

# LOCAL ENTERPRISE WEEK 2022

07-11 March

## Event Speaker

Daniel McLoughlin of  
Rocksalt Café in Louth



## A CAFÉ WORTH ITS SALT

*Daniel McLoughlin has always loved working in the hospitality industry – the buzz, the pace, the camaraderie and of course the food, have long held his interest. But having worked in the sector for 15 years, in 2018, he decided that the time had come for him to branch out on his own and so his business, Rock Salt Café was born.*

“I spent my whole career working my way up the hospitality ladder, mainly in 5-star hotels and really love everything about the industry, particularly the food and beverage element of it,” he says. “But the fine dining aspect of things can be stressful and is quite regimented – so as I had a long-time dream of running my own place, I set myself a goal of doing just that before I turned 30 – and I made it with about six months to spare.

“I have worked both in London and America and this not only gave me lots of experience, but also the opportunity to see industry trends coming down the line. So I had an insight into what would work well and in 2018, I moved back to the seaside village of Blackrock, Co Louth and started Rock Salt Café, which was initially a small community-based place with 15 seats and seven staff.”

The entrepreneurial restaurateur set about creating a place where ambience was just as important as great food. And not only did his fledgling business do well, but its success inspired him to expand.

“I wanted to create something which had elements of fine dining but a more casual feel,” he says. “And it was such a success that we decided to open another venue in 2019. We found a beautiful old building in a lovely location in Dundalk, which would double our capacity, and were ready to go in February 2020. But little did we know what was coming down the tracks – as a month later Covid hit.”

Having just taken on a team of 18 people, Daniel says his business was ‘completely decimated’ at the start of the pandemic. But thanks to a little ingenuity on his part and some financial and mentoring support from Louth Local Enterprise Office, he was able to pivot his business and not only survive the body blow the industry had been dealt, but actually thrive.

“It was extremely challenging at the start but I’m lucky that being quite young, I had plenty of energy and pluck to try and make the best out of a bad situation,” he says. “Just after the industry was

shut down, I had an emergency meeting with senior staff and said we would try to ensure that the pandemic made us stronger. So within a fortnight, we had launched a new website selling coffee beans and recipes.

“Then we started delivering food and coffee in the locality and put hatch windows in both venues – so when restrictions lifted slightly, we were able to serve through those. This proved to be a great move, because as soon as people were able to get out and about for walks, we did a roaring trade in takeaway coffees and food in Blackrock.

“On the flip side, the business in Dundalk didn’t do very well – perhaps because it was in the centre of town and most people were working from home, so we had to close it down for a few months.

“But thanks to our local LEO we were able to make the change which helped us to ride out the storm – and we launched our new e-commerce website with a grant for the Trading Online Voucher. It was very seamless and after our supplier was approved, we were not only able to keep the business going, but we improved it – and we still have this online element which is growing all the time in terms of products and business levels. Our brand has also been enhanced and our social media engagement improved and along with what we started selling on the website during the pandemic, we now have chutneys, breads and various items of merchandise, which before Covid hit, we had no intention of selling.”

***The Louth man says the simplicity of the process was also hugely beneficial and the future now looks very bright for the Rock Salt Café brand.***

“Before applying for the TOV, I was quite daunted by the idea of it all, but I knew I had to do it,” he says. “Then, once I got in touch with the LEO it was really straight forward and to be fair, everything was very easy once we got into it. Because we were selling online and doing takeaways, we were able to keep staff on the whole way through Covid, which made things a lot easier when we reopened.

“Not only did we survive the pandemic, but we had our best year ever in Blackrock and although Dundalk had a tough time initially, when outdoor dining started towards the middle of the year, it did very well.

“So overall, it has been a great success, thanks to the hard work of the staff and the support from our LEO. We now have 50 staff, two premises and a coffee dock at a local leisure centre and we have a third site in the pipeline – we are looking forward to a great year ahead.”

**FREE SPOTLIGHT EVENT: 7th March 7pm - 8.45pm**  
Retail: Adapting and innovating in an ever-changing trading environment.