

# Why these Irish eyes are smiling

**I**t only makes sense that Jennifer Gillivan, president and CEO of the IWK Health Centre Foundation, chose Halifax's La Frasca Cibi & Vini for our "Lunch with..." get-together. The casual Spring Garden Road Italian bar, bistro and restaurant, created by restaurant-creator-extraordinaire Stephanie Bertossi and her master chef-husband Maurizio, is one of Halifax's most popular restaurants, and just a few blocks from her office.

Gillivan is a fan, not only of the restaurant, but also of Italy ("I'm crazy about anything Italian; I was there last year") and Italian food. She is, in fact, not just an adventurous foodie ("being in the kitchen with my husband is how I relax") but a world traveler.

Which, in a convoluted kind of way, explains how the daughter of a Dublin, Ireland, construction worker and his seamstress wife ("we were poor; we just didn't know it") ended up as the head of the fundraising arm of the Atlantic region's most beloved and iconic women's and children's health care centre.

Gillivan met her husband while delivering a dress her mother had made to the mother of the man who would become her husband.

Joe, it turned out, was a hotel management trainee at the prestigious five-star Fitzpatrick Castle Hotel in Killiney on Dublin's south side. Although trainees had to do time in every department, Joe "loved the kitchens the most and learned to cook with the best chefs." Gillivan laughs heartily. "The first bottle of red wine I ever tasted was Châteauneuf-du-Pape!" (For the uninitiated, it's a renowned wine from France's southern Rhone valley.)

In 1982, with few hotel opportunities in Ireland, Joe flew to Vancouver (he'd been born in Canada, where his parents lived briefly) holding a one-way ticket and a dream. He began knocking on hotel doors, and quickly landed a job.

Jennifer, then 21, followed, returning home only briefly so they could get properly married. Back in Canada, waiting for her landed immigrant papers, she attended retail merchan-

dising classes at Capilano College "to amuse myself," but then became pregnant with the first of their now two grown daughters.

Although she spent most of the next decade putting her own career on hold, moving from city to city as her husband's career progressed, Gillivan makes a point of saying she was "a stay-at-home mom who *also* volunteered and was out in the community."

That helped her land a return-to-the-workforce job with a local Burlington, Ontario, business commission where she displayed what would become a career-defining knack for creating partnerships. She convinced nearby Brock University's agricultural department to team up with the commission to help beautify the downtown. "We became their project."

In 1993, she and her husband landed in Halifax where Joe — by now a turnaround specialist for a hotel management company — had signed on to manage the Atlantica Hotel.

They knew immediately this was their destination. Halifax, she says, was "everything we loved about Canada, everything we missed about Ireland."

After a brief stint helping out with the IWK's tenth anniversary telethon, Gillivan landed a job as the CBC's Halifax-based partnerships person. Within a month, she had to line up \$1.4 million in partnership funding for the network's Halifax-based signature kids' consumer series, *Street Sense*, and do it without tapping McDonalds or another kid-keen advertiser. She succeeded, partnering with the Canadian Bankers' Association.

After 14 years of increasingly important CBC network jobs, all still based in Halifax, Gillivan joined the IWK Foundation four years ago.

"It was a no-brainer," she says with another laugh. "I'm passionate about the rights of women and children. And the IWK is a place full of world class leaders. Our job is to make sure they have the tools to stay world class."

Which reminds her. She checks her watch. There's another meeting. She's already late.



## On Jennifer Gillivan's bucket list

"A dream of mine is to be appointed Canadian Ambassador to Ireland... To go back to my country of birth where my family still is and represent Canada just gives me goosebumps."

## Checked from the bucket list

After submitting a review of Sidney Poitier's *Measure of a Man*, Gillivan not only won an invitation to attend an Oprah Winfrey taping but also managed to score tickets for her husband and one of her daughters.

## A favourite quote

"Two of the most important days of your life are the day you (are) born and the day you find out why."

— Mark Twain

## New news

Gillivan has just been appointed to an Independent Advisory Board whose job is to advise the federal government on potential new Senate appointees.

