



Savouring The Sligo Food Trail: A Wonderful Wild Adventure (1). Dr. Prannie Rhatigan's Magical Marine Algae, Lissadell House, Laura's of Carney, Sweetbeat Café and Knox Restaurant

Transcript of Episode #49 of *The Artisan Food & Drink Business Show*

Catherine Moran: Hello, and welcome to episode 49 of *The Artisan Food & Drink Business Show*, the show where artisan producers tell their brand story and share the secrets of their success. I'm your host, Catherine Moran.

Today's episode, the first of two parts, features the Sligo Food Trail. In case you haven't been, Co. Sligo is a coastal county in the north west of Ireland.

Each year, in autumn, the organisers of The Sligo Food Trail launch the Harvest Feast, a two-day celebration and showcase of all that Co. Sligo has to offer the traveller — or adventurer — who is thirsty and hungry for great local food and great local drink.

I was invited, along with other journalists and bloggers, to the launch of this Harvest Feast.

So, over two days we stepped into the shoes of the traveller to Sligo. We had the opportunity to taste some of the excellent

local food and drink and to meet the producers of this food and drink — some of the county’s top food and drink talents.

Sligo isn’t just about good food and drink, though. It has a treasure trove directly related to its rugged coastal setting, namely edible seaweed foraging, seaweed baths, guided invigorating coastal walks that reveal the county’s rich cultural history and pre-history, and world-class waves for surfing. So, you wouldn’t be too far wrong if you said that Sligo is pure rock and roll: rocks of the geology kind and rolls of the big wave kind.

I should also mention that Sligo town is one of the most important live music towns in Ireland. We’ll hear a little more about Sligo’s live music scene in the next episode of the show when we meet Paul, owner of the oldest traditional Irish pub in Sligo, Thomas Connolly’s Bar.

So back to today’s show in which we’ll hear from five members of The Sligo Food Trail: Anthony Gray, owner of two Sligo restaurants, Eala Bhán and Trá Bán, and Chair of The Sligo Food Trail, Dr. Prannie Rhatigan, Sligo’s preeminent edible seaweed forager, seaweed author and international speaker on seaweed, Lucia Cecchetti, Italian themed gastro-pub owner, Carolanne Rushe, plant-based food entrepreneur and David Dunne, co-owner of Knox restaurant in the heart of Sligo town.

So, let’s dive in now. Anthony Gray, Chair of The Sligo Food Trail, explains in a nutshell what the Sligo Food Trail is.

Catherine Moran So the people who have joined and signed up for The Sligo Food Trail, it’s a mix of people who have businesses in food and drink, is that right?

Anthony Gray: Yea, it is indeed. And it’s also about the experiences and how to sell the experience to the tourists and to tourism coming in to Ireland. There are different experiences. As you know yourself, you can go foraging for seaweed. You can eat mussels beside

the shell midden sites in Cullenamore. And, it's all about trying to gel together the experiences and also the food aspect of it. And Sligo is becoming known as the adventure capital of the North West. And if we can tie food into that, we're well on our way.

Catherine Moran Next we'll hear from world-renowned, Sligo-based edible seaweed expert and medical doctor, Dr. Prannie Rhatigan. I recorded Prannie on both a blustery Sligo seashore and in a quiet Sligo hotel suite, so we'll alternate between these two locations. And the other voices you'll hear are those of the people from the media that I mentioned earlier who also came along to the Harvest Feast.

Dr. Rhatigan: We're very lucky, in Ireland — we have huge biodiversity. We have about 600 different species of seaweeds — marine algae — off our coasts. These are divided into the reds, the greens, and the browns. As you can imagine, as an island perched out there in the Atlantic, we have *really* clean water compared to other countries, very, very clean. We're very lucky.

Catherine Moran: Very lucky, for sure. And all the experts agree that Ireland should be leading the way in seaweed production. Picture this now. We're in the grounds of Lissadell House, a mansion dripping with history and a key attraction to Co. Sligo. Lissadell is on the south shore of the Magherow peninsula, a perfect spot for seaweed foraging. Here we are setting out with Prannie to the foreshore.

Dr. Rhatigan: So, We're going to head down this little drive, and I'll just show you the walled Victorian kitchen garden in there, which is fabulous. Should I put on my seat belt so that I can stop this noise? Around this little corner, and then we're going to come to a T-junction and we'll go right, there we are.

So there we are, with our reds, our greens, our browns, and they are on rocky shores, which is where seaweeds grow very plentifully, and also for those of us who have been swimming in the sea, all summer, it's been warm, but now it's getting cold and it will remain relatively cold. And that's where the marine algae, or the seaweeds, really thrive. So, around Christmas time and after Christmas, and right coming up to the Spring, when the water is just lovely and cold, and clean and fresh, that's when

our seaweeds really come to life, really blossom. So, yeah. We're *really* fortunate, for somebody like me who's grown up using seaweeds all my life; I couldn't be living in a better place than Ireland.

Isn't this amazing?

Catherine Moran: Oh. They're gorgeous.

Dr. Rhatigan: Yeah, it's just so gorgeous. We're going to head for that little peninsula of rocks there. That's our ultimate goal.

