

Championing Ireland's 'Architects of Transport'

The Irish International Freight Association (IIFA) is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. To coincide with this landmark date, Irish Trucker met up with CEO Colm Walsh to take a closer look at this stellar representative body, which provides a vital service to Ireland's freight forwarders.



Mr. Terry Allen (Director - Hawthorn Logistica), Mr. Philip Kane (Geodia - IIFA President), Ms. Silvia Valles Barrera (Young International Freight Forwarder of the Year 2011 Winner), Mr. Martin Cunningham (Director - Hawthorn Logistica) and Colm Walsh (CEO IIFA)

The Irish International Freight Association (IIFA) is the sole representative body and official voice of freight forwarding in Ireland. Established in 1962, it has over one hundred (trading and affiliated) members who between them employ more than 3,000 people, handling some 90% of Ireland's €148 billion international merchandise trade.

To understand the role of the IIFA, it is first of all important to realise exactly what a freight forwarder is: according to the Association, freight forwarding – separate from haulage - is the business of deciding the best modes and methods for moving specific goods according to a specific requirement, on a worldwide scale. The freight forwarder has often been described as a travel agent for cargo; however, they are more widely known as 'architects of transport'.

The freight forwarder acts as professional intermediary between the client and the transportation services utilised, and boasts the specialist knowledge and expertise needed for the consolidation, storage, handling, packing, and distribution of physical merchandise. He / she will also service the client's ancillary requirements, including customs clearance (for imports and exports), duty payment, and documentary credit arrangements.

Through its membership of the Customs Consultative Committee (CCC) and Trade Facilitation Ireland (TFI), the IIFA participates in discussions on local issues affecting international trade, while representation at international level is conducted through membership of FIATA - International Federation of Freight Forwarders' Associations.

As well as ensuring that the concerns of members and their



Mr. Aedan Archer (left) who was present at the first meeting of the association in 1962 alongside IIFA President in 2003 and 2004 Michael Connolly



At the IIFA 50th Anniversary celebrations outside Blooms Hotel are, front l/r: Simon Tobin, IIFA President Philip Kane, Aedan Archer, Mary O'Sullivan, Pearl Cumiskey and IIFA CEO Colm Walsh. Middle: Bob Rainsford, Sean McCool, Finbarr Cleary and Michael Connolly. Back: Peter Maybury, Bernard Jones, Tony Klerman, Owen O'Brien, IIFA Honorary Treasurer Paddy Kenny and Vincent Brennan



FIATA Diploma in Freight Forwarding Graduates 2011, front row: Matt Flint (Indep. Express Cargo), Leanne Farnan (Indep. Express cargo), John O'Hanrahan (DHL/IIFA Vice President), Amy Wang, Adrian Byrne (Nippon Express). Back: Andrew Marron (East West Express), Seamus McGowan (The Pallet Network), Brendan Morgan (Tuckmill Transport), Lisa Hughes (Campion Freight), Sonia FitzPatrick (Phoenix International), Gabriel Gergely, Glen Warnock (Emerald Freight), Colm Walsh (CEO IIFA)

clients are heard and acted upon, thus ensuring that the flow of physical trade between Ireland and the rest of the world is as efficient and cost-effective as possible, the IIFA also offers the opportunity to professionals employed in various aspects of Supply Chain Management, to achieve a FIATA Diploma in Freight Forwarding – an internationally recognized qualification that can be achieved within ten months. The course went online for the first time, last year. The next course starts in September and finishes the following June.

The FIATA Diploma course is ideal for those currently employed either directly in freight forwarding or any other area of supply chain management. It encompasses all aspects of freight forwarding encountered on a daily basis in the various operational areas such as Air Freight, Sea Freight, International Transport by Road, Customs Clearance, Logistics and Warehousing, Dangerous Goods, Marine Insurance, Computer and Information Technology and of course Freight Forwarding itself. An option for undertaking individual modules is also available to participants.

CEO of the Association

since 2005, and a previous President, Colm Walsh is only too well aware of the significance of the IIFA's 50th anniversary. "The initial meeting took place in Jury's Hotel on March 14th, 1962," he notes. "We held a small celebration to mark that occasion on the same day this year. There were ten companies represented at that first meeting. We now have 107 full trading members as well as 13 affiliated members, which is a good reflection of how Ireland has performed in the line of

international trade over the last 50 years. 60% of our members would be Irish-owned and –managed companies; the remainder are multinationals."

"We see the forwarder as the architect of transport, who possesses the knowledge to set things up for his client. Our Association was set up to represent the interests of freight forwarders and to assist them with different areas of governance as new legislation and matters arise. We also



IIFA Council member Finbarr Cleary, IIFA CEO Colm Walsh and IIFA Council member Pearl Cumiskey as the association's 50th Anniversary Celebrations



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have a Code of Conduct, to which all our members must adhere. At the moment, we have around 90% of freight forwarders in Ireland on board and this figure has remained consistent, even during the recession."

What are the challenges facing the Irish International Freight Association? "In recent years, one of the big challenges has arisen where manufacturing companies have moved abroad, which means the cake has got smaller and the number of shipments being exported is down. But, having said that, freight forwarding is as much concerned with imports as it is with exports. As a result of the drop in shipments, many of our members have decided to focus on other areas, such as warehousing and other logistics services.

"Freight is now much more of a commodity than it used to be and margins have been getting tighter and tighter over the past ten - fifteen years. Factors like shipping rates and fuel prices will affect the whole area of supply chain management, and these are changing constantly. Shipping rates are falling dramatically – you can now bring in a 20-foot container from the Far East for the same price as a first class airplane ticket.

"Also, with ongoing changes in technology, freight forwarding is evolving rapidly all the time and SME's have much better access to technology than ever before."

Indeed, as the IIFA website points out, freight forwarding in recent years has undergone a massive transformation in

response to the demands and opportunities presented by technology and globalisation. Logistical services, modern information and communications technologies - and total supply chain management - are integral to a modern service sector now very far removed from its traditional image of warehouses and docks.

Considering that members are in direct competition with one another, how difficult is it to represent each of their needs without stepping on anybody's toes? "It's very easy," Colm replies. "Of course, our members compete with one another but we represent the needs of freight forwarding as a whole, which means everybody. We offer our members use of the trading conditions of the IIFA, which have been reviewed in detail by people in the industry over many years and are very highly respected. These terms have credibility and are used by all our members. In itself, this is a very good reason why viable companies would want to become members."

The ten-month FIATA Diploma course was introduced in 2008 and runs from September until June. There are approximately 7,000 FIATA Diploma holders around the world and the IIFA has so far had

around 70 graduates. Since the course became available to online applicants, it is much more feasible for freight forwarders from outside the capital to participate. Mr. Walsh concluded " By the end of June this year another group of successful course participants will be awarded the Diploma and we look forward to welcoming new participants in the 2012/13 course. "

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IIFA Council members John O'Halloran, Phillip Kane (IIFA President), Bob Rainford and Simon Tobin