

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY:

**MS KATE O'CONNELL**, Registrar, Shannon College of Hotel Management, on 8 March 2012 in Shannon College of Hotel Management, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*, on **GERALD FRANCIS LAWLESS**

Each year the National University of Ireland, Galway awards honorary degrees to a small number of people who have distinguished themselves in various walks of life. There is no one more deserving of this award than Gerald Francis Lawless for his contribution to both the worldwide hotel industry and to Ireland.

Aristotle said "*We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.*" - This quote captures the essence of Gerald Lawless who continuously leads by example.

Gerald is a consummate and exceptionally talented hotelier; this was recognised when he received a Lifetime Achievement Award at the 2010 Worldwide Hospitality Awards in Paris and the 2011 "Leadership Award" at the AHIC (Arab Hotel Investment Conference). As Executive Chairman of the Jumeirah Group, Gerald has helped establish Jumeirah as one of the premier luxury hotel brands in the world.

Gerald joined Jumeirah in June 1997, prior to the grand opening of Jumeirah Beach Hotel in November of that year – the first of the Jumeirah group of hotels. Prior to this, Gerald had spent a 23-year career with Forte Hotels, which included managing the Shelbourne Hotel in Dublin amongst others, and culminated in him establishing and expanding Forte's operations in the Middle East.

He took on the challenge of launching the Burj Al Arab, the world's most luxurious hotel, voted "World's Leading Hotel" in 2007 by the World Travel Awards, a title it has managed to hold onto ever since.

Gerald graduated from Shannon College in 1975 and holds an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Business Administration in Hospitality Management from Johnson & Wales University, Rhode Island in the U.S. He is a member of the Executive Committee of the World Travel and Tourism Council and a fellow member of the Institute of Hospitality.

In addition, Gerald is a Vice Chairman of the Aviation, Travel and Tourism Council of the World Economic Forum, member of the Dubai Holding Executive Committee and Member of the Board of Trustees of the Emirates National Development Programme. Gerald is also a non-executive Director on the Travelodge Board, where he represents Dubai Holdings, and serves as the Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management.

Entrepreneurship is often associated with small enterprises but Gerald started and has grown a global business. The Jumeirah Group currently has 17 properties under management in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, the Maldives, Shanghai, Frankfurt, London, Rome and New York. 2012 will see the Jumeirah Group open hotels in Kuwait, Mallorca, and on the Caspian Sea, in Baku, Azerbaijan. 2013 will continue to be a very busy year for Gerald

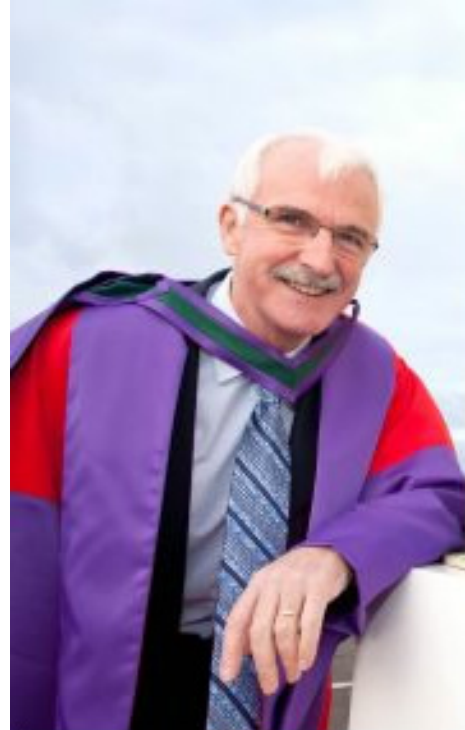


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Shannon College of Hotel Management

with new openings planned, particularly in China; in Guangzhou, Hangzhou and Macau. By the end of 2013, the Jumeirah Group intends to have 30 hotels.

Gerald has built a top class brand; he wants the Jumeirah Group to be recognised as one of the top luxury hotel operations worldwide, with each hotel offering the promise of 'Stay Different'. The three brand hallmarks of Jumeirah are:

One – Hold a smile and greet the guest before the guest greets you.

Two – Never say no as a first response to a guest request.

Three – treat each other with respect.

