

World Trade Center star big hit back at home

Áilín Quinlan hears the incredible success story of Michelle Lynch, from high profile executive roles in the USA to enjoying instant success with her new international trade business, Crannagh, in Cavan

AT ONE stage, it was a toss-up whether Michelle Lynch would become a trained singer or go into law — but the 47-year-old has never regretted opting for the trademark barrister's wig.

And it's not difficult to see why. A high-flying career as a barrister of international law and businesswoman in the US and Ireland has led, with her business partner and sister-in-law Carol Lynch, to the creation of a hugely successful firm.

After just 18 months in business, the duo have experienced eye-watering success.

Crannagh International Trade & Business Services Ltd ranks among the business elite in this country. Having won the 10th National Enterprise Award 2007, the County and City Enterprise Boards Regional Award 2007, it's been nominated and finalist as the Most Innovative Business for the Echo Awards, nominated and finalist for the Women in Business Awards — Bank of Ireland, and Winner of the Cavan County Enterprise Board Award 2007.

But then, one of its co-founders is a woman, who, at just 26, was appointed Senior Vice President of the World Trade Center Organisation and Director of the Trade Programmes with the Port Authority New York and New Jersey.

"I remember being on the 71st floor and looking down at the helicopters flying below," recalls Lynch. "The world-famous restaurant Windows on the World was essentially our canteen. Heady stuff!"

But that was only for starters. Head-hunted as Executive Director of Tony O'Reilly's prestigious Ireland Funds organisation, Lynch returned to Ireland in 1996 to oversee the disbursement of the Ireland Funds monies, a position which saw her brushing shoulders with movie stars like Paul Newman and Gregory Peck.

The move back to Ireland also put her in touch with Carol, the wife of her brother, Rory, and future co-founder of Crannagh and Co. The pair had previously worked together on a number of projects during Michelle's stint at the World Trade Center.

After a few years out to give birth to, and raise her son Matthew, 10, it was on to become CEO of the Maynooth University Foundation, and meet people like Bill Clinton, and Laura Bush. And oh, yes, make the occasional visit to the White House.

In May 2006 Michelle moved with her family to her native Cavan as part of a lifestyle change — and so did Carol.

"We wanted a better lifestyle and bought houses beside each other on Corraback Lake," says Michelle. In partnership with Carol — a former Vice Chairperson of KPMG's European Trade & Customs Practice — she co-founded Crannagh and Co.

Crannagh and Co is a boutique firm of International Trade and Customs Advisors, focusing on International and European trade law. They are the leading experts in trade compliance, risk-management and cost savings.

"When I was in the States, I noticed a tendency for small specialised niche boutique businesses who would work with the big four. The big four are a group of international accountancy and professional services firms that handle the vast majority of audits for publicly traded companies, as well as many private companies.

"How it happened in the States is that you would find a small company dealing with a small niche market and that's where we find ourselves today. We deal, from a trade perspective, in compliance, risk management, cost-savings and project management of new start-ups," explains Michelle, Crannagh's Chief Financial Officer.

In essence, the firm acts as a "one stop shop" for international trade, employing engineers, IT specialists, Customs & Excise consultants.

Just 18 months ago, they had a staff of two — now the firm boasts 11 employees, offices in Cavan & Dublin, associate law offices in New York and Washington, and a clientele, which not only includes 18 of the Top Fortune 500 Companies, but also 12 of the 100 largest private companies in the world, in addition to a number of indigenous Irish companies. They're the preferred service supplier to a large Dublin accountancy firm and to one of the largest law firms in Ireland.

Crannagh is unique in that it offers an experienced and knowledgeable industry-focused team. They deal mainly with international and European customs and trade law, excise duties, audits and disclosures, appeals, export licensing.

"We are the only company providing this service in Ireland. You can find bits and pieces of what we do in law firms or accountancy firms — but we bring all the services together under one roof."

Between them, Michelle and Carol,



GLOBAL TRADER: Crannagh director Michelle Lynch with one of the many awards she has won since returning from elevated roles as senior vice-president of the World Trade Centre and director of the trade programmes with the Port Authority New York and New Jersey.

Crannagh's Managing Director, have over 35 years of experience. Michelle is a barrister specialising in international law and former Vice President of the World Trade Center in New York, while Dublin-born Carol, sister of John Boyne, author of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, is a former Vice-Chairman of KPMG's European trade and customs practice, the leading firm of chartered accountants and business advisers in Ireland, and former head of KPMG Ireland's trade and customs practice.

"We project manage for companies setting up in Ireland — for instance, we have a specialised engineer available, if a company is exporting a computer.

We would need an engineer to break down the components of the computer physically to analyse and classify the components to ensure the most favourable duty to our customer. We would advise companies on how to export their capital equipment from the US into Ireland in the

most cost-effective manner."

Indeed — Crannagh's expertise can save clients up to \$90 million a year.

Michelle Lynch is indeed a happy woman — and she has never regretted her decision to pass up on the microphone! Yes, the hours can be long — the night before this interview took place, she was in meetings until 11pm. But she loves it.

"I enjoy it. It's hugely challenging. We could be dealing with anything from the pharmaceutical sector to airplane parts." The company recently invested in a boat — the Crannagh 3, which they use to take clients on trips along the local waterways.

"The river comes right into Belturbet, we can just sail in! We get clients coming from Malta, Iceland and the US on business. They'll usually include a holiday while they're here. They love it down here. That's a part of it that I feel is very important. Business is business, but there is also time to relax, and really embrace the customer on a one-to-one basis."

