



# Rural Convenience

*In the small village of Ballyhaise, Co. Cavan, Lee's Gala provides the local community with its convenience needs. Checkout talks to owner Dermot Lee to find out more.*

**S**ituated just a short 11 kilometres from the border with Northern Ireland, Lee's Gala, in Ballyhaise, Co.

Cavan, has been plying its trade since 2005. The store is run by Dermot Lee, who has guided it to where it is today.

Ballyhaise is a closely knit community village of about 600 people, and, as such, Dermot gets to know his customers very well.

"We get a mixed bag of customers, predominantly made up of people from Ballyhaise and surrounding villages," he explains. "We get customers of all ages, from young couples and families to older people and schoolchildren, or people who are just passing through the village."

Ballyhaise is also home to

Ballyhaise College, run by Teagasc, whose 400-odd students also naturally appreciate the Gala store's convenience.

## Local And Fresh

Being a retailer in such a local market counts for a lot, with a completely different set of demands and challenges to an urban or tourist environment.

"The store plays a vital role in the local community," Dermot says. "We provide a one-stop shop that caters for all needs, with services such as the butchery and deli counters, general groceries, lottery services and fuel."

Lee's Gala doesn't just provide the necessities, however.

"The store also has Baker's Corner, where customers can

avail of a range of bread, which is a big hit with our customers," says Dermot.

The Baker's Corner has only recently opened in store, reflecting part of a wider national trend of fresh offerings and natural, healthy foods. The in-store bakery is the part of the store about which Dermot is most excited.

"We can now supply our customers with a range of baked goods – cakes, buns, and a variety of breads and scones – all of which are freshly baked in store on a daily basis," he says.

Alongside the Baker's Corner is Dermot's pride and joy: the craft-butchery counter.

"All the beef and lamb on the counter is reared by myself, and the chicken comes sourced locally, throughout Cavan," he

explains.

"I'm proud to be able to deliver local produce to the local communities."

## Group Support

Gala provides key support to Dermot's business. What first attracted him to the group was the combination of independence, flexibility and support that it offers.

"I have the control to tailor my store to the needs of the community, with the support of the Gala group and wholesaler network, which enables me to provide the products and concepts that appeal to my customers," he says.

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**Heart Of The Community:** Dermot Lee (right) is proud of how his store works with his local suppliers and community

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The ability to be specific to Dermot’s community while having a larger network to draw on is invaluable. Gala has also helped Dermot evolve the store into what it is today.

“Gala has worked closely with us to develop the store and introduce concepts that will meet the needs of the people in Ballyhaise and the surrounding

communities,” he explains.

He also has praise for his local wholesaler, McCarrick’s Cash & Carry, who Dermot says has been incredibly supportive since day one.

### Standing Out

Gala has also helped Dermot tap into important trends in the convenience-retail industry, and not only stay competitive with other stores, but stand out.

“Gala, as a group, enables me to retain independence of my convenience store while providing access to footfall-driving concepts such as Baker’s Corner and access to support from our regional operations executive, David Mayne,” he explains.

“Being part of the Gala group has enabled me to be flexible in my approach to convenience retailing, while also benefitting from the experience and support of the group and its management team.”

Dermot has taken an interest in the Gala initiatives, and he is eager to pick up on opportunities or ranges that he can introduce to his own community in Ballyhaise.

“I’m interested in the Gala own-brand range, and I look forward to seeing the range grow in the future,” Dermot says, as an example.

“I am also interested in the recently introduced Coffee Junction concept and the potential it has to work in conjunction with our current Baker’s Corner offering.”

### Growth And Challenges

Dermot has more than a few ideas for how he would like to develop the business over the next few years. It’s vital to keep seeking out the latest developments and stay attuned to any changes.

“Over the next few years, we’d like to increase the range and diversity of our products and our butchery and bakery offerings,” he says.

He also comments on the role that the group plays in these developments, saying, “Gala, as a group, is constantly evolving, with new services and offerings, so we’d be keen to keep up with the demands of our customers and introduce new offerings that will help us to continue to maintain a high standard throughout the store.”

The retail sector is continually shifting, and with the shifts come new challenges. Which ones does Dermot see as the biggest currently facing retailers?

“At the moment, [it] is the competition from large chains and the rise in popularity of online grocery shopping.”

He adds, “Trying to keep up with the latest consumer trends can also be a challenge.”

Another issue to which Dermot is particularly sensitive is Brexit and cross-border shopping. Being so close to Northern Ireland places unique stress on Lee’s Gala.

Dermot says, “For border counties like Cavan, it can be hard to compete with the prices available to shoppers who can shop across the border, in Northern Ireland. Brexit is obviously something that could create its own challenges.”

He will be paying close attention to the news over the next two years, especially regarding Ireland and the UK’s border arrangements, but is there anything that the Irish government could do to support his situation, or the industry as a whole?

Dermot believes that paying increased attention to the issues facing rural communities would help a lot, saying, “Better investment in rural services, transport, electricity and broadband services would all help to support better business in the convenience sector.” ■