Catherine Moran: What do you most commonly pick around these neck of the woods, or *neck of the sea*, I should say?

Dr. Rhatigan: This neck of the sea! [Laughs] Well, just whatever is in season, Catherine, is what we harvest. Whatever comes in, and you're kind of a little bit like with your own garden, you know, you're *waiting* for blackcurrants or you're *waiting* for the basil to be right. You're *waiting* for whatever it is that's going to actually come into season, and then you're just *all over* it for the first while, and then you get a little bit tired of it [laughs], you've used it in every recipe, and so you kind of get a little bit fed of that one and then you move onto something else.

Catherine Moran: I asked Prannie about her first book, the award-winning Irish Seaweed Kitchen. This book is beautifully written and beautifully illustrated with both photos and line drawings of the important edible seaweeds on the west coast of Ireland. She opens her book, lyrically, with the words “As an Island people, the Irish are no strangers to the sea. In good times and in bad, there has always been seaweed, powerfully nutritious, sustaining, and available, linked to us through centuries of dependency, evolution, survival and migration. It has seeped into our folklore, our culture and our songs.” But I think most of us have forgotten how to eat seaweed, how to gather and cook it. Prannie’s gorgeous book is a remedy for this.

Dr. Rhatigan: It sort of happened organically really, *The Irish Seaweed Kitchen*. I started to give courses in a place called The Organic Centre, in Rossinver, in County Leitrim, back in the 1990s when I

returned to Sligo having done my medical training and my GP [General Practitioner medical] training. I came back to work here and brought some people out for a walk and then the walks started, and people wanted more and more recipes, so I was photocopying *volumes* of recipes and then it really just happened.

Our *Porphyra*, the one that's in sushi, is also red, so we've three different types of red there. Then there are the browns, and with the browns we've got two types, we've got the sea spaghetti, which looks exactly as it says it's going to "look on the tin" [laughs].

It took me six years to do the book because it was a labour of love. I was looking back at recipes that I had since childhood and getting my mother's recipes, and then I wanted to make it really interesting and involve other chefs and friends.

So, it became much bigger than I anticipated, it has about 150 recipes in it, and it also has descriptions of the seaweed and a little bit of folklore and history. I never really cared whether it ever sold, I had to just put everything down, although the publisher stopped me at one stage and said, "You just cannot start putting in about your seaweed creams and baths, and what you feed the dog. There has to be a cut-off point." So, I'm working on another book at the moment to cover all those things.

Isn't this is just glorious. I forgot my sunglasses; I never think to bring my sunglasses.

Catherine Moran: I just left mine in car, and thought, "Won't be needing those."

Dr. Rhatigan: Yeah, I know.

Catherine Moran: What's this weather like for foraging seaweed? Does it make any difference whatsoever?

Dr. Rhatigan: Not really, because the tide, it's kind of affecting those there now being in the sunlight like that, but really, they're all going to be dried and used fairly quickly, anyway. I try not to leave them in the sunlight, and that's a great question, Catherine, because the

ones that actually can cope with being out of the water for a long time are the ones that are highest up on the shore. So, they're kind of made to cope with it. It's a little channel rack and it has channels in it to hold the water for as long as possible.

Catherine Moran: Ah, lovely.

Dr. Rhatigan: Well, I've brought you one of these little guides, that will be able to kind of put things... and you know what's great about that, Catherine, is that there's actually a QR code for each seaweed.

Catherine Moran: I spotted that on the web!

Dr. Rhatigan: It's a QR code, and people think I'm just brilliant at technology, but I'm not at all! [Laughs] It was just something that I came across.

So, you actually can scan it, and it's a couple of minutes of me describing each seaweed and really showing how to harvest in a sustainable way for each of them, and everybody loves that. They find that it's kind of like having me on the beach with them.

Catherine Moran: Yeah.

Dr. Rhatigan: Well, my father, who's also a medic, he just knew the value of everything at the shore. He knew the nutritional value, and even though we were laughed at a bit when we were kids — what were we doing down there on the shore? — and we *complained bitterly* as children, our hands were cold and we weren't quite sure what we were doing there, but he knew the value of it all and we harvested whatever was in season, we brought it home. My mother was a great cook and she turned it into great things, so yeah, really kind of a different childhood, I guess, compared to some people, but that's all we knew at the time.

There is one that I kind of long for it to come into season, because I always feel that it's a real women's seaweed, and it's the winged kelp, or the *Alaria*, because it's got a great calcium level and I think we kind of need so much calcium in our bodies, and nice amounts that we can absorb. It also tastes great, and it's great in smoothies and it's great in soups. It's very related to

the seaweed that a lot of research has been done on breast cancer in Tasmania. I kind of feel that it's one that I should be eating, just for general good health, and it's not any penance to eat it because it tastes so good.

Catherine Moran: Did you say *Alaria*?

Dr. Rhatigan: It's *Alaria esculenta*, would be the one, or it's called winged kelp as well. I suppose the reason I love it is because I'm always trying to introduce people and children to a seaweed, and if you put that one into soup it has a mild chicken-like flavour. So, children will really enjoy a soup that might have something alien floating around in it, but there isn't a kind of a strong flavour.

