

Swedish publishers set to relocate in Dornie

BY LISA FALCONER

lisa.falconer@whfp.co.uk

A Swedish publishing house is to relocate to Dornie after buying the former residential home Graham House, with refurbishment work due to begin next month.

Bombadil Publishing, run by husband and wife team Niklas and Marianne Rugard Jarvstrat, is a youth-to-youth publisher working with authors around the world, all of whom are aged under 26.

Work to renovate Graham House is set to begin at the end of November and the firm hope to be up and running in their new location in January. Employees from America, India and around Europe will also relocate to Dornie, and Mrs Rugard Jarvstrat said they expected to employ 14 people for the first two years around half of whom would be recruited locally.

She said: "We are extremely excited about coming to the area. What place could be better positioned to inspire young writers across the world to put pen to paper, or

fingers to keyboard, and deliver their masterpieces to the world?"

"Scotland has a firm literary tradition, and is a country that is very supportive of new ideas. We are particularly pleased about the straightforwardness and transparency of the people and country at large. We are very excited about the move and are grateful for the amazing reception we have got from Highland Council and the people in the area. We feel completely at home already."

Mrs Rugard Jarvstrat added: "As a publisher, Bombadil Publishing is different

because we publish young people only, as we believe that they not only write what they want to read but that they also know what the future trends are. They have their fingers on the pulse.

"We have designed a platform which enables the youth to collaborate online with each other, their mentors or their teachers. This is a near-perfect match with the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence as it makes writing interesting and reduces the teacher's work, so we are discussing ways of implementing it in schools. It also gives

access to a library of books written by our international pool of youth authors and we hope that would encourage reading further and a cross-cultural exchange.

"We have also just decided to add Gaelic to our languages, and have received a tremendously positive response to that."

Education secretary Michael Russell said: "I am glad to see a young people's publisher with an interesting new business model moving into Scotland and I am sure that the Highlands will benefit greatly from such new creative jobs."



A packed hall heard Professor Tom Devine last week

Acclaimed history professor gives talk in Applecross

Professor Sir Tom Devine was in Applecross last week to host a talk on 'The Great Highland Famine: why Gaeldom didn't starve'.

The talk, organised by the Applecross Historical Society, saw Professor Devine hold the attention of the audience – who had travelled from as far afield as Lochalsh, Gairloch, Inverness and Edinburgh – as he spoke without notes or support materials.

Applecross Heritage Centre curator Gordon Cameron said: "As well as being such an inspiring speaker, Professor Devine expertly picked apart the events surrounding the crises of the famine

period and helped us gain a greater understanding of what some of our predecessors went through, debunking a few myths along the way.

"What came across very clearly in his talk was that the events of the late 1840s and early 1850s are not that far removed from us in human terms. He referred a number of times to the marks on the land for those who have eyes to see them, meaning the landscape evidence for townships and settlements that had been cleared when people were moved to more marginal areas, and the subsequent evidence of a struggle to adapt and survive."

After the talk a raffle and strapag organised by historical society volunteers rounded off the

evening and Professor Devine was happy to stay and discuss his talk further with the audience members, who included some of his former students.

Mr Cameron added: "We hope that last week's talk has helped to open up local and Highland history to a wider demographic, and that more people will be able to look at past and present events in their true contexts. Comann eachdraidh across the Highlands and Islands are doing such valuable work, and the support of their local communities can help to further expand what is being recorded, safeguarded and interpreted for future generations."

Doubt cast on future use of CalMac ferry 'Isle of Lewis'

The Scottish Government have rejected suggestions that the MV 'Isle of Lewis' will be retained on the Stornoway-Ullapool ferry run in order to operate a dedicated freight service, following the arrival of the new vessel MV 'Loch Seaforth'.

In official correspondence with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Transport Scotland said no decision had yet been taken over the future arrangements.

They were pressed to issue a clarification after SNP councillor Kenny MacLeod said it was his understanding that hauliers had been told the 'Isle of Lewis' would be kept on to operate a freight run.

At the moment, she is the main vessel for cars and passengers, with the MV 'Muirneag' operating an overnight sailing for commercial traffic. The Loch Seaforth is expected to assume all duties on arrival.

Comhairle convener Norman MacDonald said: "We have spoken to Transport Scotland and we were categorically told that no decision has been made. However, we know CalMac have been having ongoing

talks with hauliers over the issue, so it may have come up as part of that.

"We will certainly be continuing to press them for a dedicated freight vessel on the run to cope with the demand. But it is disgraceful that if a decision has indeed been made it is being kept from us."

In response to a request from the Free Press to clarify the situation, a Transport Scotland spokesperson said: "The long-held intention is that both the Ro-Pax vessel and freight vessel currently on the Stornoway-Ullapool route will be replaced by the new MV 'Loch Seaforth' when she enters service."

"There will be a short transitional period of around a month or two and then the Ullapool-Stornoway service will be served by one vessel – the MV 'Loch Seaforth'."

He added: "The MV 'Isle of Lewis' will remain on standby during the early period of the deployment of the MV 'Loch Seaforth' until there is collective satisfaction that the vessel is performing as required."

Healthy, happy kids

A free eight-week programme aimed at ensuring Western Isles families adopt a healthier and happier lifestyle is set to start next month.

'Healthy, Happy Kids' is a programme run by NHS Western Isles for families with pre-school children from birth to age five, set up to ensure that kids get the best start in life.

The group programme is free and will run for eight weeks, on Fridays, from 1.30pm-2.30pm, in the Hebrides Dance and Wellbeing Studio, Stornoway (at the Golf Club). The first group programme will take place on 24th October. A one-to-one programme is also available.

A spokeswoman for the health board said: "Healthy, Happy Kids is relaxed and informal. It will help you think about what is going well in your family – and offer some new ideas to get your children off to a great start in life.

"So, if you are struggling with ideas to give your child a healthy start, wish mealtimes weren't a battle, or want to enjoy being more active as a family together, contact NHS Western Isles to book your place on the programme."

Participants will get a free pack including story books, games ideas, recipes, reward charts and stickers.

Call 01851 708279 or email whb.Dietetics@nhs.net to book a place on the programme.



Blythswood appeal for more agents to help with food banks

Blythswood Care needs additional referral agents to facilitate the work of its food banks throughout the north of Scotland.

"Referral agents are usually care professionals who are best placed to assess the situations of people in need," said Blythswood's head of projects, Finlay Mackenzie.

Doctors, district nurses, social workers and clergy are frequently involved. Other referral agencies include schools, probation services, Citizens' Advice Bureaux, housing support services, Highland Council service points and Job Centres.

Blythswood now runs nine food bank centres in the Highlands, having recently opened two more in Tain and in the Hilton district of Inverness.

"We open a food bank when local people identify a need in their own community and are willing to come together to form a support committee," Mr Mackenzie said. "These are staffed by volunteers who are there to serve those who come in with a voucher.

"But these volunteers do not

decide who gets food. For this we need care professionals or those in positions of responsibility who are willing to hold vouchers and make them available to individuals or families in need.

"With more referral agents our food banks could be helping more people. We know that the need is out there. Our food bank centres are busy but they have the capacity to do more."

One referral agent is John Murdo MacDonald, manager of the Christians Against Poverty debt centre in Kyle. He described Blythswood's foodbank centre in Kyle as a godsend, adding: "In the past few months, it has provided food for six of our clients in crisis situations. This gives a breathing space in which we can establish a budget for clients and help them through to becoming debt-free."

Those who may be in a position to serve as referral agents are asked to contact Laura Ferguson, Blythswood's food bank development officer, on 01349 8830777 or email laura.ferguson@blythswood.org.

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