



Comhairle Cathrach  
& Contae **Luimnigh**

Limerick City  
& County Council

24th March, 2025

Seirbhísí Corparáideacha,  
Comhairle Cathrach agus Contae Luimnigh,  
Ceanncheathrú Chorparáideach,  
Cé na gCeannaithe,  
Luimneach

Corporate Services,  
Limerick City and County Council,  
Corporate Headquarters,  
Merchants Quay,  
Limerick

## TO EACH MEMBER OF LIMERICK CITY AND COUNTY COUNCIL

### ATTENDANCE AT ANNUAL ST. PATRICK'S DAY CELEBRATION IN NEW YORK

EIRCODE V94 EH90

A Chomhairleoir, A Chara

t: +353 (0) 61 557150  
f: +353 (0) 61 415 266

As Members will be aware, a delegation from the Council travelled to New York for the Annual St Patrick's Day celebrations where the Grand Marshal this year was Limerick native Michael Benn.

The delegation was comprised of Príomh Chomhairleoir Dan McSweeney, Councillors Noreen Stokes, Kieran O'Hanlon, Joe Pond, Fergus Kilcoyne, Joe Leddin, and Frankie Daly along with Dr. Pat Daly Director General of Limerick City and County Council Mr. Donn O'Sullivan, Head of Marketing and Communications.

The group travelled from Shannon Airport on 14<sup>th</sup> March and returned on 20<sup>th</sup> March.

Members of the delegation took part in several events while in New York as well as taking part and representing Limerick in the 2025 St Patrick's Day Parade on March 17.

#### Friday March 14

Travel day and Limerick networking dinner

#### Saturday March 15

Meeting at the Irish Centre in Queens New York

#### Sunday March 16

Flag Raising Ceremony on Wall Street

Site Visit to Bethpage Black – host venue of the 2027 Ryder Cup

#### Monday March 17

Mayor Of New York Networking Breakfast

Mass at St Patrick's Cathedral

St Patrick's Day Parade

Limerick Networking dinner NYC

#### Tuesday March 18

Ryder Cup Business Event hosted by Ryder Cup Europe and Failte Ireland

#### Wednesday March 19

Travel day

Is mise le meas,

*Dan McSweeney*

**COUNCILLOR DAN MCSWEENEY**

**PRÍOMH CHOMHAIRLEoir OF LIMERICK CITY AND COUNTY COUNCIL**



**16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025**

**EIRCODE** V94 EH90

t: +353 (0) 61 557150  
f: +353 (0) 61 415 266

**To: The Mayor and Each Member of Limerick City and County Council**

**Subject: Report on the Limerick City & County Council's Delegation Visit to Savannah, Georgia (15–18 March 2025)**

### Introduction:

In response to an official invitation from Mayor Van Johnson of the City of Savannah, Georgia, to the Mayor of Limerick, a delegation from Limerick City and County Council, led by Councillor Adam Teskey, Cathaoirleach of the Adare-Rathkeale Municipal District, undertook a civic, economic and cultural visit to Savannah from 15–18 March 2025. The delegation's primary purpose was to participate in the city's 201st Annual St. Patrick's Day festival and to further strengthen the growing relationship between Limerick and Savannah. This engagement forms part of a broader strategy to develop long-term civic, educational, and economic partnerships with key international cities that share historical, demographic, and sectoral synergies with Limerick.

Over the course of the visit, the delegation engaged with municipal leaders, representatives from higher education institutions, and senior figures across several strategic industries including water and environmental management, port logistics, tourism and hospitality, and the rapidly expanding aviation sector. These engagements provided valuable opportunities for knowledge exchange, networking, and the identification of areas for future collaboration—particularly in joint academic programmes, workforce development, and trade facilitation.

Savannah's St. Patrick's Day Parade stands as one of the largest in the world, drawing crowds of over half a million people each year. This iconic celebration not only reflects the city's proud Irish heritage, but also offers a platform to showcase Irish culture, promote international cooperation, and deepen people-to-people ties between Savannah and Irish communities. The Limerick delegation's participation in both the parade and associated events served as a powerful symbol of unity, heritage, and mutual respect.

Savannah itself is one of the oldest and most historically significant cities in the United States. Today, it functions as a major industrial hub and one of the country's most important Atlantic seaports. The city's unique blend of Southern charm, architectural beauty, economic dynamism, and strategic coastal location makes it a natural partner for Limerick. Much like Limerick, Savannah

boasts a strong tradition of innovation, a vibrant academic presence, and a youthful, well-educated population—laying the foundation for meaningful and enduring cooperation between the two cities.