Catherine Moran: There are plenty of mouth-watering recipes for *Alaria* in Prannie's book such as, "Banana and *alaria* loaf, a moist succulent bread that is perfect for every occasion, especially breakfast." And "Dressed crab with cucumber and *alaria* salad", and "Gooseberry cobbler tart with *alaria*" and "Layered, chocolate walnut squares with *alaria*". Yum!

Dr. Rhatigan: I've worked with chefs in different parts of the world, like in Denmark when the Nordic Research Lab was part of NOMA, I did some work with the chefs there, and Norwegian chefs, at the very southern most tip of Norway at a lighthouse, and some wonderful locations with chefs in Seattle. And I just came back from working with chefs in Portugal at the Sea Agricultural Conference.

So yeah, internationally, chefs are really interested in seaweed and that makes me really excited because it's just a great message to get across to people, that they can add seaweed very, very easily to food and give it that *amazing* health boost, because that's what I'm interested in really, letting people have a boost of health that can just make them feel better, look better. It's marvellous to be able to use seaweed like that.

We can review them when we get back to the courtyard. We can have a quick review, and there'll be a test! [Laughing]

Catherine Moran: Now she tells us!

Dr. Rhatigan: More champagne!

Catherine Moran: Who hasn't been listening?

Dr. Rhatigan: More champagne for those who get them all right!

So, we're spoiled, really, for all of the beautiful locations that we can bring people to, and I'm spoiled with all these marvellous chefs that I work with, like Eithne and Anthony and people like that.

Catherine Moran: Eithne is Eithne O'Sullivan, chef-owner of Eithne's by The Sea, a harbour-side restaurant in Mullaghmore, Co. Sligo that specialises in seafood and fish. Eithne's by the Sea even offers a Seaweed Tasting Plate and its Smoked Salmon Sandwich with Seaweed Pesto recently made the number one spot out of thirty dishes in the Irish Independent's Foodie Bucket List. Impressive or what?!

Dr. Rhatigan: I'm just going to pick up our gorgeous egg wrack, and on it is... and we know from the chat that we had that each little egg is one year. So, we can start it from the very top of our seaweed, so it would be there. So that piece of seaweed would be one, two, three, four year's old, that particular one, and this is the *really amazing* one that the chefs are adoring, which is the *Vertebrata lanosa*. Now, they grow it in Jersey, Jersey Island, and the cheeky Jersey guys, they call it "mermaid's bikini line", [laughter] but it tastes like a truffle and it's wonderful, and it's one to look out for.

That was kind of to complete our story, and it just happened that Glenn [owner of Sligo-based Wild Atlantic Oyster] had harvested this one, so I'm thrilled because I was going to nip back and harvest it, but those are two amazing seaweeds and we need to protect our shoreline. Remember, seaweeds have a lot of love to give, so enjoy them, and the best of good health. Let's go for lunch!

Catherine Moran: As Prannie just said, we need to protect our shoreline, if it's not too late already to do so for our seaweed. But that's a subject for

another podcast episode. We now started walking back from the shore with Prannie to our venue for lunch, the imposing and deeply historic Lissadell House. En route, I had a quick chat with fellow media folk Jennifer Petoff and Scott Petoff. Jennifer writes the travel blog [Sidewalk Safari](#) and Scott writes the work-life-vacation balance blog [Vacation Counts](#). Jennifer and Scott were part of the media group who travelled from Dublin to Sligo by train along with members of the Sligo Food Trail. There was Sligo Food Trail food and drink aplenty on the journey down from Dublin and I asked Jennifer and Scott about the culinary highlights of their trip.

Jennifer Petoff: We took the train from Sligo to Dublin this morning, picked us up and then we all went back together. The coach on the train was all decked out with the Wild Atlantic Way signs and Sligo Seatrails signs.

Scott Petoff: We had deer, venison. Venison, like cured meats.

Catherine Moran: Oh, like a charcuterie?

Scott Petoff: Like a charcuterie, exactly.

Catherine Moran: Yes, salamis, yeah.

Scott Petoff: A little smoked salmon on Guinness bread.

Catherine Moran: Yeah.

Scott Petoff: And people were telling stories about their food, where it comes from, where they're based.

Jennifer Petoff: How their business got started, a lot of personal stories.

Scott Petoff: How their business got started and supporting Sligo.

Catherine Moran: We continue walking back to Lissadell House and Prannie stops briefly to point out the tunnel running under the lawn and leading to the kitchens of Lissadell House. Common with most of the often-aristocratic owners of the big houses of the time (Victorian times), the owners of Lissadell believed that servants should be

neither seen nor heard and this tunnel was one of their solutions for keeping the servants out of sight.

Dr. Rhatigan: We'll stop here for a second because there's a servants' tunnel that actually, when the vegetables were grown in the Victorian walled garden, and they were to be brought to the big house [Lissadell House], the lord and lady didn't want to see the servants going in with the vegetables, so they were tunnelled across the garden underneath the lawn. Isn't that incredible!

Catherine Moran: Very considerate of them!

