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Government accused of hypocrisy over flights

NEWS: 9



Ambitious alumni's startup success

NEWS: 18 & 19



"The only way is up" for Treaty United

SPORT: 31



Members of the Limerick Voice team standing in solidarity with the late Joe Drennan's family at the #JusticeForJoe vigil held at University of Limerick. The DPP has confirmed an appeal has been lodged against the sentence given to the man responsible for his death. Full report pages 4+5.

Photo: Adrian Butler / Limerick Leader

Judges too lenient on repeat offenders, claims former state solicitor

BY EMMA MCCARTHY & AILISH ARMSTRONG

A former state solicitor has warned that Irish judges are too lenient on repeat offenders, while also calling for more clarity on consecutive sentencing.

Speaking to Limerick Voice, in the wake of public scrutiny of sentencing laws in Ireland, Limerick's former state solicitor, Michael Murray defended the principle of concurrent sentencing - where multiple sentences run simultaneously rather than consecutively.

However, he said that there should be more clarity on the issue.

"I don't think sentencing laws need to be reformed, but courts should provide greater clarity on when consecutive sentences should be imposed."

While he is defensive of judges against accusations of overall leniency, Mr Murray acknowledges that in some cases, repeat offenders do not face appropriate consequences. "I do think judges are over-lenient when it comes to repeat offenders," he admitted.

Though refusing to comment on any specific case Mr Murray was also critical of judges' reluctance to impose consecutive sentences for offenders who commit crimes while on bail.

"I have two particular things that I was unhappy about when I was in practice. The failure to impose consecutive sentences on people who commit offences while on bail, and judges ducking and avoiding imposing consecutive sentences. The other thing is where they impose suspended sentences. That's a bit of a joke. They don't police the suspended sentences, and people re-offend without suspended sentences being imposed. And that's a common occurrence."

Continued on page 5

Criminal gangs exploit children as young as 8 to deliver drugs and collect debts

BY ANNEMARIE ROBERTS

CRIMINALS are exploiting a legal loophole to lure children as young as eight into drug related activities, gardai have warned.

The increased involvement of young children to deliver drugs and collect debts was highlighted in a recently published a Garda Inspectorate report, which found that children were coerced into criminal exploitation following a grooming process.

Approximately 1,000 youths under the age of 17 are at risk of exploitation by such networks, according to the report, with many becoming embroiled in drug dealing, trafficking, and sexual exploitation.

"We see a lot of kids being used by criminals because they won't

be brought to court as they're so young" warned Superintendent Derek Smart of Henry Street Garda Station. "They're utilising those children to drop stuff from A to B, to use them to hold products or to be used as lookouts".

In Ireland, children as young as 12 can be prosecuted for criminal activity, but before that age, there is little that can be done from a legal standpoint. "Once a child is over 12, they can be prosecuted, but under that age, legally, there's nothing that can be done," said Juvenile Liaison Officer, Marion O'Grady. This loophole makes children prime targets for criminal gangs who know they are likely to get off with cautions, rather than facing charges.

As a Juvenile Liaison Officer in Limerick city, Garda O'Grady works within the system to try and divert young offenders from continuing

down the path of crime. The goal is to offer a second chance and to keep them out of the court system. However, as Garda O'Grady points out, this system is often exploited by criminals. "Criminals know the system, and they use children because they know they'll get a few cautions before facing court," she explained.

O'Grady highlighted the vulnerable demographics of these children—many come from disadvantaged backgrounds, where support from family and education may be lacking. Some are even paid in drugs rather than money, placing them further into the criminal world. "It's easy money for them," O'Grady noted. "They do the job, get paid—sometimes in drugs, sometimes in cash. It's a slippery slope."

Despite ongoing efforts from

youth support services, breaking the cycle remains a significant challenge. "When you have children who come from a cycle of poverty, poor parenting, and lack of support, it's a hard pattern to break," O'Grady said. The system is designed to offer chances, but without consistent support from home, these children are often left vulnerable.

Garda O'Grady's role involves referring at-risk youth to youth projects and support services. However, even with these resources, success is not guaranteed. "We can refer them, but they have to engage, and not all of them do," she admitted. "The cycle is heartbreaking because no matter how many services you pump money into, you still see the same thing happening again and again."

As O'Grady stated, "It's so easy to get into, but so hard to get out."

Continued on page 5

limerickvoice

Letter from the Editor



JACK MCKAY

FROM the moment I arrived in UL almost four years ago, the Limerick Voice was something that immediately caught my attention.

A student led project and publication. An opportunity to make our mark. In a small way yes, but a special way to do so, nonetheless.

When we got to fourth year and the opportunity to take on this project arose, I was determined to seize it. The excellent work from previous years meant the bar was already high.

But the benefit of this was that we had a platform in place.

A foundation we could build on. An opportunity to drive the Limerick Voice to even higher highs.

Taking on that task was a challenge, but one I knew would be so satisfying if we could achieve it.

Your voice, our mission.

That's what we settled on with the mission statement.

Never would I have imagined we would end up taking that to such a literal level, but we've done exactly that in many ways. The biggest of all in helping Joe's family and friends in their fight for justice.

To see our vigil in support of Joe's family spiral into a national battle to get justice for Joe, is remarkable. Campaign journalism makes a difference. To Marguerite and

Tim, I really hope that you get a fraction of the justice your Joe

deserves. We've made that our mission.

It's not the only voice we've highlighted throughout this year's edition. Gaza, and the protests against US arms through Shannon. UHL, and the dire need for change to better support staff and patients.

That's without mentioning some of the incredible stories in sports and features sections packed with content.

Bringing you these stories would not have been possible without the work of previous students.

To each of my classmates, the content in here is a testament to your ability. All 20 of you have been fantastic to work with.

You're a phenomenal group of people and I'm so proud of what we've achieved together.

You've all got bright futures on the road ahead, and we'll always be connected by what we've accomplished this year. It's been an honour.

