

US life sciences firm aims for Europe from Newcastle West base

Ortec’s new Irish base, in Co Limerick, will be its first outside the US, housing the company’s European headquarters, manufacturing and operations centre, writes **Arlene Harris**

Location is key when it comes to setting up a new business and while Limerick city would seem to be the obvious choice for companies looking to establish a footing in the region, one American firm decided to think outside the box – and outside the city centre – when it chose Newcastle West as its Irish base.

Ortec is a life sciences company headquartered in the US and specialising in materials research and manufacturing. Founded in 1980 by Larry Brotherton and headquartered in South Carolina, Ortec is still owned and run by the Brotherton family, with Larry as its chief executive.

The company currently has three facilities in South Carolina, providing contract formulation and manufacturing services to clients in the pharmaceutical, biopharmaceutical and medical device sectors.

Ortec’s new Irish base in Newcastle West will be its first outside of the US, housing the company’s European head-

quarters, manufacturing and operations centre.

According to John Geraghty, business development manager at Ortec’s new Limerick operation, the company’s decision to invest in Ireland was customer-driven.

“The need for locally-manufactured product has always been a high priority for our customers, although the pandemic has pushed customers to take a more proactive view and move more quickly to secure the supply chain of their critical raw materials,” Geraghty said.

“Ireland has a high concentration of life science companies with manufacturing facilities, some of which we support from South Carolina.

“However, the decision to invest in Newcastle West was more personal to the Brotherton family. Hailing from rural roots, they wanted to continue that tradition and build the facility away from the traditional investment centres close to the large cities.”

The site in Limerick sits on 20-plus



John Geraghty, business development manager, Ortec, at the office in Newcastle West
Picture: Arthur Ellis

acres, giving the company ample room for future expansion.

Total investment in the site is expected to be in the region of €25 million over the next few years, and Ortec hopes to employ up to 130 people in Newcastle West once all phases of this planned investment are complete.

The first phase of construction began earlier this year and is due for completion in March 2022. The site will be ISO 13485 certified and will operate under FDA and EMA guidelines for the production of pharmaceutical, combination and medical device materials.

“As business development manager, it will be my role to bring new projects to this facility in addition to managing the baseload business we will transfer in from South Carolina,” Geraghty said.

“These products will be contract-manufactured materials for medical device and pharmaceutical applications.

“In addition, we are looking at life science customers who may have a need to outsource some or all of a chemical process where quality and consistency are key.”

With many US-owned companies in Ireland relying on long supply chains for

raw materials sourced from the States, Ortec would be on hand to give them a “high quality, cost-effective and local alternative”, Geraghty said, reducing the risks associated with complicated supply chains.

He put Ortec’s success in the US to date down to its “ethos, work ethic and vision”. “In general, companies don’t survive for as long as Ortec without being successful – and in our case, this success has come from all the people within the organisation,” Geraghty said.

“The core belief of the company is integrity at every step and, to adhere to this

belief, it has developed six unwavering principles: optimism, honesty, diligence, stewardship, humility, and shared outcomes.

“When I joined Ortec almost four years ago, I immediately understood that these were not just hollow guides and felt the enthusiasm from all of the people I met at that time.

“As we progress with our hiring in Newcastle West, I feel that the people who join our organisation will feel the same. These individuals will have the opportunity to help shape the future of our company.”

International financial services firm profits from a regional focus

BY ARLENE HARRIS

When Catherine Duffy started her position as general manager of the Limerick office of Northern Trust in 2008, she knew it would be a success, but she didn’t realise just how much it would grow over the following decade.

“I was honoured to be asked to lead the Limerick operation in 2008 – and at that point there were about 150 to 200 people working at the office,” Duffy said.

“There are now upwards of 1,400 employees and this growth and success can, in part, be attributed to the support we were shown right from the very beginning.

“I was made to feel very welcome, not only by the people who were already working there, but also other companies in the region and the various educational facilities – the University of Limerick, Limerick Institute of Technology and Mary Immaculate College.”

Duffy also knew that she would need to get Northern Trust “known in the region”.

“One of the first things I did was join the Limerick Chamber of Commerce. With a place on the board, this definitely helped us to grow as I was able to sit around the table with 20 peers and discuss plans for the future of the region,” she said.

“Then I really got to know the various educational facilities and received great cooperation and interest in collaboration with them from the start. They wanted to know how they could help and what we needed from graduates once they had left third level education in order to pursue a career with us – and this was enormously helpful.”

Once this collaboration had begun with the various educational institutions, Northern Trust was able to offer placements to students in their third year. Many of whom went on to work with the financial services company after graduating, Duffy said.

“This has worked very well for everyone and last year we had over 40 students on placement for nine months,” she said. “If this cooperation



Catherine Duffy, general manager of the Limerick office of Northern Trust: ‘We have posts opening up all the time’

worked well for both them and us, then many will come back after they graduate – so this is a great opportunity for all concerned,” she said.

“There are also lots of different career paths they can choose, as our Limerick operation has many different aspects, the biggest being fund administration. It specialises in transfer agency, financial reporting as well as having an accounting unit and the usual HR and administration departments.

“So, there are many possibilities for personal development, advancement and promotion within the 52 business functions we have here.”

Northern Trust has a broad reach, not just in the Midwest region, but also across Ireland and globally. With more than 20,000 permanent staff worldwide, the business has an international outlook. “The staff across the world all work very closely with each other, offering support and working around the different office opening and closing times,” Duffy said.

Another draw for Northern Trust in Limerick starting out was the strength of the infrastructure locally, and the amenities on offer the region, which all add up to an ideal location for people looking for a rewarding career and lifestyle to boot.

“The area has a lot to offer a company. Firstly, its location close to Shannon Airport and the motorways makes it very accessible,” Duffy said.

“We have staff coming to work every day from 12 different counties and the journey is made so easy by the

transport links and the fact that they can drive to work and park outside, due to our location on the outskirts of the city centre.

“This has proved particularly beneficial over the past year of the pandemic as people didn’t need to avail of public transport to get to work.

“Then along with these access benefits, our location in Limerick has also allowed us to build up a very strong relationship with all of the major third level institutions in the area, which play a very instrumental role in providing excellent employee candidates across our many departments.

“We are currently the biggest financial operation in the region and are seen as the employer of choice, as people want to come and join us and help the company grow.”

Northern Trust has gone from strength to strength in Limerick over the previous decade and Catherine Duffy believes that this is set to continue.

“Our growth picture has been fantastic to date, and I don’t think any of us could have predicted this at the outset,” she said.

“The support we have had in the area has certainly helped this to happen and we are extremely proud that we have grown so healthily.

“Going forward, things are looking good, and we have posts opening up in various areas all the time.

“Future growth is on the cards and there are possibilities for everyone – in fact, the way I see it, the world is our oyster.”

Big thinking starts small

Grant Thornton has launched the 2021 Irish Business Voice Programme.

Irish owned businesses across the country are facing various challenges: how do we excel in today’s fast-paced business ecosystem and overcome the economic hurdles, all whilst still preserving our identity as an indigenous business.

To help answer these questions, and overcome the challenges we’re asking Irish owned businesses across the country to complete a survey to identify the concerns across different industry sectors and geographies. Grant Thornton will roll out a programme of activity and communications to help address the issues and concerns raised.

This Annual Programme has been created to:

- identify shared issues and concerns across Irish businesses today;
- arm Irish businesses with the tools and advice to move into an era of sustained growth; and
- build business networks with shared purposes, concerns and goals.

Take the survey at grantthornton.ie/irish-business-programme



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