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‘We make a difference in people’s lives’

My job: Tom Quick

In conversation with
John Daly

WHEN Tom Quick takes over as chair of the Irish Funds America this week, it will be the culmination of a philanthropic career dedicated to helping the social and cultural life in Ireland, the land of his forefathers.

The Funds celebrates its 50th anniversary this year and he more than 25 years of involvement.

“It began for me 27 years ago, when some friends of mine on Wall Street suggested I should get involved with this great organisation, and it has become an important part of my life ever since,” Mr Quick said.

“To become chair of the Ireland Funds America in this 50th anniversary year is a tremendous honour. For five decades, this organisation has shown what the goodwill of the diaspora can achieve for Ireland.

“I look forward to working with our board and our supporters around the world to build on that legacy, and to ensure our next 50 years are every bit as ambitious as our first.”

This weekend’s Worldwide Conference in Dublin draws supporters from around the world, including board directors, donors, and partners from The Ireland Funds’ chapters in 12 countries. Over three days, delegates will visit projects across Dublin, celebrate Irish culture and creativity at the Royal Hospital Kilmainham, and attend a plenary session on the relationship between Ireland and the United States.

In its mission to harness the power of a global philanthropic network to promote and invest in arts and culture, community development, and education, the organisation envisions a future of peace, equality, and opportunity across the island of Ireland and among Irish communities worldwide.

The $750m (€652m) raised by the Funds has supported 3,500 organisations across Ireland and the Irish diaspora; awarded 1,000 scholarships to students pursuing education and leadership opportunities; and built a global community united by a commitment to Ireland’s future.

Mr Quick said: “Giving back is a responsibility for those of us who have been fortunate in our lives and careers. These funds make such a difference right across the country, especially to those towns and villages where small communities will make a grant of even €10,000 work like €100,000 at the end of the day, in terms of how such monies will touch and assist to change lives.”

As the incoming chair, Mr Quick is focused on harnessing the invention and enthusiasm of the younger generation to achieve the Funds’ goals.

“We will be announcing our capital campaign this weekend, and are set to raise in excess of $200m (€172m) over the next five years. Our competitive grant rounds help us stay attuned to emerging needs, identify opportunities on the ground, and understand where our donors can have the greatest impact.”

The Funds are focused on a variety of areas, whether for the young or the elderly, and the creative sides of Irish life. “It is an ambitious programme, but one we believe can be successful, given the environment we now have with the strength of the Irish economy and the wealth creation of the markets back in the United States. We do have a task at hand, which is to engage the next generation of young people. I am a perfect example of being part of the greatest generation, and can recall growing up hearing my grandparents and parents talking about the importance of being Irish and our Irish traditions.

“Being Irish was something that shaped and formed our generation, and our challenge is to hand on that bond and patriotism about where we came from to the next generation coming through.”

Independent and nonpartisan, the Funds is known for bringing together people from diverse backgrounds around a shared commitment to Ireland and supporting initiatives that deliver long-term impact.

Rather than focus on short-term outcomes, The Ireland Funds prioritises sustained investment in organisations and leaders that have deep roots in their communities. It sees itself not simply as a source of funding, but as an engaged partner committed to transformative work.

The president of First Palm Beach Properties, Inc, a real estate holding company in Florida, Mr Quick is a retired vice-chairman of Quick & Reilly/Fleet Securities Inc, one of the America’s largest financial services firms, prior to its acquisition by Bank of America Corporation.

In addition to many years involved with The Irish Funds America, his other board affiliates include the Inner-City Scholarship Foundation, the Breast Cancer Research Foundation; The Society of the Four Arts; V&A Americas Foundation; and Casita Maria Centre, New York.

Mr Quick said: “My working life began after college, at my father’s Wall Street stockbroking firm. When we sold the firm in my mid-40s, I moved to Florida and got very involved in the real estate business there. So now, having had many years of experience in the non-profit sector, I feel that The Irish Funds is my third career, and one I am very happy to bring whatever advantages I have to bear upon the successful outcome of its aims.”

With homes in New York and Florida, Tom Quick has recently added Ireland to those locations that sustain and inspire him: Specifically Kinsale, the picturesque harbour town often called ‘Ireland’s gourmet capital.’

His first visit there was many years ago aboard his father’s yacht, on one of many summer vacations the family spent in different scenic locations across the Mediterranean and the Baltic.

Even set against the cultural attractions of places like the south of France, that first view of Kinsale left a profound impression. “We sailed into the harbour at night, and I still recall waking up to the surroundings of this incredible place: The harbour, the glittering water, the peaceful beauty of it all.

“I have never forgotten the feeling of that first morning, and that’s why we are talking today from this house overlooking that same harbour; a place I feel so fortunate to now call my summer home. I have siblings who have their own places in the Hamptons, Cape Cod, and Aspen, but when they come to visit with me here in Kinsale, they all want to stay here for ever.”