At its November 2024 Council Meeting, Limerick City and County Council approved the participation of an official delegation to visit Savannah, Georgia, from Saturday, 15th March to Tuesday, 18th March 2025. The visit coincided with the city's renowned St. Patrick's Day Parade on 17th March and included a comprehensive programme of civic, cultural, educational, and economic engagements.

This visit provided a valuable opportunity to strengthen the long-standing civic, economic, social, and cultural ties between Limerick and Savannah. Savannah's deep-rooted Irish heritage dates back to the mid-18th century, when Irish settlers first arrived following the city's colonisation. A significant influx occurred during the 1840s, when the promise of employment and prosperity—particularly during and after the Irish Famine—drew many Irish families to the area. Today, Savannah remains a city proud of its Irish ancestry, with recent census data indicating that approximately one in four residents claim Irish heritage.

The legacy of Irish settlement is evident throughout Savannah—in street names, community traditions, its renowned culture of hospitality, and a strong sense of industriousness that mirrors the spirit of Limerick. Much like our own city, Savannah boasts a strategic position on an estuary, linking the Savannah River to the Atlantic Ocean. Both cities share similar population sizes and demographic profiles and are home to major universities, thriving technology sectors, and dynamic, youthful populations.

The visit served not only to honour our shared history and cultural identity but also to explore future collaboration in key areas such as education, economic development, climate resilience, and tourism. The following provides a summary of the visit objectives.

- **Strengthen Civic & Cultural Bonds:** Actively engage in Savannah's St. Patrick's Day celebrations to deepen our cities' cultural connections.
- **Foster Academic & Research Partnerships:** Identify and develop collaborative projects in climate resilience and public health.
- **Evaluate Economic Collaboration:** Explore joint opportunities in port operations and tourism workforce training.
- **Showcase Limerick's Appeal:** Promote our city as a premier destination for tourism, student exchanges, and joint educational programmes.

To achieve these goals, the delegation held a series of strategic meetings with Savannah's leading institutions and stakeholders—both to build on existing partnerships and to forge promising new alliances. The following section provides a summary of the meetings and events attended during the visit:

## **Georgia Southern University - Armstrong Campus**

### **1. Visit to Junior Achievement Savannah 25,000 sq. ft. experience centre**

The Limerick delegation convened with Craig Tootle, Director of Development and Volunteer Partnerships, for an in-depth tour and series of presentations at the Junior

Achievement Discovery Center—a 25,000-square-foot interactive learning facility situated on Georgia Southern University’s Armstrong campus in Savannah. Designed to instil essential money-management skills, the Centre immerses students in real-world economic scenarios through hands-on simulations. Upon entering, participants encounter scaled-down replicas of local businesses—Chick-fil-A, Enmarket, Publix, and more—where they “earn” and “spend” play money, negotiate salaries, pay bills, and explore entrepreneurial ventures. Each year, the Centre delivers two flagship programs to some 15,000 middle-school students across Coastal Georgia. **JA Finance Park** equips young learners with practical budgeting and financial-planning experience: they assume adult roles, balance household expenses, and make credit-and-savings decisions within a simulated economy. **JA BizTown** channels budding entrepreneurs through every stage of launching and operating a small business, from market research and product development to staffing and customer service. In addition to the school-year programming, the facility hosts summer camps that reinforce these concepts through team challenges, guest-speaker workshops, and volunteer-led mentorship. Under Craig’s leadership, the Centre has forged strong volunteer partnerships with local corporations, civic groups, and retired professionals, ensuring that each student encounter is guided by a real-world perspective. The Limerick delegation explored how similar models could be adapted for Irish schools—envisioning a future “Limerick JA Hub” that would leverage local industry sponsors, alumni volunteers, and municipal support to nurture financial confidence and entrepreneurial spirit among Ireland’s youth.

## **2. Visit to Georgia Southern University - Institute for Water and Health (IWH)**

The delegation attended an informative session featuring presentations from Jennifer Drey, MPH, Public Health Community Outreach Coordinator, of Georgia Southern University.

The focus of the session was the work of the Institute for Water and Health (IWH), an innovative centre dedicated to translating scientific research into practical solutions that promote safe water, a sustainable environment, and resilient communities.

Located at the Savannah Research Complex near the Armstrong Campus in Savannah, GA, the Institute is home to a multidisciplinary team working at the intersection of science, technology, and public policy. Through their state-of-the-art laboratories, the IWH delivers tailored, multi-sectoral solutions—translating research into actionable tools to support policymakers and stakeholders in driving effective environmental and public health strategies.

