

Castle Leslie Estate Celebrates 25 Years in Business

Although there is over 1000 years recorded of Leslie family history, the 10th May 2017 marked the 25th anniversary of Castle Leslie Estate operating as a thriving business.

The last quarter of a century has seen the estate regenerate from a leaking seasonal Tea Rooms with a handful of part time staff to the current operations with a team of well over 140 at the end of the season.

Castle Leslie Estate is set on 1000 acres of rolling parkland with ancient trees and glittering lakes teeming with wildlife. Situated on the border, it is one of the most breath-taking estates in Ireland.

The estate is one of only a handful of Castles and Estates in Ireland still home to its founding family. It is the only one operating on such a scale and it has now become one of the most individual and best loved places to stay in Ireland.

When asked about the last 25 years, Sammy Leslie tells; *“Our family’s ethos has always been one of creativity and curiosity, openness and sharing, of innovation and entrepreneurship, of sensitivity and working with, of involvement and teamwork. With 1000 years of Leslie family history recorded, and 25 years in business, it is my great honour to be the one tasked with bringing a unique and important part of Ireland’s living heritage through to the future.”*

About the future she said *“Like my father I strongly believe that we neither inherit nor own lands, we are just guardians doing our best for future generations. It is my hope that Castle Leslie Estate will provide more decades of employment for those who live locally and continue to be a sanctuary for all our guests”.*

Sammy added *“I’d like to pay huge thanks to each and every one of our team, both, past and present, our loyal customers, and our future customers. Cheers to 25 years, and here’s to 25 more!”*

The original dream for Castle Leslie Estate - great horses, good food and good old-style hospitality is flourishing. With over 30 national and international awards to name including the AA’s prestigious Courtesy and Care Award, multiple Hotel and Catering Review Gold Medal Awards, a hall of fame member of the TripAdvisor Travelers’ Choice Awards, 2 AA Rosettes for Snaffles Restaurant and most recently, Best Domestic Equine Enterprise Award at the Irish Sport Industry Awards.

Sammy's ambition was to bring the Estate back to life, gain sustainability through tourism and work symbiotically with local communities. She also wanted to have fun in the process! Her desire was to restore the Castle in the style and manner it was built to enable guest entertainment on a grand scale.

Sammy started small and on 10th May 1992 the Tea Rooms were opened in the old conservatory of the castle. Afternoon teas were served and tours of the castle and the occasional ghost tour too. Scones were baked and teas brewed in the old Butler Kitchen and served in the conservatory. The entrance was down the tunnel via the Victorian central heating boilers and popping up out in the gardens.

Funding was supported by a grant of 5k from Monaghan County Enterprise Board, (now LEO). Sammy didn't have the matching 5k to be able to draw down the grant so she sold her Fathers car, to gather up the matching money. Later that year we won the National Enterprise Awards for our endeavours.

With the roof mended between 1995 and 1997, Sammy could now refurbish fourteen of the Castle bedrooms and bathrooms, each in its own unique style, in an effort to maintain the individuality and uniqueness of the property. Dinners were served by candlelight in the original dining room, just as it had been in the old days, with pre-dinner drinks served in the Drawing Room or Fountain Garden.

In June 2002, Castle Leslie Estate hit centre stage when it hosted the wedding of Paul McCartney and Heather Mills. Over 800 million people worldwide saw the event on TV which had a huge impact on the progression of Castle Leslie Estate and the local border counties.

In 2004, after 20 years in external ownership, the Estate's Equestrian Centre and Hunting Lodge were re-purchased. Having secured euro cross-border funding, Sammy set about restoring and regenerating the Castle at Castle Leslie Estate. The redevelopment of the Long Gallery Wing in the Castle enabled the Estate to offer business and corporate facilities. The addition of six further guestrooms brought the room total in the Castle to 20.

With 78,000 square feet of historic buildings, miles of famine wall and the Hunting Lodge back in the fold, funding was sourced for reinvestment in the Estate. Inspired by Poundbury, the town Prince Charles built in England, Sammy Leslie worked with a team of Irish architects to extend the village of Glaslough back over the Estate where it had been, prior to a fire in the 1850s. A seamless extension to Glaslough village, the Village Cottages and houses are built around a Village Square and Green. Sammy wanted to ensure that the development would be sympathetic to the current style of the existing village so she called in specialists in conservation, heritage and architecture to design the development. All proceeds from the sale of the houses were re-invested to fund the continual regeneration of the Estate. Local residents and Estate Team were given a chance to purchase a home two weeks ahead of the market to ensure as many houses as possible were retained locally

Located at the gates of Castle Leslie Estate, the Hunting Lodge and Equestrian Centre underwent extensive refurbishment and renovation before re-opening in May 2007. Both had been in the Leslie family for many years until 1984 when Desmond Leslie sold them. It was in the midst of the Irish troubles and his daughter Sammy had just qualified as an intermediate instructor. Undeterred, Sammy set up a yard in the old Estate farm buildings. Here Sammy bought, sold and broke horses until 1987, vowing to re-purchase the Hunting Lodge when she could. She achieved her goal in 2004.

In January 2006, work started on the multi-million refurbishment to expand and improve the existing facilities - the 29-bedroomed Lodge and the new state-of- the-art Equestrian Centre. The project was supported by grant aid and part-financed by the European Union under the National Development Plan 2000-2006, administered by Fáilte Ireland.

But never one to rest, Sammy has already identified a number of future projects including the restoration of the Formal Walled Garden and the location of the successful Monaghan exhibition to the gardens gate lodges among other projects.