

According to **Alanna Barry McCloskey**, 2021 Delaware Valley Irish Hall of Fame honoree, the secret to her success is coffee. But this claim has to be taken with more than a grain of salt; the 41 year old Havertown native is notoriously modest. She manages to somehow be everywhere in the Philadelphia Irish community, making a difference, while flying as low under the radar as she possibly can.

And now it is her time to shine.

In the words of Kathy McGee Burns, who nominated Alanna for the Hall of Fame, “I put her name up because I have long admired her. She is the best multitasking woman I know. When you meet her, you see this demure Irish beauty, and as a matter of fact, her name in Gaelic means beauty. But that outer beauty reflects an even brighter inner beauty. She is one of the hardest working women out there, and she makes a positive difference in the Irish community every day.”

Growing up in Havertown and raised, along with brothers Patrick and Kevin, by Antrim born father Martin and Irish Philadelphian mother Patricia (Peterman) Barry, Alanna always knew she wanted to follow a career that had something to do with Ireland. She just wasn’t sure what or how. “I loved growing up in Havertown. I loved it. I grew up in the Sacred Heart Parish in Manoa, right near Paddy Rooney’s. Havertown is considered the 33rd Irish County, and we’re very proud of that.”

After graduating from Saint Joseph’s University in 2002 with a degree in Food Marketing, she initially thought she would end up working with Irish food companies. “Board Bia is the Irish Food Board, and they promote Irish food brands around the world. That was kind of my dream job, I just loved that idea.”

After working at Williamson’s Restaurant atop the GSB Building on City Avenue throughout college, she continued there as assistant manager until 2003 when she answered an ad in the Philadelphia Inquirer for a position at the Irish American Business Chamber Network. She interviewed with Bill McLaughlin, who had founded the Chamber in 1999, and initially didn’t get the job. But in a twist of fate that was clearly meant to be, several months later she received a call asking if she still wanted the position. She did, and Alanna became the Business Manager and Marketing Coordinator of the IABCN. This was the title she held until August of 2021 when she became the Executive Director of the Chamber. Since October of 2020, she has also been the Community Programs and Communications Director at the Irish Diaspora Center.

“When I started working at the Chamber, it had only been around for four years at that time. Bill McLaughlin has always been an amazing teacher, and he was teaching things without even realizing it. I would have had no idea about the Consulate, the politics, all of that. I just learned it along the way. From Bill, and from our Board of Directors. Our board is amazing, the current one as well as all of them over the years. Jim McLaughlin was a huge part of my time at the Chamber, and he is definitely missed.”

From the beginning, Bill McLaughlin and the Chamber supported Alanna as her life expanded to include her three children: Ciara 17, Rita 13 and Tiernan 6. “Bill encouraged the work-life balance and I’ve been able to work from home on and off for years. That was always an option for me, long before it became a trend and years before Covid. I was able to work part-time, which was great. I personally wouldn’t have been able to do full-time and do what I do with my kids. I’ve just been so lucky.”

It’s more than just luck that has followed Alanna throughout her career. She brings not only a mighty work ethic, but also an enduring reputation for always getting the job done, to everything she

undertakes. She insists that “some days I feel like I look like I’m frantic,” but to anyone observing her, it simply looks effortless.

“I truly, really enjoy my job. From meeting different Irish organizations from the county councils to all the other Irish groups I’ve had a chance to work with, it all started with the Chamber.” And since she’s added her official post at the Diaspora Center to her resume, she’s discovered there’s a definite synchronicity that flows between the positions.

“I started volunteering with the Irish Immigration Center years ago, I was just always involved. I met Siobhan Lyons there, and she’s been a great friend to me ever since. And through Leslie Alcock and Emily Norton Ashinhurst; now I get paid to do the things I used to volunteer to do. I love going to the Diaspora Center -- it’s in Havertown, so again it goes back to Havertown.

“What’s great is there is a lot of overlap between my job at the Chamber and what I do at the Center. I feel like all the Irish organizations in the community work really well together, so there’s a lot of collaboration between everyone. But the Diaspora Center is community based, and it’s really nice to have that. It’s very different in that respect from the Chamber work. Both are important, but with the Center I just feel like I’m doing something that really matters, where you can see the immediate impact, if that makes sense. When you’re working with seniors, or you have a youth program, or you’re helping people get into the country who are coming for funerals, you are able to see how you really help people.

“The broader mission of the Center is to serve the Irish community and to keep the connections with Ireland close, which is what the Chamber also strives to do. They are just different avenues to get to the same destination. I think it’s so great to have both, and I’m lucky to be a part of both. I love having both aspects of it, I think it fills out the whole picture for me. This is a path I definitely want to continue on.”

For Alanna Barry McCloskey, there is no doubt that not only are there paths to be continued on, but there is an abundance of trails yet to be blazed.

Written by Lori Lander Murphy