



Muppets Arrive in Belfast as Part of a New Children's Television Series

In April 2008, the creators of Sesame Street brought the premier episode of Sesame Tree to TV sets across Northern Ireland.

Aligned to the revised Northern Ireland Statutory Curriculum, the television series will present engaging educational messages through stories and characters. Sesame Tree will also serve as a valuable resource for children, parents and those working with children by presenting positive images to children of themselves and others; emphasizing a range of objectives including valuing diversity, developing problem solving skills, becoming aware of our common humanity; and helping the early childhood community in Northern Ireland achieve its strategic goals including personal and mutual understanding in the local and wider community.



Sesame Tree Puppets Hilda, Potto and Clarabelle

“Sesame Workshop is proud to work with dedicated local partners like Sixteen-South, BBC Northern Ireland, Queen's University, and the project's funders to create relevant, inspiring con-

tent that can bridge gaps and make a positive impact,” said Gary E. Knell, President and CEO of Sesame Workshop. “The images we share and the stories we tell have the potential to extend far beyond the television screen to become a valuable resource for children growing up today in Northern Ireland.”



deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness, MP MLA with Potto and Hilda at the launch

Colin Williams, Executive Producer said: “It has been an honor to produce Sesame Tree for our children of Northern Ireland, by the people of Northern Ireland.” “Working with our friends at Sesame Workshop, and amazingly talented local writers, performers and production staff, the series is beautifully rich in local culture and completely current with teaching based on the new Northern Ireland Curriculum. The characters, stories, and whole concept is very innovative and really charming. We know the children of Northern Ireland will have as much fun watching the series as we had making it.”

Peter Johnston, Controller BBC Northern Ireland said, “This is a very exciting new venture for BBC Northern Ireland. We are delighted to be part of what we know will be a very entertaining and engaging series for children linking in to the Northern Ireland Curriculum, enhanced by our new Sesame Tree website.”

With the title song written by local singer songwriter Duke Special, and music by well-respected composer John Anderson, the 20 original 15-minute episodes are aimed at children aged 3 to 6 years. Each episode of Sesame Tree features Muppets Potto and Hilda on an adventure filled with laughter and learning. The duo will answer questions on many topics posed by children and introduce local live action films that will showcase the diversity of Northern Ireland.

In addition to the television series, a Sesame Tree website is being developed by BBC Northern Ireland Learning. Reflecting the colorful world of Potto and Hilda, the site will offer clips from the show, as well as interactive discovery games for children promoting the development of thinking and decision-making skills.

Funding for Sesame Tree is provided by the International Fund for Ireland, which promotes integration and reconciliation throughout NI and Southern border counties; The American Ireland Fund, which serves as the project's anchor sponsor; the Northern Ireland Fund for Reconciliation, which provides support for projects; and Northern Ireland Screen, which aims to accelerate the development of a dynamic and sustainable screen industry in Northern Ireland.



Cranmore school children

Photographed at the launch event were pupils from Cranmore Integrated School which is well established and one of the first integrated schools in Northern Ireland. The school draws its students from a wide area which includes a genuine mix of social, economic and religious backgrounds in Belfast. There is a strong focus on education for mutual understanding and cultural heritage - importantly integrated education is also seen as a key to building a more integrated society.

Director's Notes

The highlight of the past three months was the Bureau's St Patrick's Day Breakfast at the US Chamber of Commerce. This year's theme 'Investing in NI' promoted the May Investment Conference. Two of this year's speakers were existing investors who spoke very effectively about the NI business opportunity, and why their companies were so impressed with the local workforce. Approximately 250 guests attended the event. As with previous years' St Patrick's Day festivities continued at the White House and on Capitol Hill where the Bureau arranged separate programs for the deputy First Minister and Ministers Ritchie, Dodds, Poots and Donaldson.

Minister Ritchie took time during her visit to New York and Washington to learn about US policies on public sector housing and urban regeneration. Minister Dodds attended a lecture by Bill Gates and briefly met the Chairman of Microsoft.

In April, Minister Poots undertook an intense five-day visit to the west coast where he met with senior executives from the film production industry, members of the Scots Irish community and officials from the LA Galaxy Soccer Team, where discussions took place on the possibility of a friendly game being arranged with the Northern Ireland national team.

We were also pleased to host the First Minister in April. This visit gave us an additional opportunity to promote the Investment Conference to key audiences in Washington and New York. The deputy First Minister arrived at the end of that week to join the First Minister at the announcement of the New York City Pension Funds' \$150m investment in NI. The Bureau played an important role in helping bring this major announcement to a successful conclusion and we anticipate that this decision will lead to more investments by US-based pension funds in infrastructure projects in NI.

