



The Kingdom Awaits

O'Shea's Gala in Blennerville, Co. Kerry has more than just location on its side - it's fast becoming a must-stop destination.

What is it like to have the forecourt store with arguably the best view in Ireland? Just ask Mary O'Shea, proprietor of O'Shea's Gala in Blennerville, Co. Kerry, whose shop marks the entrance to the Dingle Peninsula, where the grey peaks of the Slieve Mish mountains dominate the landscape.

"It's one of the busiest stop off points in the southwest," she says proudly. "Between St Patrick's Day and the October Bank Holiday, the forecourt is full morning, noon and night, as you would expect - but

sometimes you would open up in the middle of January, and it's really busy."

Clearly, those dropping into the store are looking to avail of more than just the scenery. O'Shea and her family have operated the store here, just around the corner from the Blennerville Windmill, for close to 20 years, and have operated under the Gala banner for 15 of those. "Gala is very hands on, but on a more personal level," O'Shea says of the group's involvement. "With a lot of other retail groups you are just a number, whereas with Gala, there's a real 'family' feel to the organisation. If I have an idea, or

they have an idea, we all sit down to discuss it together. You still have the flexibility to put your own stamp on things."

New Approach

And with the summer fast approaching, O'Shea and her local Gala representatives Billy Massey and Martin Fitzgerald saw the opportunity to maximise sales in what is one of the store's strongest sales areas: food to go. Utilising Gala's innovative Baker's Corner concept, in the past four weeks the entrance to the store has been transformed into a showcase for fresh produce, with a range of fresh

cakes, tarts and breads as well as a variety of home-cooked takeaway meals.

"What's appealing about Baker's Corner is that it really meets the needs of the different types of customers that come into the shop. You have the businessman that comes in for a scone with his coffee, and you have the mother who comes in looking for a cake to have with her dinner. They don't have to go into town any more to get that - we have just what they are looking for."

While the store revamp looks extensive, it was a relatively simple process - the store, which despite its size also boasts a full



Best in the West Opposite page: Martin Fitzgerald (left), with Ciaran and Mary O'Shea and the new-look Bakers Corner layout. Above: Rachel XXX, deli supervisor, in front of the store's deli, which accounts for around 25% of the store's turnover

off licence and dairy wall – hasn't lowered its SKU count at all. "Billy and Martin were instrumental in making it happen," says O'Shea.

A novel aspect of the Baker's Corner offering in the store is its 'modular' setup, during quieter periods of the day, the display can be downsized, to cater for a change in demand. "You're not going to put a fresh bake on at 4pm," says O'Shea. "This set up enables us to keep the display looking well-stocked and attractive throughout the day."

Selling Point

The in-store deli, located to the left of the checkout, is another strong selling point for the store – accounting for up to 25% of turnover on some days – and the new layout also improves the visibility for this key footfall driver. "We find that some customers come out from the Tralee Aquadome [located close to the centre of the town] to have lunch here, rather than go into town. It's a straight five minute run; they can park freely, relax, and have a freshly-prepared sandwich or meal just the way they want it. It takes the hassle out of their day."

As with developing the Bakers

Corner concept, O'Shea cites Gala's support as being instrumental to the success of the deli. "Our deli supervisor, Rachel, has been well-trained by John Ireland [Gala Fresh Food manager], and she in turn has passed on this knowledge to the other members of the team. We constantly change the menu here, and John and the Gala team really helped us tailor it to our consumer."

The recently-launched Gala chilled distribution platform is also working wonders for the store, with certain brands, such as Cully & Sully and Müller, now available in the store for the first time. "Before, you wouldn't have been selling enough of a particular product to warrant a minimum drop from certain chilled suppliers," she says. "But now, we have access to all of these products, and they are selling better than I expected." The Gala own-brand bread, milk and water is similarly "flying out the door; customers are always commenting about what good value it is."

Local Following

Local support is part of the Gala ethos, and it's no different at O'Shea's, which sponsors the local

football team and school events, as well as lending its support – along with the rest of the Gala portfolio – to the Jack & Jill Foundation and Special Olympics Ireland. "The Jack & Jill Foundation would be very important to a lot of people down here, so it's very well supported," says O'Shea. In terms of local suppliers, the likes of Katie Mac's homecooked meals, Barry's Bakery and O'Mahony's Bakery all boast a strong presence.

O'Shea also pays tribute to the support of Peter Clifford, the local cash & carry operator servicing the store, as well as the other Gala outlets in Kerry. "I've worked with Peter for 20 years

now, and he knows what my customer wants just as much as I do. Just last Tuesday, he came out here after what I know was a busy day for him. Peter's advice and insight is fantastic and that is reflected in our new layout of store."

Next on the agenda for O'Shea is an extension to the store, encompassing a new seating area overlooking the Slieve Mish mountains. "We've already got planning permission, and hopefully once the new school [located right beside the store] is completed, we'll be able to start developing it."

It's a logical next step that can only add to what is already a must-stop destination. ■