To Kathryn Hayes, Christine Costello and Kieran White your help is greatly appreciated. You've played a much bigger role than you're willing to take credit for. Thank you.

I have no doubt the class of 2026 will be able to take what we've produced and bring it to a new level.

That is the ever-evolving beauty of the Limerick Voice.

And I'm honoured to have played my part.



limerickvoice

Social Media Stats

REACHED: 135.5K ACCOUNTS
(874% INCREASE)

INSTAGRAM VIEWS: 473.4K
(36.6K INCREASE)

LINK CLICKS: 1.3K (379% INCREASE)

219 STORIES AND 72 POSTS PUBLISHED

GAINED 590 FOLLOWERS SINCE
SEPTEMBER

INSTAGRAM VIEWS INCREASED BY
36628%

TIK TOK: VIEWS 105K

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#LVNEWSPAPER

The *Limerick Voice* newspaper is published annually by the journalism department at the University of Limerick. It is written and edited entirely by fourth year students of the BA in Journalism & Digital Communication programme. Limerick Voice is a multimedia news project active across all digital platforms.



limerickvoice 2025 - Editorial Team

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Catherine Duggan

Ailish Armstrong

Emma McCarthy

Anna Powell

Alan White

Aoife McDarby

Erin Stevens

Holly O'Sullivan

UHL trolley crisis deepens as record numbers reported



BY ANNEMARIE ROBERTS & EMMA MCCARTHY

UNIVERSITY Hospital Limerick was recorded as the most overcrowded hospital in the country last month with 2,234 patients without a bed.

The latest figures for the first month of 2025 follow a devastating year in UHL when more than 23,300 people were on trolleys. "Last year was the worst year on record for overcrowding," said Sinn Fein TD, Maurice Quinlivan. "Regretfully, these record-breaking figures come as little surprise to me."

"What is often lost in these numbers is that each of these figures is a person, our friends and family who have been deemed in need of a hospital bed where none is available".

According to patients advocate group, the Midwest Hospital Campaign - the INMO only record figures from Monday to Friday, which excludes both weekend numbers and bank holidays.

According to the campaign's figures, 3,029 patients were on trolleys and chairs in January 2025.

The campaign takes an average of the previous five days to estimate the numbers for Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holidays.

Melanie Cleary, member of the

“We want to do this job, but it’s been made impossible to love and do it properly under these circumstances.”

MWHC has warned that elderly people “would rather die than visit UHL”.

Following the inquest into the death of 16-year-old Aoife Johnson in 2022, it emerged that 239 patients died on trolleys in the Emergency Department between 2019-2023.

“The overcrowding was probably at its worst when I was there” recalled one student nurse who worked as a healthcare assistant in the Emergency Department from December 2023 to May of last year. The student nurse, who wished to remain anonymous claimed patients can’t even get the “bare minimum” as “there’s not enough staff. It’s so unsafe, nothing is



Melanie Cleary of the Midwest Hospital Campaign

done properly.”

“We want to do this job, but it’s been made impossible to love and do it properly under these circumstances,” she said.

She described how one healthcare assistant or nurse can be assigned to high-risk patients such as “dementia patients or drug abusers”. The student nurse explained that there would be days in which she would be assigned four patients who were all mentally unstable, and acting in a threatening way towards her, scared and confused. “It’s impossible for one person to watch four people liable to do anything,” she says.

Irish Patients Association representative, Stephen McMahon stated that “patients can be very anxious about going into the hospital because they hear about these long, overcrowding issues.” When describing the working conditions, the healthcare assistant stated, “the emergency department can hold 70 people but there would be over 160 in there on trolleys”. She said a lot of elderly people were sadly left on trolleys. “You’d be walking through them, and they’d be trying to grab your hand, but you can’t treat everybody.”

“There were days where you want to cry because it’s so overwhelming,” she recalled. Nurses are going into UHL “working like robots as if they’re in a factory”.

When asked what challenges

nurses are facing due to overcrowding and how has it affected patient safety, a spokesperson from Irish Nurses Midwives Organisation (INMO) warned of the impact on patient care.

“There’s an inability to provide basic care such as observation, monitoring and administration of medications on time.”

The spokesperson added that while some supports are in place they are “difficult to access due to staff deficits”.

According to the HSE Mid-West, staffing numbers increased by 43% in UHL between December 2019 and 2024.

When asked about issues of overcrowding at UHL, a spokesperson for HSE Mid-West said: “We are increasing inpatient bed capacity at UHL. We opened a rapid-build 16-bed unit in December 2024, and a further 96 beds will be delivered by mid-2025.”

Meanwhile, the newly appointed Health Minister Jennifer Carroll has confirmed the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) is currently leading a review into urgent and emergency care capacity in the Mid-West region including consideration of the need for a second ED.

An interim briefing on this review is expected in February 2025 with a final report expected in May 2025.

HEALTHCARE

Minister must meet with families affected by ‘catastrophic’ health service, says Cleary

BY EMMA MCCARTHY & ANNEMARIE ROBERTS

MID-WEST Patient Group advocate Melanie Cleary has called on the newly appointed Minister for health to meet families who have suffered because of the “catastrophic” health service in the Mid-West region. University Hospital Limerick (UHL) is the only serving emergency department for Limerick, Clare and North Tipperary.

Following the tragic death of her 21-year-old daughter Eve in 2019, who suffered a heart attack just three hours after being discharged from UHL, Melanie began advocating for the Mid-West Hospital campaign (MWHC).

The MWHC are an advocacy group calling for a second emergency department in the Mid-West region following the closure of emergency departments in Nenagh, Ennis and St. John’s hospital, Limerick in 2009.

“The new government has to address the situation in the Mid-west as a matter of urgency,” says Melanie. “We have seen previous governments ignore the situation and allow it to worsen, they were all aware of the problems in UHL and let it become a national scandal.”

Melanie is hoping to meet with the newly appointed Health Minister Jennifer Carroll MacNeil to discuss her daughter Eves death and the MWHC on how they can improve the UHL emergency department both in the short term and long term.