In addition to its scientific mission, the Institute places strong emphasis on workforce development and education. It offers a suite of comprehensive educational resources designed to train the next generation of water professionals, ensuring long-term regional sustainability and resilience.

The delegation also learned about the Institute’s robust community outreach efforts, including its upcoming initiative—the launch of the One Health KAP (Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices) survey. This survey aims to assess public understanding and behaviours related to the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental health. Plans are underway to implement the survey in Ireland, with the potential for Limerick to be one of the key participating locations, further strengthening international collaboration and knowledge exchange.

## Meeting with Mayor Van Johnson, Mayor of the City of Savannah

The Limerick delegation was honoured to be invited to a formal event with Mayor Van Johnson, Mayor of Savannah, and his senior officials. The event was also attended by Dara Calleary TD, Minister for Social Protection, Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, as well as the Consul General of Ireland based in Georgia. This high-level engagement provided an opportunity for meaningful dialogue and further strengthened the growing relationship between Limerick and Savannah.

The meeting facilitated an exchange of ideas and insights on shared challenges and opportunities faced by both cities. The Limerick delegation was pleased to discuss areas of mutual interest, including urban regeneration, economic development, and community engagement. Mayor Van Johnson shared his administration's strategic priorities, with a particular focus on addressing economic inequality, enhancing public wellbeing, increasing collaboration and investing in critical infrastructure. He also outlined his ambitious vision for a more prosperous Savannah and for deepening collaboration with Limerick.

During the meeting, the delegation reflected on the recent visit to Limerick by Mayor Johnson and representatives from the Savannah Economic Development Authority (SEDA), highlighting the positive momentum and collaborative potential generated through these exchanges. As a symbol of continued friendship and partnership, Councillor Adam Teskey presented Mayor Johnson with a framed copy of the Declaration of Friendship Agreement, which had been signed during Mayor Johnson's visit to Limerick alongside Mayor John Moran.

This occasion marked another important step in deepening the civic and cultural ties between Limerick and Savannah, with a shared commitment to fostering transatlantic collaboration in areas such as education, innovation, heritage, and sustainability.

## The Sergeant William Jasper Memorial Ceremony

The Limerick City and County Council delegation participated in the annual Sergeant William Jasper Memorial Ceremony, a solemn and symbolic event through which Savannah pays tribute to its military service members—both past and present many of whom are of Irish descent. Held on the eve of the St. Patrick's Day Parade, the ceremony honours the legacy of Sergeant William Jasper, a hero of the American Revolutionary War, who is believed to have been of Irish heritage. Jasper famously lost his life while rescuing his regiment's colours during the Siege of Savannah in 1779, an act of bravery that cemented his place in American and Irish-American history.

The event was attended by prominent Georgia State and Savannah City officials, including local military representatives and civic leaders. The ceremony was also addressed by Ireland's Dara Calleary TD, Minister for Social Protection, Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, further highlighting the strong diplomatic and cultural ties between Ireland and the State of Georgia.

Sergeant Jasper's legacy has long served as a symbol of courage and patriotism for the Irish community in Savannah. His story inspired Irish immigrants in the city during the 19th century, who went on to form the Irish Jasper Greens militia in 1842. This unit played a notable role in both

the Mexican-American War and the Civil War, and their legacy continues to be honoured during the annual commemorations.

## Mass in Honor of St. Patrick – Cathedral Basilica of St. John the Baptist

As guests of honour along with Minister Dara Calleary, TD, The Consul General, and the visiting Wexford delegation, the Limerick delegation had the privilege of attending the traditional St. Patrick's Day Mass at 8:00 a.m. on St Patricks Day morning in the magnificent Cathedral Basilica of St. John the Baptist at 222 East Harris Street, Savannah. The Mass was celebrated by the Most Reverend Bishop Stephen D. Parkes, the 15<sup>th</sup> Bishop of Savannah and head of the Diocese of Savannah, and was also attended by the Most Reverend Kevin J. Boland, Bishop Emeritus, the 13th Bishop of the Diocese of Savannah, local dignitaries, parade participants, and members of the wider Irish-American community.

This annual religious service, which precedes the St. Patrick's Day Parade, is a deeply rooted tradition that reflects the strong Irish Catholic heritage of the region. It offers a moment of solemn reflection and spiritual significance before the day's vibrant celebrations begin. The inclusion of the Limerick delegation in this important ceremony underscored the strong cultural and historical ties between Savannah and Ireland.