This brand building has been acknowledged to such an extent that Dubai has replaced Las Vegas in becoming the world benchmark centre for innovation, product development and quality standards in Food & Beverage operations. Gerald and his team have been at the forefront of all this. To quote Robert Jarvik - "*Leaders are visionaries with a poorly developed sense of fear and no concept of the odds against them. They make the impossible happen*". (Dr Robert Jarvik, 20th-century American heart surgeon)

Not a bad achievement in 15 years!

So where has this man Gerald Lawless come from?

Well, Gerald is the second child of Tom and Nellie Lawless from Circular Road, Galway, his father Tom was a dairy farmer on the outskirts of Galway city. Gerald lived there with his older brother Billy and sisters Helen and Mary until he moved to Shannon in 1971 to commence his studies.

When some of his Shannon classmates were asked to share their memories of their time spent with Gerald in Shannon, there was no shortage of colourful tales, many of them featuring the exclusive wooden hostels at the end of the runway where the students lived! Some of the memories that can be repeated here today are that he was known to sit at the back of the classroom – possibly not paying a lot of attention and was even late for lectures on the odd occasion! Despite this, Gerald graduated from Shannon with honours in 1975. Interestingly, Gerald completed his Final Year placement with Forte Hotels, the group formerly known as THF and he remained with them until he joined the Jumeirah Group.

Back in 1971, Shannon was a long way from Galway where Gerald had left his childhood sweetheart, Neasa. She was always in his heart though, and true love survived and they became engaged at the tender age of 19.

In keeping with Shannon student's ingenuity, it is a little known fact that Gerald purposefully cut his hand whilst on his summer placement in the Great Southern Hotel, Eyre Square, Galway so he could stay longer as Neasa was working and studying in Galway too.

Gerald and Neasa are still very happy together and have three wonderful children;

Tom, Angelina and Michael.

We are delighted to formally welcome you back to the college today Neasa.

Whilst researching this citation and speaking to Gerald's colleagues, it is clear that he is very grounded with a strong personal value base; has a keen sense of what is ethically right, treats people with respect and invests a lot of time in relationship-building. People and investors trust Gerald; that is why he has succeeded in building such an iconic company in the Middle East. "*Act so as to elicit the best in others and thereby in thyself*" as the American educator and reformer Felix Adler said. (1851-1933)

In addition to his corporate and business activities, Gerald has also sought to contribute to worldwide tourism, which in 2011, was worth 1 trillion dollars in revenue, and earns 24,000 US Dollars per second in visitor spending in the United States.

But Gerald is passionate about promoting tourism as a force for good. This philosophy is very similar to the views held by Dr Brendan O'Regan, founder of the college, who saw hotel management and tourism as the vehicle for international shared understanding and the achievement of world peace.

Gerald has been very active within the World Travel and Tourism Council as well as The Aviation, Travel and Tourism Council of the World Economic Forum. Over the past two years both councils have been working on the electronic visa proposal, which would make it much easier for international travelers to visit foreign states.

Gerald has taken the same visa facilitation initiative further and discussed it at the Global Irish Economic Forum at Farmleigh House with the Irish Government. Following these discussions, a number of initiatives have been enacted which allow travelers with UK visas to visit Ireland. This has certainly had a positive effect on the Irish economy and continues to benefit Irish tourism. Even though Gerald has been out of Ireland for the best part of 30 years, he has never lost his Irishness; he continuously assists and facilitates Foreign Direct Investment contacts and opportunities.

In conclusion, I will leave the end of this citation to a young Shannon graduate who currently works with the Jumeirah Group in Dubai, and who recently emailed me on what Gerald means to him.

*"As well as being tremendously respected on the global hospitality front, Mr. Lawless is an inspiration for the colleagues throughout Jumeirah, reaching to over 13,000 globally at this point in time. Indeed, Mr. Lawless is Jumeirah. He is different to any of the other leaders in the sector. He attends colleague parties in Dubai not just to give a business update but regularly takes part in the fun aspects of the night remaining true to the Jumeirah promise to STAY DIFFERENT™. Holding the position of Executive Chairman makes him a very busy man yet, he has always made the time to meet personally with Shannon graduates, offering meaningful support and guidance. He is a keen man for the three Jumeirah Hallmarks; the core values of the group; and often quizzes many colleagues on the same. I think it's fair to say that all Shannon graduates can look to Mr. Lawless as a true success story within the industry".*

*Praehonorabilis Vice-Cancellarie, totaque universitatis, praesento vobis hunc meum filium, quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testur ac spondeo, totique Academiae.*