Dr. Rhatigan: Very considerate!

We now arrive at the courtyard of Lissadell House and are greeted by Constance Cassidy, *barrister* and co-owner of Lissadell. This piece with Constance is tantalisingly short because she had to rush off to a court case in Dublin. Here's Constance.

Constance Cassidy: When you're finished, Anthony is going to come up to me and I'm just going to give tickets so that people can actually come in to see the house and I'll bring you on a tour later on myself, because we're here most weekends. So look, I'm going to head off to my date. Great to see you all, and *Up Sligo!*

Catherine Moran: Up Sligo! Indeed! So we now go in to Lissadell House where we make our way to the dining room moving through rooms full of priceless items relating to Ireland's political and cultural history. Lissadell was the childhood family home of Constance Gore-Booth (later Countess Markievicz). Constance was a suffragette, revolutionary and nationalist and played a key role in Ireland's 1916 Rising. Lissadell was also a holiday retreat for the poet W.B. Yeats, one of the most important twentieth century poets globally. In fact, Yeats describes Sligo as his "country of the heart". Yeats and Constance and her siblings were childhood friends. There'll be a little more about Constance in the next episode of the show. In the meantime, here's Anthony Gray explaining the link between Lissadell, W.B. Yeats and yet another poet, Leonard Cohen.

Anthony Gray: And leading to the next room, to finally where we're going to eat. And we'll stop off where Leonard Cohen used to meditate before he went to do his concerts. He used to sit down and take a few moments. Some of you will be sitting at W.B. Yeats' table, and Lady Gregory, where he wrote some of his poetry. And the table is a very prestigious table. So, that's a little bit history. So, feel free to meander around and we'll keep on going down to make our way to lunch.

Catherine Moran: As you might expect, seaweed featured on the lunch menu. Prannie gave us a little background on the lore of seaweed locally.

Dr. Rhatigan: So this is the one that every grandmother had a recipe for the chest, because it is proven to be antiviral. And it is one of those that has been well researched. So, it's antiviral, and if you do have a cough it really does help with the bronchitis. So, it's a very special seaweed. I think it goes back centuries in Ireland. It's like our dillisk, or dulse. The carrageen and the dulse are really very special. So that's it. Well done and enjoy.

Catherine Moran: We had a sumptuous lunch, cooked by Anthony's chefs from his restaurant in Sligo Town, Eala Bhan. It was a true taste of the Wild Atlantic Way and included Lissadell mussels, local scallops and prawns, lamb from Sherlock's of Tubbercurry and a platter of desserts. Check out the show's website myartisanbusiness for photos of these outstanding dishes.

We next made our way back from the coast to Sligo town as we had a dinner date at Anthony's restaurant, Eala Bhan later that evening. En route, we stopped at Italian-themed gastro pub Laura's of Carney. Time to sample more food? Well, this is the Sligo Food Trail, after all. The owner, Lucia Cecchini, had prepared a host of small plates for us, Italian in theme but Irish in ingredient provenance.

Catherine Moran: And your theme is seafood?

Lucia Cecchini: It used to be a seafood restaurant... Everything what we do here

is like homemade, the pasta, the bread, the dessert, the pizzas, proper food like we do in Italy. Because, you know, many times you go to Italian restaurant and you get just a fake, like the hard grain pasta. We do the proper one.

Catherine Moran: And you have laid out some beautiful treats here for us. I think there're mostly savoury. And I missed what they are. Would you mind just explaining what you've got on the...

Laura Cecchini: Yes, over there is the seadas, and it's filled with... it's a homemade pastry, first of all, and inside it's filled with Pecorino sardo, orange and glazed with honey.

Catherine Moran: Ah, so that's actually a sweet... it's not a savoury... it's a sweet...

Laura Cecchini: With the orange and the honey, it's something in between... Then there is the panzerotti, and there is the tomato, mozzarella, ham, but you can put whatever you want inside there, so... you can do it with whatever you want to put... it doesn't have to be only one thing. Then, we call it the wrap, anyway, with the chicken and the vegetables, and then the chicken balls... But you can do so many things anyway.

Catherine Moran: And your name is Luc- Lucia-

Lucia Cecchini: Lucia.

Catherine Moran: Lucia?

Lucia Cecchini: Lucia, yes.

Catherine Moran: Lucia. And the name of your place is?

Lucia Cecchini: Laura's [Laura's of Carney].

Catherine Moran: Laura's, yes.

Lucia Cecchini: I didn't change the name because this place was always called Laura's, so there was no point to change the name. Laura is an Italian name, anyway so... And Laura is an Italian name,

anyway.

Catherine Moran: Absolutely, it's very close. And you're on Twitter?

Laura Cecchini: Ah, Facebook, Instagram, Trip Advisor.

Catherine Moran: OK. So people can find you on line if they just do a search for "Laura's of Carney"?

Laura Cecchini: Yes, we have a Facebook page and like I said, we're on Trip Advisor.

Catherine Moran: Wonderful. Thank you very much for chatting, Lucia.

Laura Cecchini: Ah, you're welcome, thank you!