The US-NI Investment Conference, which took place in Northern Ireland on 8 and 9 May, and was attended by Prime Minister Gordon Brown and the new Taoiseach, Brian Cowen. They joined the First and deputy First Ministers in welcoming US business people to Belfast. The guest list included Mayor Bloomberg, and was without doubt the most significant economic event to take place in Northern Ireland in decades and has put Northern Ireland firmly on the map as a location for US companies who are seeking to do business in Europe.

SeaGen System to Provide Renewable Energy to NI

A major milestone in the development of radical new technology for generating electricity in an environmentally clean manner has just taken place in Northern Ireland.

Marine Current Turbines Ltd, (MCT) the global leader in tidal stream technology, has successfully completed the installation of its 1.2MW SeaGen tidal energy system in Strangford Narrows in Northern Ireland. There will now be a 12-week period of commissioning and testing before it starts regularly feeding power into the Northern Ireland grid.

Strangford Narrows is a scenic waterway linking the inland seawater lake of Strangford Lough to the sea, located some 25 miles SE of Belfast. Powerful currents reaching 8 knots sweep in and out of the Lough through one of the most beautiful areas of NI, with sight of where the fabled Mountains of Mourne sweep down to the sea.



Impression of how the generator works

using submarine turbines, devices which work in much the same way as a windmill, but using flowing water rather than wind.

Harland and Wolff Heavy Industries' giant crane Samson began the loading of the SeaGen onto a specialist vessel on March 22. The twin-rotor, submarine power generator, which was completed at the yard last summer, was loaded on board the Belgian-registered crane barge 'Rambiz' to begin its journey.

The completion of the installation was achieved with the placing of the superstructure on top of SeaGen and the departure of the Missing Link support vessel.

The device and its support structure were transported from the Belfast yard to the Strangford Lough site



SeaGen being transported by crane barge Rambiz

where it was installed on the seafloor. The SeaGen's depth was then set at the optimum level to maximize use of tidal flow. After being carefully positioned by the heavy-lift crane-

barge in the early hours of April 3rd there has been a six-week operation to secure the 1000 tonne structure to the seabed and link up SeaGen's grid connection to the electricity substation on the southern shore of Strangford Lough.

Alan Haley, Harland and Wolff project director, says the SeaGen may be the first of many. "This is the world's first commercially viable tidal energy generator and we were very pleased to play our role in its fabrication and assembly," says Mr Haley.

Angela Robotham MCT's Chief Engineer in charge of the SeaGen project oversaw the transfer of the device from Harland and Wolff to Strangford.

"Approaching the completion of a project never before undertaken anywhere in the world is immensely exciting and my team and I are looking forward to the moment when the SeaGen begins generating electricity," says Ms Robotham. "This is cutting edge technology and we at MCT are very proud to have progressed the latest innovation from its inception five years ago to full operation."



Missing Link support vessel & SeaGen

"We are all confident that it will be successful and very much hope that an entire generation of these SeaGens will be deployed around the globe."

Martin Wright, Managing Director of MCT, said: “This has been a ground-breaking operation, the like of which has never been attempted before and it has attracted interest from around the world. SeaGen’s installation has been filmed by TV crews from North America, Germany and France as well as from Ireland and the UK. “MCT’s engineering team is to be congratulated for the excellent progress it has made over the past few weeks in very challenging conditions and we now move to the commissioning phase and commercial operation.”

When fully operational the tidal system’s 16m diameter, twin rotors will operate for up to 18-20 hours per day to produce enough



SeaGen in Position

clean, green electricity, equivalent to that used by a 1000 homes. This is four times greater than any other tidal stream project so far completed, including MCT’s earlier 300kW SeaFlow system installed off the south coast of England at Lynmouth, Devon in 2003.

ESB Independent Energy, the retail subsidiary of Ireland’s ESB, has signed a Power Purchase Agreement to supply to its customers across the island of Ireland, with the electricity produced by the SeaGen system.

As a renewable energy company, Marine Current Turbines takes its responsibilities to the environment seriously. It has established a £2million (\$4m) program to closely monitor the environmental impact of SeaGen, involving scientists from Queen’s University Belfast and from the Sea Mammal Research Unit at St Andrew’s University (SMRU).

The program includes the presence of a Marine Mammal Observer on SeaGen at all times during the commissioning phase, when SeaGen will only operate during daylight hours, to observe how the Lough’s marine life interacts with the structure. There is also a sonar system monitoring seal movements, operated by SMRU, which has been partly paid for by the Npower juice fund.

Social Development Minister Visits

NY

Social Development Minister Margaret Ritchie, MLA visited New York during St Patrick’s Day week. The visit gave the Minister an opportunity to make two speeches to the New York business community discussing the key areas of political progress being made by the power-sharing Executive.

