, people are looking for new ways to get fit and feel better about themselves. These workshops are perfect of this. Along with the physical benefits, this movement calms the mind and encourages concentration.”

A recent study carried out by the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York found that dancing frequently significantly reduces the risk of developing dementia. It found that most types of physical exercise did not appear to significantly reduce the risk of dementia in older adults, with the exception of dance. In particular, dancing that requires decision-making.

“Regardless of age, physical exercise is necessary for a healthy lifestyle. 5 Rhythms is a fantastic way of boosting confidence. I teach the classes as a guide, it's not about steps and structure. My role is to encourage people to enjoy themselves and chill out. If only for a couple of hours, this type of dance can help people escape the madness in the world around them and just enjoy themselves.”

Starting on April 23rd, Caitriona will be running classes at The TF Royal, Castlebar. Further information on these workshops and the dance itself can be found at www.deorade.com.