Catherine Moran: Let me now introduce you to the final two members of the Sligo Food Trail for this episode, Carolanne Rushe, owner of Sweet Beat Café and David Dunne, co-owner of Knox Restaurant in Sligo. I asked Carolanne and David why they signed up to the trail.

Carolanne Rushe: I love it, I have to say. When I heard it was happening, it was kind of like, "Finally, we're getting together as a group." I actually couldn't believe how many of us are part of The Food Trail. When we had the launch night I was blown away by how many people were there. It was just great to have us all there together because we never get together like that. Especially for someone who is a new café owner, business owner in town, in the food industry in Sligo, it's been huge because we got like Anthony Gray, who's part of the Restaurant Association, so it's great to have him in town as well.

It's just brilliant because I'm able to tap into local producers that I didn't know existed and be able to buy local organic produce from members of The Sligo Food Trail. It just feels like we're finally like a food community, like we're getting together and we're kind of really proud of what we're doing, so it's really nice for me to see that. I'm sorry that that hasn't happened sooner, but for me, to be a year and a half into business and for that to happen is great.

Catherine Moran: And here's David Dunne's perspective.

David Dunne: For any initiative like this, and it's in its infancy, it can only but be a benefit. When you sign up to something like this, it wasn't a huge entry cost for us and the production values... there was a fantastic video that was done that can be streamed on the social media. As an early venture, absolutely. Whether we see any benefit immediately, I don't know that... We have to look at this as a longer-term project and longer-term play. We're trying to get more people to come to Sligo and enjoy the food.

Catherine Moran: Carolanne started as a market stallholder, food blogger, recipe developer and then set up plant-based eatery, Sweet Beat Cafe. She also supplies some of her products to supermarkets in Sligo and its surrounding counties. So, Carolanne has retail and wholesale strings to her culinary bow.

Carolanne Rushe: Sweet Beat Café is a plant-based café. Basically what we offer at the moment is a 100% plant-based menu. Now, all of our food on our menu revolves around fruit, vegetables, grains, nuts, seeds. We do a real lovely brunch/breakfast menu every day and all day. Then at lunchtime, we offer a daily changing soup, hot dishes, salads, and also our breakfast menu. We also have a treats' menu.

All of our baking is vegan so we wouldn't use any dairy or eggs or cream or anything in our baking. Then we also have raw treats, so we have raw vegan bakes. We've got raw vegan cheesecake, raw brownies, raw energy balls, raw cookies, so kind of something for everybody who's looking for basically a healthy alternative to your favourite snacks. Tomorrow, we'll have a raw Snickers bar on the menu, which I'm very excited about,

Catherine Moran: A raw Snickers bar, oh!

Carolanne Rushe: A raw Snickers bar, yeah. We make an almond biscuit base and then top it with a caramel cashew cream, raw peanut butter and date caramel, and then we coat it in our own homemade raw chocolate and top it with crushed, toasted peanuts and it's ahh-mazing! [laughs]

Catherine Moran: It sounds good. It *does* sound amazing!

David Dunne: We opened up in May 2014, so we're just over a year open, a year, 15 months open. What we wanted to provide to the Sligo customer was fresh, locally sourced, both meat and vegetable offering, and provide an all day kind of offering, in terms of breakfast, lunch, and we've now gone into evening meals. So, right from the off, I suppose, we just wanted to be honest with ourselves on how we went about that.

We try and do everything in-house. We bake everything ourselves. We don't buy in any mixes or anything like that. Even when we're making a soup, for instance, we want to make sure that it's the freshest ingredients possible. That carries right through. From a breakfast offering, we have locally sourced sausage from Adrian Sheerin, out at Ballymote. He uses farms that are all within about 10 miles of his butchery. We use his bacon. We use Benbulbin Eggs, another local company.

Catherine Moran: I've just seen those on the menu. You've got eggs Florentine, eggs Benedict, eggs-

David Dunne: Eggs Florentine, eggs Benedict, and while they're staple breakfast choices in Dublin and the like. There wasn't that kind of an offering in Sligo up to now, so we wanted to try and bring breakfast back to the fore, in some ways, and certainly the brunch at the weekends is particularly busy for our Benedict and for our Florentine. We then go through and in terms of a lunch offering, we've a variety of sandwiches, soups, burgers. We source all our mince locally from Clarke's Butchers, which is literally 300 yards around the corner, always fresh, never frozen. You know, and we just try and follow that through.

Carolanne Rushe: Before Sweet Beat, it was Green Warrior. Green Warrior was the name of my market stall, which was just about to be launched into a retail market... retail product line. I was literally on the point of going retail and then this space opened up for the café. A couple years ago, myself and my sister had been emailing backwards and forwards about a name for... or like opening a café together. It was kind of our dream to do it all the time, but we thinking that the Sweet Spot and we were really

keen on that. Then I was talking to my dad about it and Dad just said, "Well, a healthy heart makes a sweet beat," and I was like, "Boom, that's it."

Catherine Moran: Oh, right. It fits very good.

