

the burnavon

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS

In the heart of Mid Ulster

Comhairle Ceantair
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District Council

The Burnavon Arts Centre, Burn Road, Cookstown is marking its 20th Anniversary.

Burnavon takes centre stage as it marks 20th Anniversary

IT all started with a boy from Dundrum...

The first night an audience poured into the new Burnavon theatre in Cookstown, it was a young stand-up comedian by the name of Patrick Kielty who took to the stage to give them their very first taste of the sort of night which would become commonplace over the two decades which have followed.

From the outset, the people of Cookstown and surrounding areas took the Burnavon to their heart. Those who constructed the ambitious plans to replace the old Town Hall with an ultra-modern, fully functional and flexible event space could not possibly have envisaged the absolute success story the project would become.

There have been celebrations of culture, nights of side-splitting laughter, deep dives into history with talks and seminars. There have been functions galore, Presidents and premieres, exhibitions

and emotional closing nights aplenty.

Some staff faces have moved on, others have stayed to give customers the same smiles which for two decades have contributed to the famous "Burnavon Welcome." It's why people from Omagh to Magherafelt, Dungannon to Dungiven, and everywhere in between keep coming back for more.

Long gone are the days of locals having to travel to Belfast, Dublin or other cities in order to see their favourite acts. The fact that the Burnavon brings these acts to people's own doorsteps underlines the important role which the theatre plays in helping bring the arts to the rural population of mid-Ulster.

Ballet Ireland can sell out a run of ten shows in the Gaiety Theatre in Dublin, yet year after year choose to also bring their amazing performances to Cookstown and the stage of the Burnavon. That is testament to the high esteem in which the

Burnavon is held not just across Ulster, but throughout Ireland as a whole.

In 2018/19, over

125,000 people passed through the doors of the Burn Road centre, an incredible number in a town listed as having a

population of just under 40,000.

Over the past 20 years the Burnavon has not only become part of the

furniture of Cookstown, but part of the very fabric of the town. It has firmly established its place in the hearts and

minds of locals, and 20 years from it first opened its doors, the Burnavon plays a more important role now than

at any point over the past two decades.

And the best news of all is... we're only getting started!

Famous faces who have graced Burnavon's stage



Entertainer Patrick Kielty was the first act in the Burnavon.

IT IS TO the credit of the Burnavon, its staff and its patrons that the venue, for 20 years now, has been punching above its weight in terms of the acts which are brought to the Mid-Ulster town.

Did you know for example that comedian Jack Dee once performed at the Burnavon?

Down through the years the likes of Philomena Begley and Brian Kennedy have been regular visitors, with patrons of an older vintage sure to still remember the nights when Isla Grant, Roly Daniels and Dickie Rock came to their town.

Phil Coulter wowed audiences with his soulful mix of piano and vocals, while Foster and Allen, Peter Corry and Cara Dillon have proven to be consistently big successes.

The Burnavon was at the forefront of the new wave of Country superstars like Nathan Carter, Lisa McHugh and Derek Ryan drawing crowds of eager young jivers through the doors.

Of course there are some of the previous acts who have since passed away, with the laughter caused by the likes of Brendan Grace and Gerry Anderson still echoing in the ears of those who were fortunate enough to attend their shows.



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Burnavon plays a variety of important roles in the local community

WHAT HAPPENS in the auditorium is only one component of the Burnavon's role in the local community, with a packed arts and cultural development programme helping educate, skill and entertain thousands of participants each year.

The diverse range of activities and workshops which offers holistic benefits including physical, mental, social

wellbeing and playing a part in reducing social isolation for the residents of Mid Ulster and further afield.

Participation in the arts creates more involved citizens and contributes to community cohesion, making communities feel safer and stronger. The arts also help to break down barriers between different social groups within our community, and serve a key role in helping shape our society.