When speaking on the outcome of the General Election, Melanie says she was not disappointed that Stephen Donnelly lost his seat. “If you’re going to be Minister for Health, you need

“I think it’s the biggest catastrophe of our time”

to accept that you’re going to have to meet families that have suffered,” says the Limerick mother.

Last year, she decided to run as an Independent in the 2024 general election, in which she received 650 votes as a first-time candidate.

Speaking about her election result, she knew she might not get elected but described it as an opportunity to open a conversation about the conditions in UHL.

“I think it’s the biggest catastrophe of our time” she states.

The Limerick mother’s personal experience in A&E at UHL with her daughter Eve, has given

her the strength to help prevent any future families from experiencing the horrific conditions she witnessed.

She stresses that the only way forward is to open a new emergency department, to prevent any further fatalities and to increase patient care in the Mid-west region.

MORE THAN 23,300 PEOPLE WERE ON TROLRIES IN UHL LAST YEAR



Emergency department at University Hospital Limerick. Photo: Emma McCarthy

JUSTICE FOR JOE

Joe Drennan memorial competition providing a voice for the voiceless

BY HOLLY O'SULLIVAN

SUCH was the impact of Joe Drennan's journalism work, that several awards have been established in his name.

As a journalist, Joe aimed to give a voice to the people who have been overlooked and underreported on, someone who wanted to give opportunities to people who needed it the most.

The Joe Drennan Memorial Competition was set up in UL to remember the talented young journalism student.

The competition, in association with the Irish Times, is focused on inclusive journalism and will highlight stories rarely covered by mainstream media.

Entrants must produce a 1,000-1,5000 word article. The winning article will be published in the Irish Times.

Speaking about what the competition is looking for, Ireland and Britain Editor of the Irish Times, Mark Hennessey said: "What we are looking for in this competition is stories that break new ground on a subject that has not previously been the focus of public attention or has been underreported in the media."

Dr Kathryn Hayes, Course Director of Journalism and Digital Communications, spoke about Joe's motivation as a talented up and coming journalist. "Joe's passion to pursue a journalism career that was dedicated to inclusivity is reflected in the stories he had published and those he

had planned to write."

In addition to the article being published in the Irish Times the winner of the competition will receive a trophy presented by the Drennan family.

Talking about the competi-

“Joe's passion to pursue a journalism career that was dedicated to inclusivity is reflected in the stories he had published and those he had planned to write”

tion, Joe Drennan's mother, Marguerite said: "The writing competition is a wonderful tribute to his memory, he would have been so thrilled. We are so very proud of Joe and what he accomplished in his life; he loved writing and UL."

The closing date for entries is March 21, 2025.

Last year, Gay Community News, Ireland's longest-running free LGBTQ+ publication renamed the LGBTQ+ Trailblazer award to the Joe Drennan LGBTQ+ Trailblazer award in honour and recognition of the young journalist. The award recognises young people who are making an unforgettable impact on our community.

Justice for Joe: one family's unwavering journey of hope and advocacy

When Joe Drennan's life was cruelly cut short, the impact of his death reverberated far beyond his family, touching everyone who knew him. **Holly O'Sullivan, Emma McCarthy, Ailish Armstrong and Erin Stevens**, report on the campaign for justice, which attracted a powerful display of community solidarity.

THE Drennan family launched their #JusticeForJoe campaign following the sentencing hearing of Kieran Fogarty (21) Hyde Road, Limerick, at Limerick Circuit court on January 30 last.

Fogarty who pleaded guilty to dangerous driving causing the death of the talented young journalism student in October 2023 received a six-and-a-half-year sentence, which the judge ordered be served concurrently with an eight-year sentence imposed for a shooting incident in June 2023.

Reacting to the sentencing in court on the day of sentencing, Joe Drennan's father Tim Drennan spoke out and asked Judge Colin Daly if this meant Fogarty would never serve a day for killing his son.

During the sentencing hearing, Judge Daly referenced the stark contrast between Joe Drennan and Kieran Fogarty whom he said at 19 was already "embroiled in a life of crime".

In contrast, he remarked how Joe Drennan had so much to offer the world and was a "great student and a budding journalist" already involved in work that was making a positive impact.

Judge Daly recalled how Fogarty who was driving at 122km/hr when he struck Joe Drennan, took "forensic measures" to protect himself before fleeing the scene while the 21-year-old student was pinned under the car.

Fogarty - who had 46 previous convictions at the time of the fatal hit and run - also received several other concurrent

jail sentences for drug offences including possession of €14,000 worth of cocaine in June 2023.

Speaking outside the court after the sentencing hearing Sarah Drennan, Joe's sister, said her reaction was of shock and disgust and questioned how Fogarty could receive only six and a half years for the death of her brother but eight for the discharge of a firearm towards a wall.

"There are no words to describe how I feel... Joe didn't deserve this. He was just finishing

“There are no words to describe how I feel... Joe didn't deserve this he was just finishing his day of work waiting for a bus home then his life is taken by a known criminal who shouldn't have been free to harm him.”

his day of work waiting for a bus home then his life is taken by a known criminal who shouldn't have been free to harm him.

"Our suffering will never end. My brother didn't deserve to die. This sentence is disgusting."

Vigils

Joe Drennan's parents Tim and Marguerite, and their family, have made several difficult journeys from Laois to Limerick since October 13, 2023.

On Thursday February 6 - exactly one week after the sentencing hearing - hundreds of people gathered in the University of Limerick to show their solidarity with the Drennan's and their #JusticeForJoe campaign, at a

vigil organised by fourth year journalism students in UL and the Limerick Voice team.

Several people spoke at the vigil about Joe Drennan's sense of justice and his desire to change the world.

"Joe's passion for social justice was evident in the journalism

he produced, where he consistently championed the voices of the marginalized and sought to expose systemic inequalities," said Kathryn Hayes, one of Joe's journalism lecturers.

Addressing those at the vigil Joe's aunt Julie Bennett said the Irish justice system was "failing its victims."

