Northern Ireland time is five hours ahead of American Eastern Standard Time. To coordinate with their American colleagues, many Northbrook workers begin their shifts in the afternoon and work into the evening. Photo by Andrew Galvin, Northbrook Technology

**Call Centres: Innovation and New Opportunities**

NEW TECHNOLOGIES and innovative thinking can create business opportunities and global relationships unimaginable just a few years ago. The establishment of an international call centre in Strabane, in beautiful northwest County Tyrone, is an example.

Once a major linen-manufacturing town, Strabane was hard hit by the collapse of Northern Ireland’s textile industry. By the 1990s, it had one of Europe’s highest unemployment rates and many social problems.

In the wake of the 1999 Good Friday Agreement, Northbrook Technology was one of the first companies established to strengthen Northern Ireland’s economy. A subsidiary of the U.S. insurance company Allstate, Northbrook set up facilities in Belfast, Londonderry, and Strabane. Today, Northbrook employs more than 1,500 information technology workers in Northern Ireland.

Ironically, the Strabane area is famous for heavy regional accents, speaking quickly, and “Strabanisms”—dialect words and local sayings that even some other Northern Irish find difficult to understand. Learning to “speak American” is one of the first skills that workers must master.