The New York City Housing Department, the largest municipal developer of affordable housing in the United States, was very keen to hear details of her new Housing Agenda, launched recently in Northern Ireland.

Michael Bloomberg, Mayor of New York, has announced a \$3.2b (£1.62b) commitment to create and preserve more than 165,000 homes and apartments by 2013 throughout the 5 boroughs. Margaret Ritchie was therefore very keen to discover in turn what lessons could be learned from such an ambitious program.

As part of her program, the Minister visited Harlem, New York, one of the most deprived areas in the country. Margaret Ritchie said: “In Harlem, people are trying to move away from simply pouring public money into building and renovating properties. They are seeking to be more imaginative in the ways they finance social and affordable housing, and have developed innovative community revitalization initiatives that promote private investment and productive public/private partnerships.

“There may be much that we can learn from them that could be of benefit for Northern Ireland. They were also very keen to be briefed on the new Housing Agenda.”

During the visit to New York, Margaret Ritchie also met with

Christine Quinn, New York City Speaker, and Laura Lazurus, Deputy Commissioner for Housing Development in New York City.



Minister Ritchie with local housing Consultant Steven Williams outside the famous Apollo Theater in Harlem

US-NI Investment Conference

The landmark US-NI investment conference took place in Belfast from May 7th to 9th, approx. 150 business leaders representing 90 companies attended the events during the three days.



First and deputy First Ministers at Stormont with Mayor Bloomberg, Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, Taoiseach Brian Cowen and Sir Tony O'Reilly

Joining Ministers from the NI Executive at the various events were visiting dignitaries including UK Prime Minister, Gordon Brown; the Republic of Ireland Taoiseach, Brian Cowen; Mayor Michael Bloomberg of New York, Ambassadors and senior diplomats as well as New York City Comptroller, William Thompson. Delegates at the main business session were also greeted by messages relayed from US President George Bush and President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso.

The visiting business leaders discussed and explored the exciting business opportunities in Northern Ireland on the first anniversary of the devolved administration.

The conference provided a unique opportunity for delegates to see the dramatic transformation that has taken place in Northern Ireland, and to discover for themselves that this new, stable Northern Ireland is open for business.

The three-day program began with a welcome reception at the Folk and Transport Museum on May 7th at which Northern Ireland's community and enterprise were showcased. Delegates also sampled specialty foods from each of the six counties of Northern Ireland.

The Business Conference on the morning of May 8th included endorsements of Northern Ireland from existing investors including Allstate, Citi, Liberty Mutual and Caterpillar. A luncheon followed at Parliament Buildings, hosted by NI's First and deputy First Ministers. In the afternoon, visiting US delegates engaged in a discussion session with Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Taoiseach Brian Cowen.

A gala dinner was held that evening at Hillsborough Castle which was addressed by the Heads of Government.

On May 9th, the conference concluded with a number of sectoral sessions, and a visit program which allowed delegates to experience some of the delights of Northern Ireland's landscape, culture and leisure.

During the conference NYSE Euronext and CyberSource, a world leader in developing secure payment systems for use over the internet, announced new investments supported by Invest NI, which have the potential to create over 120 new quality jobs. Pierre Beaudoin, President and Chief Operating Officer of Bombardier and Sir Anthony O'Reilly, Chief Executive of Independent News and Media both made major investment announcements of \$137.5m (£70m) and \$13.7m (£7m) respectively.

This conference was not only successful in attracting new investment to Northern Ireland, but it also raised the profile of the region as a potential investment destination for businesses that have yet to come to its shores. In the months to come, Invest NI and the Northern Ireland Executive will make a concerted effort to reach out to those companies who seek to discover the business opportunities available in Northern Ireland.



First and deputy First Ministers with Paula Dobriansky, Mayor Bloomberg and Sir Tony O'Reilly at Stormont

Bright Lights of Hollywood Beckon to Northern Ireland



Dame Judy Dench with Culture Minister Edwin Poots

In April, Northern Ireland's then Minister for Culture, Edwin Poots MLA, headed west to the Golden State for a series of meetings in Los Angeles and Sacramento touching on a wide variety of topics including film, sport and the arts.

With the recent completion of Tom Hanks' film, *City of Ember* (shot entirely in NI), Minister Poots traveled to California to meet with executives from the top film production companies to spread the word about the vast opportunities and incentives that await, by choosing Northern Ireland as a filming destination. The Minister was warmly received by representatives from Paramount Pictures, NBC/Universal, Disney/Miramax, and 20th Century Fox, who expressed a keen interest in filming future projects in Northern Ireland.