"He [Kieran Fogarty] got an eight-year sentence for shooting at a wall, and he got six and a half years for killing Joe and leaving him to die alone on the side of the road in Limerick."

Calling for a change in sentencing laws, Ms Bennett added: "Concurrent sentencing should not apply when there's been a fatality."

The Drennan family travelled to Limerick again on February



Dr. Kathryn Hayes, Course Director BA Journalism and Digital Communication, Mark Hennessey Irish Times Ireland Editor with Marguerite and Tim Drennan. Photo: Alan Place





Tim and Marguerite Drennan pictured with Joe's sisters Sarah and Marie at the vigil held in UL

8, last when large crowds gathered in Limerick city centre to show their support at a march through the city organised by Limerick campaigner Natasha O'Brien.

A 'Walk for Justice' was held in Joe's hometown of Mountrath, Co Laois, on Sunday, February 9. More than 1,000 people gathered to show their support.

The Drennan family also set up a petition to reform consecutive sentencing laws in Ireland which has been signed by over 12,000 people in its first few days.

Speaking in the Dail after the sentencing of Kieran Fogarty, newly elected Limerick TD Conor Sheehan, called on the government to come up with new sentencing guidelines, claimed the justice system was "failing victims of violent crimes."

Raising the issue of sentencing reform directly with Taoiseach Micheál Martin, Deputy Sheehan said:

"I'm asking you to urgently review sentencing guidelines, particularly in relation to the issue of concurrent and suspended sentences for violent offences."

"There is a running theme here of the DPP and Justice System failing victims of violent crimes and the government

need to come up with new sentencing guidelines," he said.

Deputy Sheehan said he was "heartened" by the response from the Taoiseach, who has said he will discuss issues around sentencing reform with the newly elected Minister for Justice, Jim O'Callaghan.

Appeal

On Wednesday morning February 12 almost two weeks after the sentencing hearing, the Drennan family received a call to confirm that the DPP had lodged an appeal against this sentence given to Joe Drennan's killer.

Speaking to Limerick Voice from her home in Camross Co Laois, Marguerite Drennan, expressed deep gratitude that their tireless efforts had finally been heard.

"We got the appeal. It's great news, thank God. We are delighted and we want to thank everyone who has helped support our campaign," she said.

The announcement that the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) had lodged the appeal marked a turning point in the #JusticeForJoe campaign, one that had been fuelled by countless hours of advocacy and unyielding hope.



Siofra Grant, Kevin O'Brien and Lauren O'Shaughnessy at the UL Vigil for Justice for Joe. Photo: Adrian Butler



Limerick Voice reporters at the Justice for Joe vigil

POLITICS

Judges too lenient on repeat offenders, claims former state solicitor

BY EMMA MCCARTHY & AILISH ARMSTRONG

Continued from page 1

MICHAEL Murray who retired eight years ago after serving as State Solicitor for Limerick city since 1980, believes sentencing laws in Ireland follow the principles of proportionality and totality ensuring that punishments are fair and not excessive

"In this jurisdiction, we have an aversion to the American type sentencing system where you could end up getting 100 years for a variety of different relatively minor offences."

Mr Murray does not believe sentence laws need to be reformed, but rather courts should provide greater clarity on when consecutive sentences should be imposed.

He is also concerned about the message that concurrent sentencing sends to repeat offenders.

"Some offenders who are out on bail continue to commit offences, operating on the basis that if they're caught, they'll only get a sentence for the first charge, and the rest will be taken into account."

"But having said that, a lot of these repeat offenders are people of low intellect, have had very little opportunities in life, have been brought up in a harsh environment, and judges are reluctant to come down hard on them. And that's something I appreciate," he added.

Mr Murray insists judges approach sentencing in "a well-considered and thought-out manner." "Putting judges into a straitjacket restricts their ability to do justice" he says.

"I don't like a very harsh sentencing regime. You have a better chance of rehabilitating somebody if you are a bit more circumspect in how you treat them."

His comments come amid public scrutiny and calls for reform of concurrent and consecutive sentencing laws in Ireland.



Former State Solicitor for Limerick Michael Murray Photo: Limerick Leader



POLITICS

General Election 2024: Who will be representing Limerick in the new Dail

BY ERIN STEVENS

CONOR SHEEHAN (LABOUR)

THE youngest candidate in the Limerick City constituency, Conor Sheehan was elected to the Dáil at just 589 votes ahead of Social Democrat candidate Elisa O'Donovan. Sheehan hopes to ease the housing crisis for Limerick city by revitalising urban and rural communities.

PATRICK O'DONOVAN (FINE GAEL)

PATRICK O'Donovan made history by being the first Fine Gael candidate to be elected in the first count in Limerick county. Previously serving as the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, TD O'Donovan main priorities are improving childcare, housing, and the judicial system.

KIERAN O'DONNELL (FINE GAEL)

PREVIOUSLY serving as a senator in the 25th Seanad, TD for Limerick city from 2007 to 2016, and as Minister of State since December 2022. O'Donnell's main priorities revolve around job creation in Limerick and promoting Shannon Airport.

WILLIE O'DEA (FIANNA FAIL)

SERVING as a Limerick city TD since 2011, and TD for Limerick city east since 1982. TD O'Dea's slogan is 'Working for you... Al-

ways'. He is focusing on issues in Limerick surrounding housing, crime and rising prices.

NIAL COLLINS (FIANNA FAIL)

NIAL Collins claimed the final seat in Limerick county. The Fianna Fáil TD has served as TD for Limerick County since 2016 and has been appointed Minister of State at the Department of Justice with special responsibility for International Law, Law Reform and Youth Justice.

MAURICE QUINLIVAN (SINN FEIN)

SERVING as a Limerick City TD since 2016, TD Quinlivan was appointed Chairperson of Joint Oireachtas Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Employment. His main concerns are increasing investments in University Hospital Limerick, additional drug support services in the city, dealing with antisocial behaviour and crime, and affordable housing in Limerick city.

