

*'It's a great privilege to be a part of the Canadian government's overseas aid program to developing countries. By participating, I'm giving something back to Canada' — Gerry O'Connor, founder of Blackrock Corporate Services*

## TIME OUT



Gerry O'Connor, Blackrock Corporate Services founder, volunteers with Canadian Executive Services Organization in countries such as the Republic of Georgia, which has an economy that parallels the Ireland he left as a young man.

*Success in Canada prompts businessman to help overseas peers*

# Irish goodwill goes a long way

By MARY TERESA BITTI

**W**hat do 1950s Dublin and present-day Tbilisi have in common? A lot for Gerry O'Connor, the founder of Toronto-based Blackrock Corporate Services, a consulting company specializing in the design and administration of defined benefits and defined contribution pension plans.

Mr. O'Connor grew up in Dublin when Ireland was considered a developing country. Since 2004, when he retired from SunLife Financial, he has volunteered to help businesses in the capital of the Republic of Georgia.

"The level of poverty and lack of opportunity in Georgia is parallel to what I experienced in Ireland," says Mr. O'Connor, who emigrated to Canada in 1971 at the age of 27 with less than \$100 in his pocket, no job waiting, no contacts, nothing.

"Canada has been very good to me," Mr. O'Connor says. He was recently appointed to the board of directors of the Toronto Board of Trade, serving on the governance, audit and pension committees and now divides his time between Blackrock and his volunteer work in Canada, serving on the investment advisory boards of non-profits, and overseas, via his participation in the Canadian Executive Service Organization.

Volunteering, particularly with CEO, is Mr. O'Connor's way of saying thank-you to his adopted country. "It's a great privilege to be a part of the Canadian government's overseas aid program to developing countries," he says. "By participating, I'm giving something back to Canada."

Mr. O'Connor's first assignment in March, 2004, was to help the largest dairy in Georgia set up a human resource function. Basic business concepts such as marketing, customer

***'They are getting the best North American technologies and expertise and they know that'***

service and human resource management simply did not exist in the former Soviet system. Before he arrived, the dairy under-employed 3,000 people. The government bought all production, so there was no incentive to improve.

There also was no such thing as a job description. On his first walk-through, Mr. O'Connor took notice of several high-quality paintings on the walls of the plant. Surprised,

he asked why a dairy plant would have such artwork.

The answer: There wasn't enough work for all the employees, and, as it turned out, some of the workers were good artists, so they were asked to paint. "That's Communism," he says.

Mr. O'Connor returned for three concurrent assignments in 2005, helping an aircraft manufacturer and an insurance company. For the third assignment, he taught a course in human resources management at a state university.

This year, he worked in Belgrade, Serbia, with the largest supermarket in that country. Then he returned to the aircraft manufacturer in Tbilisi in October, where he was able to see the impact of his initial visit.

"They are getting the best North American technologies today and expertise and they know that and appreciate and act on it," Mr. O'Connor says.

"I was amazed at how much they were able to implement from my visit a year earlier."

Much of his work is in line with UN Millennium goals, which include eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal education and promoting gender equality and empowering women.

"By making corporations stronger and profitable that results in a stronger social structure," Mr. O'Connor says. "And it's wonderful to be a part of that."

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entrepreneur@nationalpost.com

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GETAWAY

A LITTLE BIT OF PARADISE

By Gerard Holmes

Voted Best Resort in the Atlantic Ocean in Condé Nast Traveler Reader's Choice Awards for three years in a row, the One&Only Ocean Club on Paradise Island, Bahamas, is the ultimate stress-relief, quick-getaway destination.

If you normally take four or five days before you feel relaxed at other resorts, here you will be relaxed in four or five hours, tops.

To describe the atmosphere as serene is an understatement. From the moment you and your guest arrive you are treated as if you are the only people at the resort. And, from the number of other people you actually see most of the time, you wonder if that indeed is the case.

Add to that a butler assigned to your room to respond to your every need and a guest-to-staff ratio that ... well, at the beach during three days, the most we saw were eight other guests at any one time, being served by six staff. You get the point.

The rooms are spacious, beautifully appointed and come with a mouth-watering fresh fruit basket that is refreshed daily, and champagne and chocolate-covered strawberries that are delivered each evening.

Make sure you experience the full range of other amenities available.

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Dine the first night at the ocean edge in Dune, the resort's dramatic signature restaurant, then spend the sense of occasion the second night with a private dinner set up on the beach, overlooking the ocean from the Beach Deck or nestled in the Versailles Gardens. Keep room service for breakfast on your ocean front terrace — a spectacular start to the day.

As if that is not enough, the experiences (at an additional cost) the eight Balinese private trellis villas will enable you to achieve a level of tranquility.

For someone who is pressed for time and in need of major stress relief, the One&Only Ocean Club is the perfect place to go. Three and two nights later, you'll feel reinvigorated. A Hartford Wing view room will cost you between US\$600 and US\$860 a night, and drinks will likely add \$50 to the tab. Limo to and from the airport is \$120. Two-night total \$2,300, \$2,900, plus airfare.

Gerard Holmes is president and CEO of Genesis Strategic. [info@roynat.com](mailto:info@roynat.com)



Dining with an ocean view is one of the One&Only Ocean Club's great pleasures.