While the film industry was a main focal point for this mission, the Minister took time to visit the home of the Los Angeles Galaxy Soccer Club, to discuss a possible friendly between the David Beckham-led Galaxy and the Northern Ireland Football Club in 2009. He also met with officials from the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art to explore potential art exchanges between the museum, and collections in Belfast.

The Minister was active on the political front, as Northern Ireland begins to cultivate ties with its counterparts on the west coast. In addition to meeting Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa of Los Angeles, Minister Poots held discussions with officials from the cities of Pasadena and Woodland, and was recognized by the California State legislature.

The week-long visit to California concluded in the Northern California town of Woodland, which played host to the Scottish Highland Games. Minister Poots served as the events keynote speaker, and joined thousands of Scots and Ulster Scots in a variety of traditional events. The

Minister was also delighted to greet a group of drum majors from Northern Ireland who were competing in this annual competition.

This was the first visit of a Northern Ireland Minister to California since the restoration of the Executive last year. However, given the abundance of potential partnerships across a vast range of industries, you can expect many more dispatches from the west in future issues.

Ulidia Integrated College Pupil Wins Prestigious Washington Scholarship

Ulidia Integrated College pupil, Christopher Madden aged 15, has won a scholarship to attend St Albans School in Washington DC, as a boarding pupil for 3 years starting from September 2008.

Christopher, who recently travelled to Washington with his father Paul, to visit the school and attend a Northern Ireland Bureau breakfast said, "I am absolutely delighted to have won this scholarship. It was brilliant to have the chance to travel over to see the school, meet with some of my future teachers and see where I will be living. I am really looking forward to the challenges ahead although I will miss my friends and family in Northern Ireland. I would like to thank everyone who has been involved with arranging this once in a lifetime opportunity for me."



Pictured at the NIB St Patrick's breakfast are Christopher Madden, Jack McDonnell and St Albans Admissions Director, Mason Lecky

The scholarship of £22,500 per year (\$45,000) is being funded by Washington area businessman, Jack McDonnell, whose children and grandchildren attended the school. He wished to sponsor a pupil from an Integrated School to attend St Albans, due to his belief that educating children together is helping to build a better and sustainable future for Northern Ireland. Applications were open for all pupils of the 41 integrated colleges and Christopher beat tough competition to win the scholarship.

St Albans, in previous years has hosted three brothers from West Belfast. Other alumni include former American Vice President, Al Gore and the son of American Civil Rights Activist, Jesse Jackson Jr.

Bush Visits Belfast

On the final day of a week-long trip to Europe, President Bush touched down in Northern Ireland to meet with First Minister Peter Robinson and deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness, as a follow up to a meeting at the White House held in December 2007.



deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness, President George Bush and First Minister, Peter Robinson at Stormont.

President Bush arrived with the First Lady on the afternoon of June 16th, and travelled directly to Stormont Castle where they were met by the First and deputy First Ministers. Following the meeting with Ministers Robinson and McGuinness which focused on future investment in Northern Ireland, the President was greeted by other members of the Northern Ireland Executive, British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, and Taoiseach, Brian Cowen.

In remarks to the media gathered in Belfast, President Bush said, “This a good place for investment. Ultimately investment will help Northern Ireland reach its full potential.” He added, “Northern Ireland is a success story. Obviously more work has to be done. Progress made to date would have been unimaginable ten years ago.”



President Bush at Loughview Integrated Primary School in Belfast

He said other countries around the world looked to Northern Ireland and wondered if reconciliation was possible for them.

After departing the Stormont Estate, the President travelled to South Belfast to meet students from the Loughview Integrated Primary School where he was joined by the First Lady, Laura Bush to observe the work of integrated schools in Northern Ireland. Earlier in the day, Mrs Bush visited the Community Foundation for NI, where she met with community workers and was briefed on the innovative projects being undertaken to bridge the divide between the communities in NI. At the Loughview school, she and the President were treated to a festive atmosphere which included the President chatting with students and engaging in board games with the students assembled for this historic visit.



President Bush

The scene then shifted to the school’s gymnasium for an exhibition of the Peace Players International. This program, partly funded by US contributors, attempts to advance reconciliation in Northern Ireland through the medium of basketball. President Bush, who is not known for his basketball skills, stepped onto the court in order to lend his support.

At the President’s personal request, a meeting was also arranged with former First Minister, Ian Paisley who struck up a rapport with Mr Bush during his visit to Washington DC with deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness last December.

In the early evening, the Presidential delegation returned to RAF Aldergrove for their flight back to the US. While the President’s trip was brief, it was a symbol of the continued US commitment to Northern Ireland that transcends party and politics.

Following the President’s departure, the First and deputy First Ministers reflected on the constructive role of President Bush and previous US administrations, and looked toward a continued economic partnership with the United States into the future.