RICHARD O'DONOGHUE (INDEPENDENT IRELAND)

CO-FOUNDER of Independent Ireland, TD Richard O'Donoghue seeks to improve housing and healthcare in Limerick County, as well as addressing the issues surrounding agriculture and infrastructure to create a better future for rural Limerick.

Two months of silence: International Rugby Experience site remains vacant



BY ALISON REEVES & LEAH HOGARTY

TWO months after the unexpected closure of Limerick's iconic Rugby Experience, frustration among the people of Limerick is palpable.

Almost two thirds of Limerick City's elected public representatives said they were not involved in the decision to close the Iconic Rugby Experience. Locals are still in the dark as to what lies ahead.

The €30M building had been offered to Limerick City and County Council as a gift from the McManus Foundation along with a €1.2 million donation, in October 2023. Heads of Terms were signed in March 2024.

Just a year after opening its doors, on October 24, 2024, the McManus Foundation owned International Rugby Experience announced it would cease operations by the end of the year.

The news followed numerous talks between the IRE and Limerick Council Executives about the possibility of transferring the tourist attraction to the council.

Limerick Voice reached out to var-

“All possible avenues were explored including a report from an independent tourism expert consultant.”

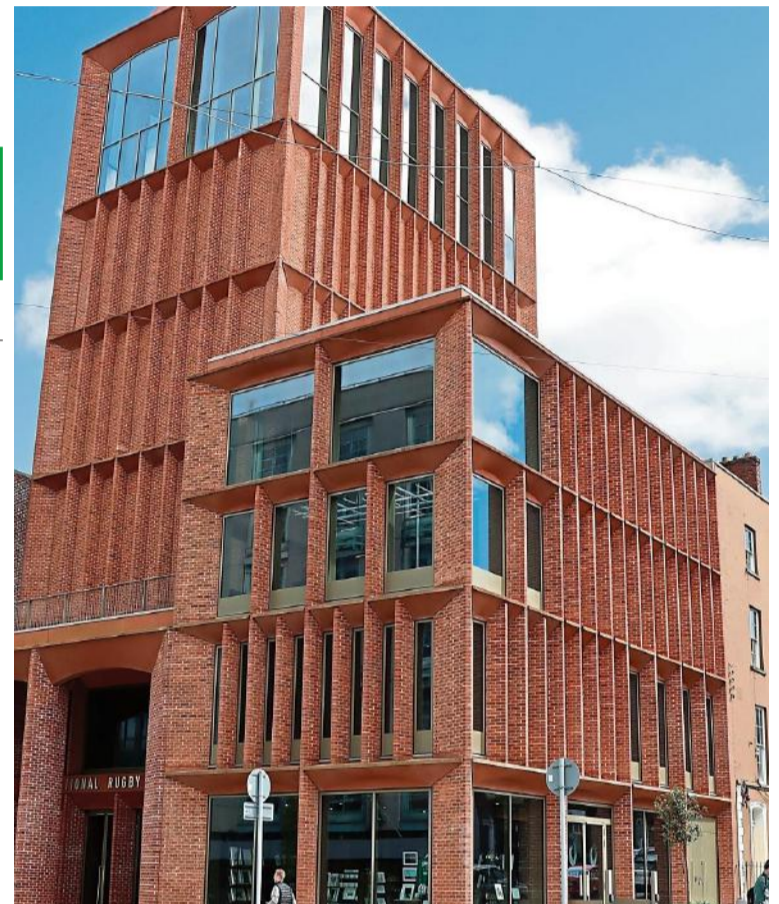
ious International Rugby Experience contacts, along with all 40 sitting Limerick City and County councillors in relation to the decision-making process.

Of the 17 who responded, 14 were members of the metropolitan district.

Some 93% insisted they were not included in the decision-making process.

“This came out of left field completely for all of us councillors... there was a public announcement made on our behalf as councillors that we hadn't signed up to, that we hadn't agreed on,” said Social Democrats Cllr Elisa O'Donovan.

Fine Gael Cllr Sarah Kiely made similar remarks saying, “People think we had decision making ability here



The International Rugby Experience on O'Connell street

and were in the loop, but we weren't.

Independent Cllr Ursula Gavan added, “We couldn't have been included if there were 30 meetings, and we weren't privy to such.”

Fine Fáil Cllr Joe Pond echoed these views, “The decision had practically reached a foregone conclusion before we got it.”

A short statement issued by Limerick City and County Council after the closure said, “Following extensive due diligence, a detailed briefing was provided to the councillors of Limerick City and County Council, as recently as this week, to discuss the proposed transition.

“All possible avenues were explored including a report from an independent tourism expert consultant.”

However, in contrast to what was alluded to by council executives in this official statement, councillors say they were not involved in these discussions.

Talks between the IRE and Council Executives were ongoing for almost a year before councillors were briefed.

According to Cllr Sarah Kiely, “We had no knowledge of the timelines involved. We were brought into a room and were presented with a report on a Wednesday.

“But then the IRE came out the following morning and said the report that was agreed wasn't the report presented to councillors.”

The only respondent who felt he was included fairly in the decision-making process was Labour TD Conor Sheehan, who was a councillor at the time.

“Even though we were consulted towards the end of the process. I'm happy with the information I've got.” The Limerick TD added, “The International Rugby Experience is fantastic, it's a great addition to the city of Limerick, but it's just not viable for the local authority to take it on.”

Speaking on Live95's Limerick Today show, IRE Director Keith Wood explained that inflated figures, to the sum of €6.2million, were included in the report presented to councillors, “it was represented as being mutually agreed, and it wasn't.”

The issue of vacant and derelict buildings is one that has plagued Limerick, particularly in recent years with almost 20% commercial vacancy in 2024.

However, Chief Economist at the Limerick Chamber, Seán Golden, explained how “...the local authority brought in a vacant property refund scheme in 2025, which should help to attract new businesses to use units that were previously vacant.”

With no clear resolution in sight, the fate of the Rugby Experience remains a source of growing concern for Limerick's residents and elected officials alike.