Carolanne Rushe: I still get goose bumps and I get tears in my eyes and I think about it, because he's been a huge part of our journey. To get to here, when he said those words it was like, "That's it. That's what I want." As well as that, my business partner, Simon, is a DJ. Music plays a huge part in eating and dining and kind of gathering at the table and listening to some good music. Simon is, like I said, is a DJ and he's a drummer, and he's incredible with music. He's actually compiled playlists for every moment of the day. So, if the weather changes, he changes the playlist to something else. He's constantly updating the music and it's ... For us, it's huge for our staff to be able to listen to something that's enjoyable whilst they're working, and also for our customers to come in. Like, if they're having a nice cup of coffee on their own, to be able to enjoy some good listening. That's another part of where the beat comes from.

Catherine Moran: When you described your offering as being plant-based food, it's interesting that you didn't use the word vegan or vegetarian. Is that deliberate on your part? Is that how you're sort of pitching your offering, plant-based?

Carolanne Rushe: Yes, absolutely. We found when we kind of started down the route of offering plant-based food that people were more drawn to it than they were vegan. With vegan, I found personally that people were scared of the term because it has quite a few negative connotations to it. As well as that, we also offer dairy as an option for coffees, for milky coffees. Before we were opening, I was 100% determined not to have any dairy in the entire building because I was like... I didn't want to have dairy on the menu. My co-business partner, he kind of made the argument that, "If we don't offer dairy, we're ruling out a lot of customers who won't come in because they don't generally drink dairy free milks."

What we've actually found is people who come in for say a dairy

cappuccino, or a dairy flat white, or a latte, we offer them our option. We'll say like, "Maybe a hazelnut milk flat white?" or, "An almond milk cappuccino?" and immediately they are like, "Oh, that sounds really cool. Let's try that out." Then they come back and they try it again and they try it again and again. We found that having dairy on the menu, we've actually been able to convert people to plant-based milks, which is really cool.

Catherine Moran: Interesting.

Carolanne Rushe: It's kind of sneaky on our part, but I would love to see more and more people go in for plant-based milks, dairy free options. To me, they offer more flavour. They're better for your health, and they're also better for the environment, at the end of the day.

David Dunne: Both myself and Patrick have a financial services background.

Catherine Moran: Patrick is Patrick Sweeny, David's business partner and co-owner of Knox Restaurant.

David Dunne: It was kind of a change of career, a change of direction for both of us. I went down to the Ballymaloe Cookery School for 12 weeks prior to opening up, so learned a lot from Darina Allen and Rory O'Connell down there. That's where I wanted to make sure prior to opening that I garnered some experience.

From that, we learned an awful lot about food and the providence of it, but we made sure we took on the proper staff, a good staff, proper chefs, chefs that wanted to experiment, chefs that hadn't developed some of those bad habits that you may have seen in other places, and chefs that kind of merge what we wanted, in terms of providing honest, good food. So, we're on a steep learning curve, the both of us, in terms of opening up. It was nerve racking, but we learned a lot...

Catherine Moran: Oh but yeah, it's a big change of scene for you.

David Dunne: Big change of scene, yeah, but when you're willing to learn, you learn quickly. You know you're going to make mistakes... Mistakes were made. If you're big enough to admit that you made the mistake, you won't make it again.

Catherine Moran: That's right, yeah.

David Dunne: When you're open to that, the two of us are, we feel our business is getting better, in terms of how we run it, as well. The customer's always to the fore, in terms of making sure that the plate was right and that the experience enjoyed by the customer was always on the money. That was important to us. We wanted to make it an inviting place. We did a lot of work on the interior before we opened. We wanted to make sure there was nice music going on and just trying... somewhere that we were happy with, as both Patrick and myself, somewhere that we would've liked...

Catherine Moran: Yeah, somewhere you'd like to eat at yourself.

David Dunne: ... eat ourselves. We felt that it was from a business point of view... We thought the town needed more options. From our own point of view, we thought we'd give it a go.

Carolanne Rushe: Before we even opened, because I had been going down retail with the market stall, it was kind of... I knew I had to have something like an offering, basically, for takeaway. What I'd been offering at the market was always takeaways, takeaway salads, takeaway hummus's and pesto's, raw bars, plant-based milks, and so now in the fridge, we've got our super salads, which is actually where the whole businesses started. The business originally was me offering salads at the market on sunny Sundays in Strandhill People's Market. That was basically the first dish of the café.

As much as I love plant-based food, I love fermented food. Naturally, we've got fermented kombucha. Our house kombucha flavour is hibiscus and it's to die for. I think it tastes like a beautiful, like dry red wine. We also have a Ginger Bug, which is a wild yeast fermentation. We've got our raw kale pesto and our chilli and coriander hummus, both of which are in Super Valu. Last year, I took part at the Food Academy Programme with Super Valu and in May of this year, I started stocking it. We're now in five shops...

Catherine Moran: Wow, five Super Valu's?

Carolanne Rushe: ...and soon to be eight. Yeah, five Super Valu's locally and we're in Donegal, Sligo and Mayo and we'll be in more Mayo and Donegal shops over the next few weeks. That's really exciting. So we are not just a café. We're also offering takeaway and we're in... and my dream of it getting into retail is kind of coming true, slowly. Working on the product line that I had so many years ago is coming into kind of fruition now in Super Valu and the Food Academy Programme.