So far in 2019/20 workshops and classes delivered include: Introduction to Cake Decorating; Basket Weaving; Lego Animation with iPads;

Pastel Painting; Candle Making; Creative Writing; Textile Art; Card and present making; Burnavon Summer Scheme; Coding; Ballet Ireland Summer School; Design & Print Your Own T-Shirt (ASD Friendly); Traditional Music Summer School; Watercolours and Advanced Watercolours; Furniture Upcycling; Minecraft; Jiving; Arm Knit Blanket; Halloween Masks; Old Time Dancing; Bath Bomb and Soap Making; Floral Art; Felt Making for Kids (ASD Friendly); Make-up Masterclass; Christmas Crafts for Kids; Silk Painting;

Fused Glass; and Macramé.

The 2019 Winter Craft Fair was the biggest to date, welcoming 3,000 visitors over the two-day event, while plans are already in place for the Easter Family Fun Day 2020, another highlight of the calendar.

The Burnavon also facilitates the likes of the hugely-successful Traditional Music in Schools programme and the Cookstown Youth Choir, which have helped many thousands of young people locally develop new skills and boost their confidence through public performances on the Burnavon stage.



Mid-Ulster District Council Chairman Martin Kearney celebrating The Burnavon's 20th Anniversary with Cllr Trevor Wilson, Caroline Sheehy and Tony McCance.



Mrs Meta Bell MBE and the Cookstown Youth Choir.

The Burnavon taking on a brand new online look

THE BURNAVON will celebrate entering its 21st year with a brand-new online look.

The culmination of 12 months of work behind the scenes was propelled into the public domain this week with a revamped burnavon.com

website, one which will serve the venue well for years to come.

The launch of the new site was timed to coincide with the 20th birthday celebrations, and this weekend will be the first time the public will get the opportunity to utilise the new and improved website.

Burnavon manager

Caroline Sheehy believes that the new-look online presence will prove to be a winner with customers.

"The feedback from our own staff and those who have had a sneak peek at the site has all been hugely positive, and we can't wait to let our customers try it out for themselves.

"As well as being aesthetically pleasing and much more interactive with video content and other modernisations, it also serves the very practical purposes of being much easier to navigate and more accessible to people of all ages and abilities. Just like our venue, we wanted a site

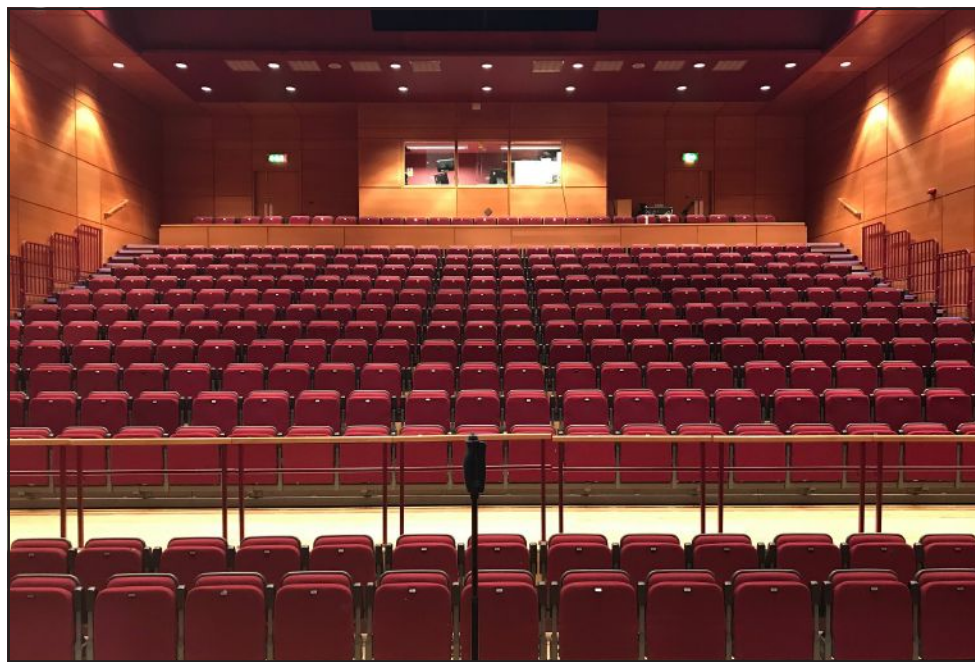
which makes everyone feel welcome, and one which they will want to come back to time and again."