“Addiction doesn’t care about your background”: Breaking down harmful stereotypes



BY ANNEMARIE ROBERTS

AS the addiction crisis in Limerick continues to impact individuals and families across all walks of life, efforts to break down stereotypes about substance abuse are more critical than ever.

Jack Mullane takes an active role in Cocaine Anonymous in the Munster region, supporting those on their recovery journey. “It’s there to help people recover, and that is growing in itself, but that means that there are more users looking for a solution to get better. In Limerick city, you can see that (addiction) is still prominent,” he added.

“It affects everyone — teachers, farmers, engineers, even the guards. It crosses all walks of life”

Speaking on his personal journey, the former addict touches on how his addiction began “It wasn’t immediate,” he recalled. “When I first picked up a drink or a drug, I wasn’t an addict. But by the time I was 17, 18, it became part of my everyday life. What started as recreational use turned into a daily habit” he said.

Living just outside the city, Jack

became part of a widespread pattern in Limerick, where drugs were shockingly accessible.

“Even when I tried to stay away from it, the drugs always found me”

It was after his third arrest that the fear of jail finally forced him to confront the reality of his situation. “That’s when I knew something had to change,” he explained. “I was scared. I didn’t want to go to prison. But more importantly, I didn’t want to keep living like this” he said.

The business owner admitted he initially feared treatment would be filled with societal stereotypes, “I was thinking, am I going to be the only person with teeth in here? Do you know? I’m like, am I going to be putting a straitjacket?” However, he found himself alongside professionals and individuals with varied backgrounds. The business owner emphasised that the only difference between him and the person society labels as the “typical addict” was external circumstances like owning a car or attending college.

Over the past decade, the city has seen a dramatic shift in its drug landscape. Cocaine, once a rarer vice, has surged in popularity. Crack cocaine has also taken a foothold, surpassing heroin in usage and becoming a major concern for local



Recovered Jack Mullane on a trip abroad Photo: Jack Mullane

authorities.

Alan Galvin, manager of the Saoirse Addiction Centre in Limerick city explained, “Cocaine is a highly sophisticated drug. It doesn’t make users fall around drunk or disoriented like other substances. It’s more insidious, people can keep up appearances while still battling with it.”

Saoirse has been at the forefront of Limerick’s response to this growing crisis, offering free, confidential services to help those struggling with drug, alcohol, and gambling addictions.

One of the most powerful messages to emerge from Saoirse is the need to break the stigma surrounding it. The perception of addiction

often involves images of homeless people with brown bags or street-level drug dealers, but addiction can affect any profession or person. “Addiction doesn’t care about your background,” said Galvin.

“It affects everyone – teachers, farmers, engineers, even the guards. It crosses all walks of life”

Breaking down these stereotypes is crucial in encouraging people to seek help without fear of judgment.

Saoirse’s role, along with other support services, is to make sure that anyone who needs help can find it, no matter their background or situation.

Limerick’s addiction crisis is far from over, but the growing network of support and treatment options is

a beacon of hope.

For former addicts like Jack, the journey of recovery is a testament to the power of support, community, and the willingness to ask for help.

For Limerick city, the fight against addiction is one that will require continued effort.

“If I can open someone’s eyes and steer them in the right direction, that’s a positive for me” added Jack.

To reach out to Saoirse Rehabilitation Centre, please contact 085 818 4590

Digital drug crisis: Substances within “the touch of a button”

BY ANNEMARIE ROBERTS

THE rise of technology and the prevalence of mobile phones have drastically changed how drugs are bought and sold, creating significant challenges for law enforcement in Limerick. Superintendent

Derek Smart of Henry Street Garda Station painted a stark picture of this reality.

“With the touch of a button, you’re in talk groups with drug dealers,” he explained.

Superintendent Smart pointed out that social media platforms have become a virtual marketplace

for illegal substances, and delivery methods have evolved, with electric bikes and other discreet tools being used to bring drugs directly to people’s doors.

Criminals are also exploiting minors, knowing they are unlikely to face legal repercussions due to their age. “Children are being used to hold products, or transport drugs,” Smart highlighted, emphasising how this system victimises the most vulnerable members of society.

This digital evolution has forced law enforcement to adapt. The Gardaí now routinely seize mobile phones during investigations, but accessing the critical data within requires a warrant, a step introduced only in the past year. “The phone is the gateway into the metaverse,” Smart said, highlighting how mod-

ern investigations demand advanced techniques to combat the tech-savvy operations of organised crime.

The human cost of this digital-fueled drug trade is evident not just in the lives of exploited children but also in the health of users. Cocaine use, for example, has become normalised for many,

yet the reality of its production is far from glamorous. Smart describes the appalling conditions where drugs are prepared, “They’re being mixed in sheds with rats running around, using substances detrimental to people’s health.”

Despite these dangers, the demand for drugs persists, perpetuating a cycle that links these users to organised crime. Superintendent Smart calls on the public to under-

stand that every individual actively partaking in the drug market is placing vulnerable people at risk, including very young children.

“With the touch of a button, you’re in talk groups with drug dealers”

While crack cocaine and heroin remain among the most prevalent drugs in Limerick, there is hope in collaboration. “We’re working with non-government agencies, like the Ana Liffey Drug Project, to support those struggling with addiction,” Smart noted. The focus, he insisted, isn’t on filling prisons but on helping individuals break free from the cycle of dependency. An Garda Síochána are currently focusing on tackling this evolving digital trend by actively proposing new legislation to adapt to our digital society in order to protect the community.



Stock image of medication taken from Pixabay

ONE OF THE MOST ALARMING TRENDS IS THE INVOLVEMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN IN DRUG-RELATED ACTIVITIES.

“I didn’t expect this”: International students struggle amid Limerick housing crisis

Limerick Voice reporter highlights a problem that continues to plague international students in Ireland



BY JORDAN NGUI

AS a third-year international student from Hong Kong, returning to Ireland from my exchange semester in Los Angeles to Limerick should have been seamless. But the severity of the housing crisis had reached a point that shook me.

