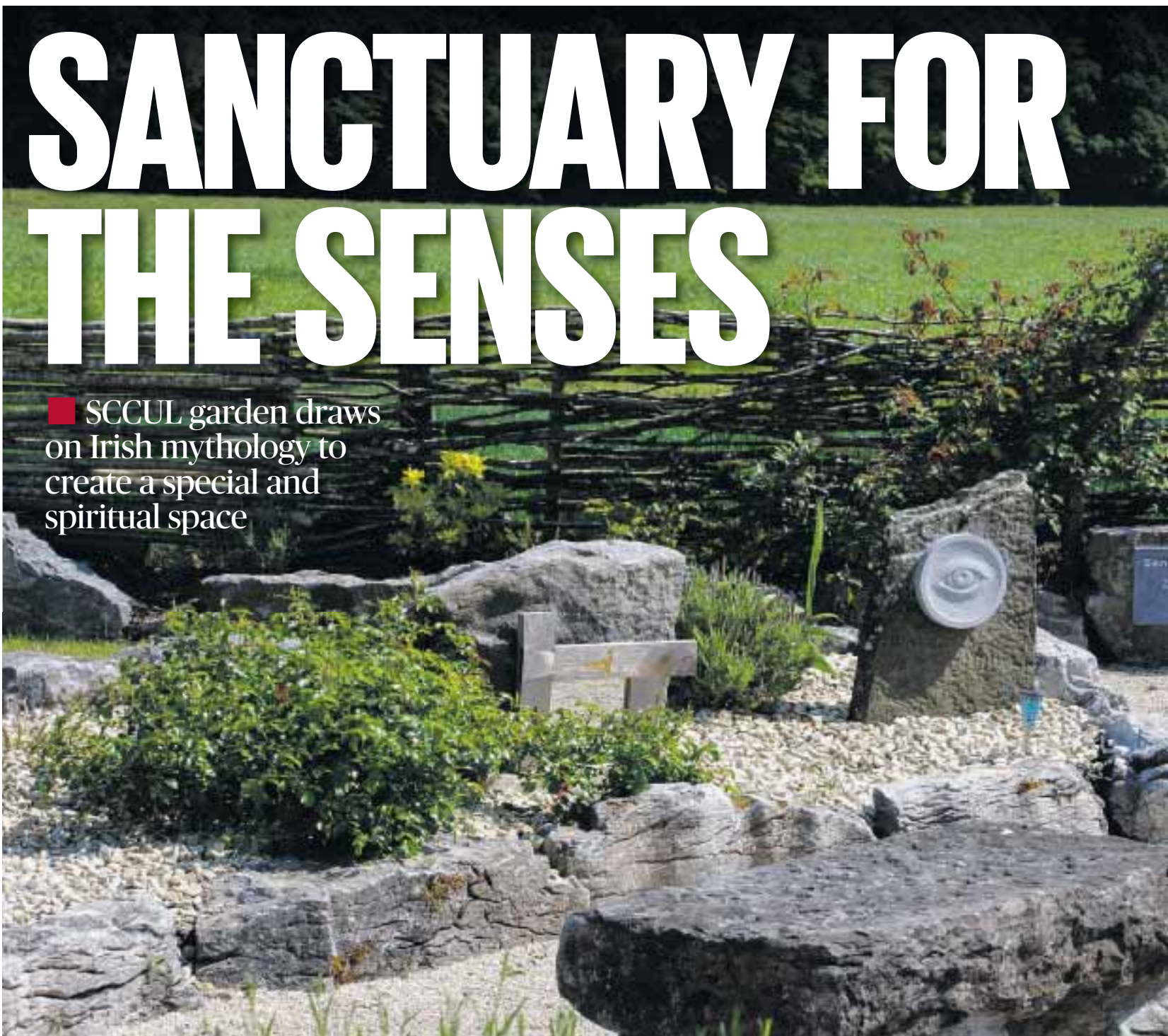


SANCTUARY FOR THE SENSES

■ SCCUL garden draws on Irish mythology to create a special and spiritual space



COMMUNITY MATTERS

WITH ANNA KING

FOCUS ON CLARINBRIDGE

A STUNNING garden that brings together Irish mythology and sensory design has created a healing environment for visitors to a much-loved therapeutic retreat centre in Clarinbridge.

The SCCUL Sanctuary has three themes - sensory, spiritual and sustainability - and each element of this oasis of calm and sensory pleasure is crafted with care and precision by Mike Walsh & the team from Claddagh Designs.

Sanctuary Co-Ordinator, Trisha Murphy, describes the original vision to create a space where people can engage with their senses as they experience the garden.

"We wanted people to be able to 'get in touch' with nature through their senses, and in turn re-connect in a deeply nourishing way with their

personal physical, emotional and even spiritual needs," she says.

With the desire to make the area wheelchair accessible, the SCCUL team were 'blown away' by the design that landscaper, Mike Walsh, came up with.