Mothers enjoy hit with baby service

FROM a website selling baby bottles to an online business offering hundreds of baby products as well as its very own brand, Handy Baby Products Ltd is a real success story.

The company, which manufactures and distributes baby care products for bath-time, feeding and safety, was set up in September 2003 by Dublin born sisters Suzanne Browne and Martina Delaney. Their aim — to make the experience of caring for infants easier, safer and healthier for both parents and babies.

Handy Baby Products Ltd, launched its own baby brand, Clevamama, in September 2006 (www.clevamama.com). Last April, the company won the Practical Parenting Award in the UK for its innovative baby bath towel. For two years running the firm has been a finalist in the prestigious Kind & Jugend Innovation Awards. Kind & Jugend is Europe's largest trade show attended by more than 14,000 trade visitors and featuring more than 6000 international exhibits.

The company sells a range of products from its award-winning baby bath-towel to transparent oven door guards, tableware and soother sterilisers.

Explains Suzanne: "Lifting a baby out of the bath is a challenging experience. We came up with a towel that wraps around the parent's neck like an apron, allowing you two free hands to safely lift the baby out of the bath — that was our first Clevamama product."

The company's products sell in Ireland and Northern Ireland, Russia, UK, Spain, Norway and Sweden. The Clevamama range now has 10 products, with new and innovative products in the pipeline.

For more information, see www.handybaby.com



CLEVER MOMS: Suzanne Browne and Martina Delaney of Clevamama, a baby service with a growing global clientele.

Irish birth rate is still soaring

IRELAND is still proving the number one country in Europe when it comes to births — making us the envy of Europe when it comes to producing a long-term workforce. Population levels here have soared to 4.3 million, according to the latest report from the Central Statistics Office (CSO).

The 2.5% rise in the 12 months from April of 2006 to April 2007 is the third year in a row in which our population has increased by over 2%.

This makes us the most consistently fertile race in the European Union.

The figures in the CSO's Population and Migration Estimates also reflect Ireland's expanding immigrant community. Still, overall this demographic is one which is the envy of most of our EU neighbours.

Network eases the path for female entrepreneurs

START-UP entrepreneurs gained an invaluable insight into the part which developing contacts plays in growing a business at the first National Women's Enterprise Day in The Mullingar Park Hotel, in Co Westmeath.

Sheelagh Daly, National Women's Enterprise Day chairperson and CEO of Wicklow County Enterprise Board, says this type of networking event can improve your likelihood of business being

successful.

"The Government wants to encourage more women to start up their own businesses," explains Sheelagh. "There are many women out there capable of starting a business. We want to provide an encouraging and supportive environment to help make that happen."

"There is a spirit of entrepreneurship out there. We want to help wom-

en to be part of this new business environment. The recent GEM report found that only four out of 10 women believe they have the knowledge and skills to start a business.

Hosted by the County and City Enterprise Boards, six businesswomen gave delegates an insight into their businesses. These included Pamela Fitzmaurice of Blazing Salads Food Company Ltd; Rachel Doyle of Ireland's first five-star

garden centre, The Arboretum; Mary Kelly of Kellys Organics; Tara Cunningham of Release Speech Therapy; Catherine Fulvio of Ballynocken House and Carol Ann Casey of CA Consulting. Some of the above feature on these pages.

To stay touch with events in 2008, visit the website at www.nwed.ie, email info@nwed.ie or call Clara Clark on 01-2898533 for information.

FEMALE INNOVATION: Sheelagh Daly, chair of the National Women's Enterprise.



STYLE FIELD: "Gardening is as fashion conscious as clothes and plants come in and out of fashion just like clothes and accessories," says Rachel Doyle of Arboretum, (pictured here with Minister Tom Kitt).

Arboretum Garden Centre class apart

RACHEL DOYLE, along with her husband Frank, founded the Arboretum Garden Centre in 1978. It has grown to be one of the biggest garden centres in Ireland and in 2005 was awarded the accolade of Ireland's first five-star garden centre.

It has been Garden Centre of the Year for the past five years and won Best Customer Service award 2006/2007 from Bord Bia.

Arboretum is Latin for a 'collection of trees'. Located in Leighlinbridge, Co Carlow, the Arboretum is a state-of-the-art gardening and lifestyle experience. Rachel says their aim is to bring customers a totally customer focused shopping experience.

"Here at the Arboretum we pride ourselves on attention to detail. Our highly trained staff are on hand to help you

with all your needs, from gardening advice to choosing the perfect gift! Indeed it is our high level of customer service, the range of products we carry and our friendly welcome that has earned us the title of Bord Bia — Best customer service 2006/2007, Bord Bia Garden Centre of the Year and an award as Ireland's first five-star garden centre."

Rachel and Frank have built a garden centre that caters for all experiences. Rachel says: "I feel that gardening is as fashion conscious as clothes, and plants come in and out of fashion, as do clothes and accessories. For example, grasses are very in at the moment and conifers are out."

Rachel, who represents Ireland on the International Garden Centre Board, says this gives her the opportunity to see best practices in countries all over the world.

This also acts as a good excuse to travel to exotic parts.

"I was in South Africa this year, also New Zealand, Australia and Switzerland. I was in Canada in February. I get to see some of the best gardens around and thus am able to keep ahead of the global trends," she notes.

When people ask what her customer base is, Rachel's answer is simple — Ireland: "We get customers from all over the country travelling to the Arboretum. That is partly because we give the full package — people choose and purchase plants, avail of our landscaping service, have lunch or afternoon tea and it's all home cooking!"

In Spring 2008 they are opening a new Arboretum Garden in which customers can browse and enjoy the colour-themed plants which are central to its design.