I began my search three months in advance of my arrival, believing that would be enough time. After a few weeks, I found a house to spend the semester, but the landlord here imposed severe restrictions.

Washing times were limited, and with only eight minutes of hot water available for showers everyday due to issues they’ve been “trying to fix”. Equipment was broken, and with only two hours of heating a day, and despite constant complaints, nothing was fixed for over a month.

It was a place that didn’t even meet basic living standards. It felt like my basic rights were being ignored.

Months ago, while I was searching for somewhere, I met a new friend, Louanne Roux, who had just started her exchange semester at UL. She walks 40 minutes to campus every day because she wasn’t allocated on-campus housing and couldn’t find a place nearby.

She applied four months in advance, and ironically the only reason she couldn’t apply even earlier was that she hadn’t yet received the right documents for her final offer.

It suddenly hit me that the housing crisis is something international students are not prepared for. No matter how early we start searching, it’s never early enough, and the majority always end up living in terrible housing conditions.

“We Had No Idea What We Were Walking Into”

Louanne Roux, an exchange student from Bordeaux, France, has previously been in Ireland multiple times and loved the country.

For Louanne, moving to Ireland to study at the University of Limerick (UL) was supposed to be a dream



Adriana Farias

come true. Instead, her months before arriving turned into a frantic scramble to find a place to live.

Like me, Louanne started her search for accommodation months in advance but found nothing available. She took the first thing she could find.

“I really panicked when I didn’t get accommodation on campus, because I didn’t know anything about Limerick, and I was on my own to find accommodation,” Louanne explained. “I was really stressed every day, and I didn’t expect housing to be that expensive.”

“Not living on campus has been very difficult for my academic life. Sometimes I was very late to classes because I couldn’t get the bus in the morning, because the bus is not reliable at all.”

“Most people don’t even leave the campus for weeks. They are 24 hours on campus. If you’re not on campus, you might feel a bit excluded, and you waste a lot of time in transportation.”

A Crisis Unfolding Too Late

For international students like Louanne and I, the housing crisis is something that often doesn’t fully sink in until we arrive in Ireland. We start our searches months in advance.

Our experiences are not rare cases. The student housing crisis in Limerick has reached critical levels.

UL Student Life President Ronan Cahill described the situation as “beyond a crisis.”

“Students aren’t happy, and there’s a lot of anger, frustration, and disappointment among them. I know that currently, there are at least 600 students on the on-campus waiting list,” he said. “Last year, there were a couple of thousand waiting. So, it really is past the word ‘crisis’ at this stage.”

Calls for Change

While UL has announced plans to add 300 on-campus beds, students and advocates say more needs to be done. When asked for comment, a spokesperson for UL’s Global Office acknowledged the difficulties faced by incoming students and is continuing ongoing collaboration with the government, local partners, and the wider sector to find solutions.

“UL has been working hard to support students in their search for accommodation. We’ve partnered with TUS and MIC on awareness campaigns encouraging homeowners to rent out spare rooms. The UL Accommodation Service also offers advice, information, and an off-campus housing website, Studentpad, which currently lists 156 rooms in 115 properties.”

UL currently provides 2,930 on-campus beds, prioritising first-year and international students. UL Global assists international students in securing housing before their arrival, while a Student Engagement Team and a dedicated accommodation officer support students struggling to find off-campus options.

Ireland’s “slow” healthcare system risks pricing out international students

BY JORDAN NGUI

ADRIANA Farias, an international student from Madrid, who previously studied in Limerick, expressed her frustration with the healthcare system. “When I first came here, I didn’t know how long it would take to get an appointment,” she began. “I waited three weeks almost to see a GP for what I thought was a simple issue. Back home, I’d be seen within a few days, so this was a real shock for me.”

Being a student in the EU, Adriana has EHIC coverage that grants her access to health care in Ireland under the same conditions as Irish residents. But it’s not been a smooth transition.

Long waits and limited availability, waiting weeks to be seen by a doctor for even basic issues, it just compounds the issue.

GP consultations, which cost approximately €50 to €70 per visit, are the usual cost for students not covered under the EHIC or the public health system. This puts a bigger financial burden on students who do not have this cover, and many non-EU international students pay more when attending medical consultations.

Joanne, a non-EU student from Malaysia, explained how the healthcare costs affect her. Since Joanne is not EHIC-covered, she must pay for private health insurance, which is a must for all non-EU students in Ireland.

These range from €150 up to €500 annually, depending on the provider and the coverage involved. To add to this, her GP visits cost about €60 each, while other mental health services can be even more expensive. “The system is very slow, and it’s frustrating not knowing where to go in case you are feeling sick,” she said.

As a non-EU student, the costs add on, and that’s excluding the long waiting times.

A very important concern is mental health support. Students often go through not only the stress of academic pressure and homesickness but also, financial stress while trying to understand a very complex healthcare system that was not clearly explained to them before arrival.

Many international students find themselves on waiting lists for mental health services, some-

times for weeks or months, particularly for counselling.

Joanne, for example, was told it would take at least two months to see a counsellor when she first arrived. “It’s really hard to cope with stress, homesickness and academic pressure, but there just aren’t enough services for us,” she added. “It feels like we’re left to fend for ourselves.”

A System in Crisis

General medical services and mental health care wait times in Ireland are much longer than many other European countries, according to The Irish Council for International Students (ICOS), though EU students may avail of public healthcare on foot of the EHIC, delays in receiving necessary treatment translates to frustration for international students too.

For students who are not from the EU, like Joanne, there is the added burden of securing and paying for private health insurance that does not fully cover all medical services.

The cost of private consultations adds up fast, further complicating the already tight financial pressures faced by students.

Calls for Change

International students’ problems point to larger issues within Ireland’s health system and the relative lack of resources put toward international students.

Calls for greater funding for general healthcare and mental health support is now louder than ever, as universities across Ireland are increasing their intake of international students each year.

The situation calls for urgent reform if Ireland is to remain a welcoming destination for students from around the world.