We also sell local organic salad leaves from the likes of The Organic Centre. Hans Wieland runs the Organic Centre and he's been my... I call him my German parents, but they're like my fermentation food mentors, Hans and Gabby. They've just been amazing. My whole journey since I've come home from travelling three years ago, and we also sell... Then we have some vegan products like mayonnaises and cream cheese and things like that, that people can come in and get alternatives to.

Catherine Moran: What sort of meals do you do in the evening? Is that a new venture, opening in the evening time?

David Dunne: Yeah, it is a new venture Catherine. We toyed with a few different suggestions. As you can see outside, there's kind of a rustic feel to the interior. We've reclaimed scaffolding boards as tables and we've kind of reclaimed pallets on the walls. We had to find a kind of... a type of offering that suited what we had. We only have 17 to 18 tables out there, so we felt, having tried a couple of different things, we wanted to explore the idea of a good tapas offering, good tapas restaurant. It has been a huge success for us. We opened in March/April time this year.

Catherine Moran: Oh, so just a few months ago?

David Dunne: Yeah, and it immediately grabbed the attention of the Sligo people. Luckily and thankfully, our Friday and Saturday nights are all booked out.

Catherine Moran: Good.

David Dunne: We made the conscious decision of not opening seven days a week, or six days a week for the tapas. Essentially, we offer Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights. Yeah, it was a tapas. Our chefs garnered experience in tapas restaurants. They went off and did stages elsewhere, came back with new ideas, and we developed a menu from that. It was very much... it suited the space that we had, in terms of the sharing of the plates, the small plates, the speed of which you can get your food. If somebody wanted to come in at six o' clock, they'd get their food very quickly and it suited us perfectly. Thankfully, the Sligo population have enjoyed it, too.

Catherine Moran: Striking to me during my time as a culinary traveller to Co. Sligo was how all the members of the Sligo Food Trail that I spoke to had the customer experience at the centre of what they do. Here's a small insight into my experience as a customer at Carolanne's Sweet Beat Café.

Catherine Moran: I've just had lunch in your café.

Carolanne Rushe: Yes, my secret recipe, the one I'll never give away! [laughing]

Catherine Moran: Yeah, I thought you might say that. What did I have? Describe what I had.

Carolanne Rushe: You had the hummus toast, which is one of our most popular dishes. It is because the hummus is just so addictive. That's the hummus that's now on the shelves of Super Valu.

Catherine Moran: Ah, great!

Carolanne Rushe: Yes, so...

Catherine Moran: Fantastic.

Carolanne Rushe: ... it's kind of like a cult hummus, almost. It's chilli and coriander hummus.

Catherine Moran: Did you say cult?

Carolanne Rushe: A cult [laughs]
Catherine Moran: Cult almost, yeah.

Carolanne Rushe: It's a very simple recipe, but it's very unique recipe and it's probably the one I'll never, ever give away.

Catherine Moran: You're *absolutely* right, yeah trade secrets are really important.

Carolanne Rushe: The other hummus toast comes on Bake Shop sourdough, so the Bake Shop is also one of The Sligo Food Trail members. They make the most incredible sourdough. We get our bread freshly baked out there every day. It goes with our soup. It goes in our open sandwiches. It goes in our takeaway sandwiches in our grab and go fridge. Yeah, it's really, really nice to be able to use such a nice, high-quality product in our dishes. It just kind of... it highlights our food, really.

Then we use organic leaves, our own kale pesto, toasted seeds, and then we use sprouts from a new company called Wee Greens. They're a new company from Paul, Ann, Gary and Tracy. They set up just a couple of months ago and immediately, we saw them posting stuff online. I just got in touch and we've been using their spreads ever since. They're *phenomenal*. They're like micro leaf sprouts, which we use in our curry today and yesterday and it just completely changes the dish, transforms it into something out of this world.

Catherine Moran: Well this was... what I've just eaten was *savagely* beautiful, *savagely* delicious, really, really gorgeous and just it's layer after layer. The attention to detail with the seeds, they weren't just seeds. They were toasted seeds. The kale...

Carolanne Rushe: Kale pesto.

Catherine Moran: ...kale pesto. That was gorgeous, yeah, really lovely. I can buy this in Super Valu in Mayo?

Carolanne Rushe: You can buy the kale pesto in Super Value in Grange, Tubbercurry, and Ballisodare in Sligo, and Bundoran in Donegal, and then in Manorhamilton in Leitrim.

David Dunne: Social media's so important, I suppose, for opening up a new business. We made the conscious decision first of all, to have our own Facebook page. Our website was then developed shortly afterwards. We're on Twitter and we're on Instagram as well. It's very hard to do all modes. I have to be honest. We're not techie heads in any which way. I suppose our strategy, or the way we present ourselves on those is really, we like the food to do the talking. We're not taking pictures of ourselves and the dog or the kids, and not a lifestyle decision from our point of view.

For me, it's all about the food and what we're creating so people can get a taste of it, and see the menu board or whatever it may be. There's no doubt that social media has been of great value to us, in terms of setting up a new business.