"We approached Mike and explained that we wanted the five senses represented: taste, touch, smell, hearing and sight," admits Trisha.

"We were initially apprehensive, as we knew it was quite a task. Right from the start, working with Mike was an amazing experience.

"He immediately developed some really inspirational ideas, such as having a seat at each flowerbed, to sit and reflect upon each sense. He understood the idea that people need time in this chaotic world to slow down



WHETHER YOU ARE WALKING, TALKING OR JUST SITTING IN THE GARDEN WE HOPE PEOPLE CAN FEEL THE ENERGY OF HOPE AND POSSIBILITY.

and reflect."

Indeed, this is a common conceptual thread that runs through much of Mike's work.

"These ideas are very close to my heart," he explains. "Spending quality time with family or friends is a principle building block to what we create at Claddagh Designs, and I am passionate about creating communal spaces that encourage communication and sharing."

Trisha explains how Mike came up with some fabulous ideas for the sensory element of the garden.

"He suggested creating a sculpture of an eye for people visually impaired to touch like brail. For the sense of hearing we have the sound of water, a feature with a stone trough that Mike kindly donated to us."

Mike's dedication and talent is evi-



▲ Beginning...the start of the SCCUL Sensory Garden.

► Garden enthusiasts....paralympian Mark Rohan and SCCUL CEO Michael Smyth.

◀ The completed SCCUL Sensory Garden.

▼ The garden's symbol of eternity.



and meaning in a world that can sometimes feel isolating and hopeless.

There is a lovely sense of evolution to the SCCUL Sanctuary garden. You are compelled naturally to follow the pathway from the senses toward the spiritual space within the garden called the symbol of eternity. And it is here that Mike's work takes on a breath-taking dimension.

This arresting stone setting is inspired by ancient Celtic design and Mike's company logo. It represents eternity: no beginning, and no end.

Together with Master Stone Carver, Ray Flaherty from Galway Salvage, Mike created this awe-inspiring central art piece that is surrounded by a round rugged traditional stone-wall.

SCCUL's passionate team - including Noirin Ni Chonaola, Interior Designer and Matt Whelan - wanted to have somewhere for outdoor meditation.

Trish explains how they originally picked a smooth limestone so that on damp spring mornings the stone would dry quickly and enable them to have groups outdoors for yoga or meditation.

"Mike, however, sourced for us something even better. It is an ex-

ceptional focalized crystal embedded limestone, and there is a real sense of being connected to the earth and antiquity through this stone," she says.

Operations Manager Annette Hassett really appreciates the purpose built rugged, almost broken down feel of the wall around the central spiritual garden.

"It somehow represents the cycle of life - with all its ups and downs, pockets of growth coming out of the craggy broken-down places we sometimes find ourselves," she says.

The garden is completed by the reflective memorial seat that sits naturally in the presence of grace just north of the circle of eternity.

When reflecting upon the whole process Trisha recounts how fantastic Mike was to work with.

"This was our first time doing anything like this. Mike had such great ideas; he really listened and took time to develop our plans with us. His dedication was second to none! Nothing was too much trouble, he was really

patient, offering gentle guidance when we were not sure of our way, and suggested changes very sensitively," laughs Trisha.

SCCUL Sanctuary are now working on a sustainable and youth garden with raised bed, with the hope that young people can come and plant herbs and veggies and the organic produce used for cookery and nutrition classes for different groups within the locality.

"Mike has started this for us, but we are in the process of attempting to raise funds for its completion. Our sponsors for the first phase of the garden include Medtronic Chorale, Galway County Council, Flag West and Alkermes Athlone and we are now currently inviting continued support for the next phase of our little garden," adds Trisha.

■ Email Annette Hassett at www.scculsanctuary.com for any queries regarding the Sanctuary - and Mike Walsh is at www.claddaghdesigns.ie

dent to all by the intricate woven hazel fence that surrounds the garden. This piece of art acts as a frame without taking away from the feel of the indigenous forest grounds.

From larger scenic vistas to minute detail, it is possible to journey around this little sensory oasis, rub your hands over herbs and flowers and let the smell of organic lavender, mint or fennel lift your spirit.

Importantly, the height of each flower and herb bed is designed with thought for people using wheelchairs or with mobility challenges. It is possible to be seated and still reach over and touch or smell the scent of the rose petals, or crushed soft green sage.

Although each flowerbed is separate, they are designed with curves and circles to represent the symbol of

eternity, continuity and togetherness.

"The garden echoes beautifully what we do inside our Sanctuary; we work within circles of support with many different community groups and people with specific needs," says Trisha.

"Whether you are walking, talking or just sitting in the garden we hope people can feel the energy of hope and possibility. And, importantly by spending time together in this garden we realize that we are not alone on the journey through life; that there is a always a place to feel accepted and loved, nurtured and cared for."

This garden, in all its simplicity, is not big - but, in conjunction with SCCUL's team of therapists and workshop facilitators, it can touch people's lives and restore a sense hope