The new website provides a crucial link between the Burnavon and its customers, and fits with Mid-Ulster Council's 'Digital First' approach, utilising new technologies to help the shift towards a more carbon neutral and 'green' mindset as to how the venue goes about its business.

"I suppose one of our most utilised marketing methods in the past would have been letters and flyers distributed by post, a traditional and successful method

deployed by theatres worldwide. In recent times, our customers may have noticed a shift towards more targeted email marketing and a lean towards digital alternatives, and that will continue to be the case for us."

"We believe that it is what the public have become accustomed to, and the growing public awareness of Green issues means we will do all we can to keep ahead of the curve, exploring all options and emerging technologies available to us, while continuing to deliver the high standard of customer service that our many patrons associate with the Burnavon over the past two decades."



The impressive interior of the Burnavon Arts and Cultural Centre, Cookstown.



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The Burnavon caters for people of all tastes and people of all ages

OPPORTUNITIES FOR EVERYONE

ONE OF THE REASONS for the Burnavon's incredible levels of success over the past 20 years is the fact that it really does cater for people of all tastes and ages. From kids shows and pantos to cutting-edge dramas and plays, there is little which the Burnavon stage hasn't seen down through the years.

While the staple diet

of the Cookstown venue at present may be country and comedy, that has certainly not always been the case, and highlights how the Burnavon reflects the changing trends and tastes of the public which it serves.

While some of the biggest acts in showbusiness have brought themselves to the Cookstown venue, most important of all is the opportunities the

Burnavon affords for the local community to have their time in the spotlight.

Whether it's the long-running January pantomime by Stewartstown Amateur Drama Society, the Christmas Celebrations concert involving the Traditional Music in Schools and Cookstown Youth Choir programmes, or the multitude of locals who have taken part in the many amateur drama

productions which the Burnavon has hosted down through the years.

The sense of pride felt by parents, grandparents, friends and families as their emerging stars strut their stuff on the Burnavon boards is truly immeasurable, and shows little sign of declining with the opportunities for those local talents continuing to come thick and fast.



Music youth in The Burnavon.

The Burnavon can proudly take a bow for its many prestigious awards

Over the years, the Burnavon has picked up some of the most prestigious awards available for a venue.

The venue holds the Royal National Institute of Blind People Northern Ireland Model of Excellence award, recognising the contribution

organisations make to enhance access for blind and partially sighted people.

We were also honoured to receive a Prestigious Access Award from the William Keown Trust, in recognition of the Burnavon's contribution to an accessible, user-friendly environment.

The Burnavon Arts and Cultural Centre has

also been awarded the Arts and Disability Equality Charter and Plaque in recognition of their ongoing commitment to the promotion of access to the arts for all. The Charter award was made in recognition of work that the Burnavon has undertaken to provide access for disabled people to the arts, either as audience members, artists, or

employees. Assessors examined five areas of operation of the arts centre, including the accessibility of all aspects of the centre to people with disabilities, participation by people with disabilities in the arts and in the audiences for events, as well as the development of policies and the employment of people with a disability.



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‘Wonderful staff and equally wonderful public secret to theatre’s success’

ONE OF the longest-serving supporters of the Burnavon is Cookstown-based Councillor Trevor Wilson.

As Chairman of Mid-Ulster Council's Development Committee, Councillor Wilson has also been part of the Burnavon committee from the outset. As the venue marks 20

years serving the local community, he is keen to praise the ongoing work which keeps the Burnavon at the top of its game.

“We have been very fortunate over the past two decades that we have had some wonderful staff and individuals, each bringing their own skills to the mix and helping push the Burnavon towards even greater heights.

What I think has remained consistent though, and this is crucially important, is the ethos of the venue. It is welcoming, it is respectful, and it understands its place in Cookstown and within the bigger Mid-Ulster picture.