Catherine Moran: What's your Twitter handle?

David Dunne: The Twitter handle will be @knoxsligo. That's K-N-O-X Sligo.

Catherine Moran: And your website?

David Dunne: The website is www.knoxsligo.ie.

Carolanne Rushe: That is where it all kind of started, blogging back in the day. I was living with my sister at the time and I was always cooking random, crazy recipes that students wouldn't normally cook. She just kind of said, "Why don't you start blogging?" She was studying digital media at the time, so I think it was just before blogging had kicked off and the only two real bloggers I knew were Donald Skeehan and Italian Foodie, Lorraine from La Cucina in Limerick. And of course Caroline Hennessy from Bibliocook. I just kind of got into it and I loved writing. It was also a great way to procrastinate from doing college work. [laughs]

Catherine Moran: Of course, yes!

Carolanne Rushe: When I did that in the final year, I then left Ireland and travelled for six years and it was great, because I had built up this following of bloggers. I was part of this Irish blogging community

who then followed me travelling all over the world. They would stay in touch and meet more bloggers around the world, who I still stay in touch with and they follow what I do now at home. It's just a really, really great way of creating a nice network of food friends around the world. I've been hounded by everybody to start blogging again because recipe writing is one of my favourite things to do, and writing in general. I will definitely sit down at the keyboard and start writing again.

Catherine Moran: Of course, ultimately it's content marketing so-

Carolanne Rushe: -It is indeed, absolutely, yeah. It would be really nice to be able to share some of the recipes from the café that people love. I'd love to start doing that. We do release a newsletter every month but there is really nothing like sharing little stories from yourself and from the kitchen, as well. Yeah, soon it'll reappear.

Catherine Moran: Carolanne, what are your digital addresses? You're on Twitter and what's your website?

Carolanne Rushe: Yeah, so we are @sweetbeatsligo on Twitter and Instagram. We're also on Facebook, Sweet Beat Café. Then you can contact us through our website, SweetBeat.ie or hello@sweetbeat.ie.

Catherine Moran: It's Sweet Beat?

Carolanne Rushe: Sweet Beat, so S-W-E-E-T B-E-A-T.

Catherine Moran: Okay, fantastic. Thank you so much for having a word.

Carolanne Rushe: Perfect, thank you very much Catherine. That's brilliant. Thanks a mil.

Catherine Moran: I hope you enjoyed hearing from Anthony, Prannie, Laura, Carolanne and David, all members of The Sligo Food Trail.

Lucia, Carolanne and David mentioned their social media handles on the show. Let me tell you how you can also find out more about Dr. Prannie Rhatigan, Anthony Gray's two restaurants and Constance Cassidy and Lissadell House.

Prannie's website is www.irishseaweedkitchen.ie. Anthony's restaurant Eala Bhán is available at www.ealabhan.ie and the website for Trá Bán is www.trabansligo.ie. The Lissadell House website is at www.lissadellhouse.com/.

I would also like to thank some people who work behind the scenes to make the Harvest Feast and Sligo Food Trail such a success and for being so welcoming when I visited Sligo. To Marie Brouder, from Brouder Design, Noelle Cawley and Eva Derie from Failte Ireland and to Sheila Haran from Sligo Tourism.

In the next episode of the show we'll hear from more members of the Sligo Food Trail, specifically, from Paul and Joe of The White Hag Irish Brewing Company, from Paul of Connolly's Bar, the oldest traditional Irish pub in the northwest corner of Ireland and from Auriel Robinson, owner of Seatrails, which specialises in guided heritage trails on both horseback and on foot in Co. Sligo.

All links mentioned in the show are available at my website, which is www.myartisanbusiness.com. And you can download a free transcript of my conversation with Prannie, Lucia, Carolanne and David there.

To get updates on when I publish new episodes of the show, subscribe to my email list and I'll let you know when new episodes are live. So that's all at myartisanbusiness.com.

You can find me on Twitter as [@FoodDrinkShow](https://twitter.com/FoodDrinkShow), so please get in touch if you have any comments or questions or suggestions.

Until next time, I'm Catherine Moran, happy cooking, happy brewing, happy fermenting, happy distilling, and thank you for listening.

A Related Episodes of *The Artisan Food & Drink Business Show* You Might Find Interesting

Episode 45 is a wonderful conversation with Olivia Duff from The Boyne Valley Food Series. Focusing on the food traveller, the episode is called *Olivia Duff. The Boyne Valley Food Series: a Blueprint for the Future of Artisan Food and Drink* and you can check it out here: <http://myartisanbusiness.com/podcast/olivia-duff-the-boyne-valley-food-series-a-blueprint-for-the-future-of-artisan-food-and-drink/>

PS

If you're enjoying the show and/or finding it useful, I'd appreciate if you'd please:

1. Subscribe* on iTunes (iOS) or Stitcher (Android) and, if you're feeling extra generous...
2. Leave an honest rating and review on iTunes.

*According to the podcasting gurus, the best way you can spread the word about a show is to subscribe to it. Thank you for doing both if you feel so inclined.