## St. Patrick's Day Parade

Savannah's St. Patrick's Day Parade is one of the largest in the United States—second only to New York City—and ranks among the most significant celebrations of Irish heritage worldwide.

Featuring vibrant marching bands, traditional Irish dancers, and elaborate floats, the parade attracts participants and spectators from across the United States and beyond. As Savannah's largest public event, it holds a cherished place in the city's cultural calendar. Many attendees even camp out overnight along the parade route to secure the best viewing spots, underscoring its immense popularity and festive spirit.

The Limerick delegation, along with various Limerick groups from Savannah, proudly marched in the parade behind the City of Limerick Pipe Band. The three-hour procession began at Forsyth Park on Abercorn Street, winding through the Historic District and along the waterfront, before concluding at the junction of Bull Street and Harris Street. This year's event featured over 280 entries and drew an estimated crowd of 500,000 people, all enjoying the celebration under the warm Savannah sun.

## Visit to the Georgia Ports Authority

The Limerick delegation visited the Georgia Ports Authority offices, gaining valuable insight into the scale and operations of one of the largest seaports in the United States. Jeff Neill, Manager, Strategic Projects and Partnerships and Steven Alford, General Manager, Executive Communications at Georgia Ports Authority, welcomed the Limerick delegation and delivered a comprehensive presentation followed by a guided bus tour of the two-mile-long docks and expansive container storage terminals at the Port of Savannah—one of North America's largest and fastest-growing container ports.

During the visit, the delegation was briefed on opportunities for enhanced transatlantic trade, including potential synergies and future collaboration with the Port of Foynes. The group also received an in-depth overview of the Port of Savannah's strategic development plans, highlighting its role in supporting global logistics and economic growth.

## Visit to Savannah Tech Culinary Institute

The delegation visited Savannah Technical College's new Culinary Institute facility, located at 7 West Bay Street in the heart of downtown Savannah. During the visit, they met with Robert Grant, Vice President for Community and College Relations, along with key members of his team. The group provided a guided tour of the state-of-the-art facility and delivered a presentation outlining the institute's programmes and their critical role in supporting Savannah's hospitality and tourism sectors.

The Culinary Institute offers a structured sequence of courses designed to prepare students for professional careers in the culinary arts. These programmes develop the academic, technical, and professional skills essential for job placement, career growth, and long-term success. Emphasising both culinary theory and hands-on practice, the curriculum equips students with the comprehensive knowledge and experience needed for employment in the hospitality industry.

## Visit to the Savannah Technical College Aviation Campus

Savannah is home to a robust aviation sector, including major industry players such as Gulfstream. During the visit, the delegation had the opportunity to tour the Savannah Technical College Aviation Campus, located at 170 Crossroads Parkway. This state-of-the-art facility plays a key role in preparing students for careers in aviation through hands-on training and industry-aligned education.

The Crossroads Technology Campus offers a wide range of professional continuing education programs and supports both economic and workforce development. Certifications are available across multiple industry-related fields, including aviation, manufacturing, warehousing, and customer service.

Opened in 2013, the Aviation Training Center features a 5,000-square-foot hangar, four fully equipped labs for practical instruction, and spacious classrooms. The center delivers a variety of programs, offering certificates and diplomas in areas such as aircraft structures manufacturing and repair, luxury craft cabinetmaking, and aircraft electrical systems repair and installation.

## Outcomes

This recent visit to Savannah has significantly strengthened the civic, economic, and cultural ties between our two cities through meaningful engagement with municipal leaders, higher education institutions, and key industries—including health management, port operations, hospitality, and aviation.

In light of the progress made, it is proposed that a dedicated working group be established to advance the shared initiatives and support the development of pilot programmes across the identified sectors. Furthermore, planning should now commence for a reciprocal visit by a Savannah delegation to Limerick later this year, in order to sustain momentum and deepen strategic collaboration.

On behalf of our delegation I wish to formally extend our sincere appreciation to Mayor Van Johnson and Joseph Melder of the City of Savannah, as well as Hugh “Trip” Tollison, Leagh Ryan, Marty Hogan, Chris Aherne and Antwone Mohammed of the World Trade Center Savannah and SEDA, Howard Keeley of Georgia Southern University and Joe Marinelli of Visit Savannah. Their generous support, hospitality, and assistance were instrumental in facilitating and enriching the experience of our delegation during our recent visit.

Adam Teskey

**Councillor Adam Teskey,**  
Delegation Lead on behalf of the Mayor of the City and County of Limerick.