“We are also indebted to the public who continue to show such fondness for the Burnavon and who ensure that visiting

performers all get to experience that special Burnavon welcome, keeping them coming back year after year.

“The Burnavon is a credit to Cookstown and to its people, and something of which we can all feel rightly proud. And I firmly believe that the Burnavon will continue to serve us well for many, many years to come.”



The Burnavon's season programme is a must for arts enthusiasts.



Lafarge Cement among proud sponsors of the Burnavon Arts Centre

THE COOKSTOWN plant of Lafarge Cement is the long-standing main sponsor of the Burnavon, the annual income received helping the venue to excel and maintain the high standards with which it has

become accustomed.

According to Lafarge's Cookstown Plant Manager Russell Larmour, the arrangement has been one which has served his organisation well over the years.

"We are very proud of our long-standing support of the Burnavon, and have thoroughly enjoyed working alongside

their staff through the years. I know not only from personal experience but also from the positive feedback from our employees, and indeed our customers, who have attended shows and performances that the facility is at the very fore when it comes to the Arts and entertainment in this region.

"We celebrated the

50th anniversary of our Cookstown plant back in 2018, and we know that the Burnavon is now as synonymous with Cookstown as the cement plant is. Hopefully both will continue to serve this local area well for future generations, and that both continue to prosper and overcome any challenges they may face."



Cookstown Folk Club in The Burnavon.

History in the making... how the Burnavon Arts Centre got its name

DID YOU KNOW? - BURNAVON FACTS

1. The Burnavon name was the brainchild of former Coagh Primary School Principal and published author Eddie McCartney, 'Burn' being the Scots for stream, paired with the Gaelige for the same word, 'Abhainn.'

2. The Burnavon has hosted more than 2500 shows/performance in 20 years.

3. The Burnavon was built at a cost of £1.6million. £1.1million of which was accessed through the Arts Council Lottery Funding Programme.

4. The first internet booking for a Burnavon event was in May 2006. The online transaction was made from Germany for two tickets to attend a performance by Eric Bogle and Rosemary Woods, while the recipients were on vacation in Northern Ireland

later that same month.

5. In 2019, 51% of all bookings were completed online, a rise from just 25% ten years ago. The other 49% of sales come through our Box Office staff in the form of walk-ins and telephone bookings.

6. The Burnavon programme of events is posted to almost 10,000 households three times each year.



Capacity crowds are a regular feature in the Burnavon Arts Centre, Cookstown.

Birthday greetings from the great and the good as The Burnavon turns 20!

Birthday Greetings from...

"I have loved taking my tour there every single year. The team in the theatre are outstanding, the audiences are unbelievable, and from everyone on my team I want to wish you a big Happy Birthday... and we can't wait to get back up to Cookstown soon!" **David Meade**

"A very Happy Birthday to the Burnavon. The

Burnavon is, without doubt, the finest theatre in... Cookstown. And you're 20 years old... Celebrate in style! Go buck mad, it's your birthday, enjoy yourself! The Hole in the Wall Gang are back at the end of February, and we can't wait!" **Tim McGarry**

"I just want to wish all the very best to the Burnavon theatre in Cookstown as they celebrate their big birthday bash. Many a

great show I've had up there with the team, the staff and management, so congratulations once again. And I'm looking forward to many more shows there too! Happy Birthday!" **Gary Gamble**

"Happy Birthday Burnavon! 20 years? Wow... where does the time go! I'm back again in 2020 for a very good reason... it's a great, great venue. Only problem

is the audience, they're weird! Anyway, Happy Birthday!" **Colin Murphy**

"Congratulations, Happy 20th Birthday to the Burnavon. I always love playing there, so much so that I'm actually there twice this year! My passport's in order, and I'm heading for the border! See you all soon, and congratulations again everyone." **Conal Gallen**



Donaghmore singer Malachi Cush and Mid-Ulster Council Chairman, Cllr Martin Kearney extend their congratulations to the Burnavon Arts Centre on its 20th Anniversary.