

Foster unveils Ballymena jewellery workshop as UK's first ÉCONOMUSÉE

TOURISM Minister Arlene Foster today announced that a jewellery workshop in Ballymena is to be the United Kingdom's first ÉCONOMUSÉE.

An ÉCONOMUSÉE is a Québec inspired tourism initiative that encourages visitors to meet an artisan in their workshop and learn about the history of their craft. From today, Galgorm-based Marion Woodburn Jewellery will join the ÉCONOMUSÉE Northern Europe network.

Artisan Marion Woodburn and her team use precious metals to hand craft jewellery on the premises. Much of Marion's work is inspired by the richness of the local landscape and the surroundings of the Antrim Coast and Glens Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Speaking at the Galgorm workshop, the Minister said: **“With only 18 ÉCONOMUSÉE sites in Northern Europe, being part of this influential international network will provide a great platform to further strengthen Northern Ireland's cultural tourism offering.**

“The ÉCONOMUSÉE will ultimately enhance the unique heritage of the Causeway Coast and Glens area, by showcasing the traditional skills of our local craftsmen and women. Visitors to Marion's workshop can watch her at work, as well as learning about the history of jewellery making and the origin of the precious metals she uses.”

The Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust (CCGHT) is the lead partner in Northern Ireland to implement the ÉCONOMUSÉE Northern Europe project, which is part funded by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

The ÉCONOMUSÉE Northern Europe network has been developed with assistance from the European Union's Northern Periphery Programme 2007-2013. The INTERREG project is organised as a co-operation project between regions from seven countries including Northern Ireland, Canada, Greenland, Iceland, The Faroe Islands, Republic of Ireland and Norway.

Arlene Foster added: **“The establishment of the UK’s first ÉCONOMUSÉE in Ballymena is a welcome step, as it will encourage visitors to go beyond the Giant’s Causeway and explore other areas along the Causeway Coastal Route. It will also give tourists another tangible reason to stop and spend money in the area.”**

The launch was attended by key representatives from the ÉCONOMUSÉE Society Network in Québec, the Québec Government Office in London and Hordaland County Council in Norway.

Sarah Irwin, Sustainable Development Officer for the Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust said: “We are delighted to have been given the opportunity to lead on such an innovative and creative tourism initiative. There is a need to encourage and promote more sustainable tourism experiences in the Causeway Coast and Glens area and this project is a fantastic example of how to achieve that.

“We are very proud that we have developed the first ÉCONOMUSÉE in the United Kingdom. It is of particular importance in this current economic climate to support local artisans/businesses in such an engaging manner. Hopefully it will sustain their livelihoods during these challenging economic times.”

Marion Woodburn added: “This initiative fits perfectly with our business as we use traditional skills to create our contemporary designs. ÉCONOMUSÉE will enhance local tourism and raise public awareness of craft with an understanding of the time and skill involved. Over the coming months I hope to create further employment and I look forward to welcoming additional visitors as our business continues to grow.”

Notes to editors:

1. The ÉCONOMUSÉE Network is a non-profit organisation and was created in 1992, with its headquarters in Quebec City.
2. The ÉCONOMUSÉE Northern Europe network has been developed by the assistance of the European Union i.e. the Northern Periphery Programme 2007-2013. The INTERREG project is organised as a cooperation project between

regions from seven countries including Northern Ireland, Canada, Greenland, Iceland, The Faroe Islands, Republic of Ireland and Norway.

3. The Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust is a public/private/voluntary sector partnership established in May 2002 as an independent company limited by guarantee. It includes representation from Ballymena, Coleraine, Larne, Limavady, Moyle and Borough and District Councils in partnership with representatives from the environment sector, the community sector and the tourism and farming industries.
4. CCGHT look after and promote three Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in Northern Ireland. These are the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB, the Binevenagh AONB and the Causeway Coast AONB.
5. For press enquiries please contact DETI Press Office on tel: 028 9052 9604. Out of office hours please contact the Duty Press Officer via pager number 07699 715 440 and your call will be returned.