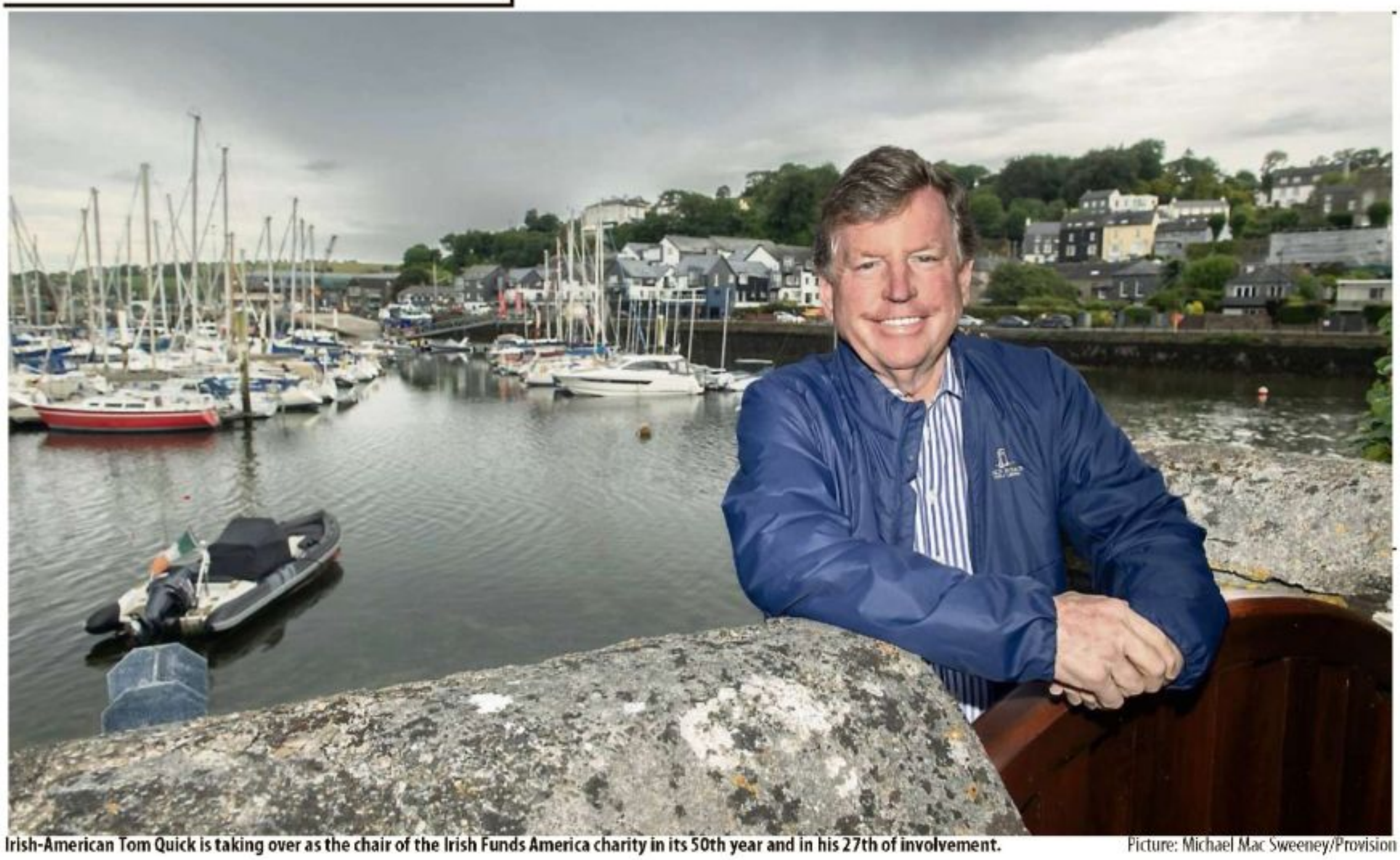
And even in his downtime overlooking Kinsale’s harbour, Mr Quick continues to walk the philanthropy walk, helping local initiatives, like Sailing Into Wellness, which utilises the therapeutic nature of the sea and the unique teamwork of sailing to encourage people to use their own life experiences as a platform for growth.

"I can view that boat sailing out of the harbour, with young people on board learning about teamwork and skills that will hopefully help point them toward a better life within their grasp. That is why I do what I do. At the end of the day, what do you want people to say about you? Did you make a difference in the life of somebody?"

Name: Tom Quick

Occupation: Incoming chair of The Irish Funds America

Background: The Ireland Funds celebrates 50 years in 2026, having raised over $750m (€645m) to support peace, culture, education and community development throughout the island of Ireland, in addition to Irish-related causes around the world



Irish-American Tom Quick is taking over as the chair of the Irish Funds America charity in its 50th year and in his 27th of involvement. Picture: Michael Mac Sweeney/Provision