

# Immigration Law

## ≅ Foodservice

## Profile of an Immigrant: Emmet Gallagher of McMahon's Pub

by Becki L. Young

Emmet Gallagher came to the US in 2003; six years later he is the general manager of McMahon's Irish Pub & Restaurant in Warrenton, Va., married to an American and expecting a baby. This is the story of his US immigration journey.

Emmet grew up in Naas, Ireland, a small town outside of Dublin, and had already lived in Australia in his early 20s.



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It was there he caught the "travel bug" – when he returned to Ireland he contacted Justin Holohan, a childhood friend from Naas, who was working at Irelands Four Provinces in Falls Church, Virginia (then owned by Christy Hughes, the current owner of The Irish Inn at Glen Echo).

Emmet entered the U.S. in March 2003 on a J1 visa to train at the 4Ps (he was one of several Irish trainees and staff there). He arrived during St. Patrick's Day

week so quickly got a taste of how much Americans love to celebrate this holiday. It was at the 4Ps that he met a young American woman who was working as a waitress, Kelsey Redfearn; she would later become his wife. The 4Ps also came under new ownership near the end of Emmet's tenure there, when the pub was sold to local restaurateur Colm Dillon.

In 2004 Justin Holohan was contacted by a family friend in Ireland, Paddy Whelan, who owned a popular Irish bar in Philadelphia called The Bards and wanted to open a new place in the DC area. Paddy asked Justin to join him as General Manager, and in June Emmet transferred his J1 visa to the new restaurant O'Faolain's (which is "Whelan" in Gaelic) to continue his training there. This was the first time Emmet had been involved in a restaurant opening, and he swore he would never do it again – famous last words.

In the fall of 2004 O'Faolain's decided to sponsor Emmet for an H1B (professional worker) visa as their Restaurant Manager. It was at that time that Emmet came into my life; he saw a column I had written on immigration for the hospitality industry and phoned my office. I have been working with Emmet ever since then, and he has also introduced me to numerous other Irish restaurateurs in the DC area.

In addition to Emmet, O'Faolain's also sponsored a few trainees from Ireland, including Justin's brother Damien, who came for a stint in the kitchen. Regarding the atmosphere at O'Faolain's, Emmet says it was similar to the 4Ps – a "Cheers-style" neighborhood bar where the bartender always remembers your drink.

While at O'Faolain's, Emmet met a local businessman, Francis Fusco, who was well connected to the local Irish community. According to Emmet, Francis was a member of the "Irish inner circle," a group of friends that met regularly to socialize at the Four Courts in Arlington and other local venues. Francis had dreamed of opening an Irish pub, and he

approached Emmet to help him manage the new restaurant, McMahon's Irish Pub & Restaurant.

Even though Emmet had sworn he would never be involved in another restaurant opening, the opportunity was too good to pass up – in the Fall of 2006 he transferred his H1B visa to McMahon's, where he became the general manager. He and Kelsey moved to Warrenton, where they initially lived above the restaurant (later they bought a house in town).

In June 2007 Emmet and Kelsey were married in Ireland; they are expecting a baby this June, and Emmet is now in the process of applying for his green card.

When I asked Emmet what advice he would give other immigrants, he said, "Do it the right way – don't cut corners and take the illegal route. It's worth the time and money to have your ducks in a row. Also, before you decide to come to

the U.S., be really sure that this is what you want to do. Opportunity will be given to you – it's up to you to take it."

As to what advice he would give other employers of immigrants, Emmet said "Keep hiring Irish staff – the success of all three restaurants where I worked comes down to Irish workers – customers want to come to an authentic Irish-run place with authentic Irish service."



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