Jordan Ngui

Shannonwatch and IPSC accuse Irish government of hypocrisy over military flights



BY EMMA MCCARTHY

THE Irish government is facing fresh criticism from the peace group Shannonwatch, which has accused it of hypocrisy in its handling of international military operations.

Speaking at a protest organised in conjunction with the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign (IPSC) Shannonwatch member John Lannon, revealed the number of exemptions the Irish government granted to planes carrying munitions over Irish airspace.

“We are actively complicit in genocide and could in theory be taken to the International Criminal Court and sanctioned by the International Court of Justice”

“Last year, the Minister for Transport, Eamon Ryan, granted over 1,260 permits to carry munitions through Irish airspace,” he revealed.

“45,000 U.S. troops and their weapons went through this airport last year. So, the government here in Ireland cannot be allowed to pay lip service to criticizing Israel while being complicit in what they’re doing.”

Mr Lannon has called on the newly appointed Minister for Transport, Darragh O’Brien, to not grant any exemptions to munitions flying over our sovereign airspace.

“When he is asked to give permission for a flight to come through here, he just simply has to say no. No to any permit request for a U.S. military flight with troops on board and their personal weapons. If he can’t just start saying no, the very least the authorities should be doing is inspecting the planes to see what’s really on them.”

“Come on, who thinks that the U.S. Air Force and the U.S. Navy go anywhere in the world without carrying weapons?” Lannon asked.

Lannon praised the Ditch’s work in reporting on the flight carrying weapons. “If the Ditch can identify them, why can’t the government?”

According to peace activist Edward Horgan a former Irish Army Commandant, and member of Shannonwatch, the Irish government is not only complicit in Israel’s bombardment of Gaza but actively facilitating the ongoing genocide.

“We are actively complicit in genocide and could in theory be taken to the International Criminal Court and sanctioned by the International Court of Justice,” said Horgan.

Speaking to Limerick Voice, Paulie Doyle, an investigative re-



Protesters at Shannon Airport . Photo Credit: Emma McCarthy



SCAN QR CODE TO READ MORE

porter with The Ditch, highlighted an overlooked aspect of US arms shipments through Ireland.

“The majority of flights carrying munitions aren’t even landing at Shannon—they’re flying directly over Irish sovereign airspace, illegally,” he claimed.

Horgan dismissed government efforts as meaningless. “There is no point in searching military planes at the airport. They shouldn’t be allowed to go through in the first place. Eamon Ryan has been Minister for Transport for years, and it’s appalling that the Green Party has been approving these landings at Shannon Airport.”

Over three million soldiers have passed through Shannon Airport since the US attack on Serbia in 1999, according to Horgan. “Each of those

soldiers have carried with them an automatic rifle through Shannon Airport” he said.

“So, any claims that weapons are not going through Shannon Airport are completely false. It’s not just a matter of searching a few planes on a sporadic basis. The U.S. military should and must be stopped from going to Shannon Airport because we are in breach of a whole lot of international laws and conventions in doing so”.

Palestinian and activist with the IPSC, Abdaal Salim challenged the Irish government during his speech at the protest, asking when they deemed it acceptable to allow the devastation to continue. “The bombs carried through here are the same that’re destroying my home, the same bombs and ammunition that

are killing thousands of children, women and elderly. There is nothing left in Gaza. It was never about destroying Hamas, it’s about destroying every aspect of life so that the people will leave” he said.

Head of ISPC, Zoë Lawlor is calling on the Irish government to enact the Occupied Territories Bill, the Illegal Israeli Settlements Divestment Bill and the Arms Embargo Bill. Lawlor described Ireland’s position as “bizarre and totally contradictory”. “We joined South Africa’s case against Israel for genocide at the ICJ, and we’re signatories to the Genocide Convention, but at the same time, we’re facilitating genocide.”

As pressure mounts, the Irish government faces growing calls to match their rhetoric with meaningful action.

A major step forward: Breakthrough in Cappamore convent dispute as building lease is relinquished

BY EVAN O’SHEA

A major step forward has been made in the dispute over the former convent in Cappamore, with the Coolmine Therapeutic Centre relinquishing its lease on the building. This decision comes after months of protests and community pressure, clearing the way for potential negotiations over the future use of the site.

The Cappamore Housing Association (CHA), which owns the property, confirmed that Coolmine had stepped away from its short-term lease. The decision follows sustained opposition from the Cappamore Community Group and parents of Scoil Chaitríona students, who have called for the building to be used as an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) facility rather than for social housing or rehabilitation services.

The dispute escalated when protesters blocked access to the convent with silage bales and signage, objecting to its use by Coolmine, a rehabilitation service for people recovering from addiction. While CHA insisted that the convent would only have been used for residential purposes and not treatment, opposition continued, with some arguing that any such service near a school was inappropriate.

In response to these developments, the Cappamore Community Group announced that it would suspend its protest to allow talks to progress. A meeting between CHA and Scoil Chaitríona’s BOM is expected in the coming days, with hopes that a resolution can be reached to provide much-needed ASD facilities.

In a statement issued to The Limerick Voice, Cappamore Housing Association CLG reiterated that the provision of an autism suite at

Scoil Chaitríona is a matter for the school’s Board of Management and the Department of Education. While CHA is open to discussions, they emphasised that their role remains separate from the school’s decision-making process. “Cappamore housing association CLG acknowledge that the provision of an autism suite is a matter for the School Board of Management and the Department of Education. As stated on numerous occasions, Cappamore Housing Association CLG are willing to discuss how the former convent residence may assist the School Board of Management and the Department of Education in our upcoming scheduled meeting,” said PJ Blackwell, company secretary of CHA.

Meanwhile, a GoFundMe campaign has raised €5,220 to support efforts to secure the convent for

Scoil Chaitríona, backed by parents and local community members .

For now, tensions in Cappamore

have eased, but the final outcome remains uncertain as negotiations continue.



Roaccutane: The side effects and success stories

Roaccutane is often perceived as a miracle cure for acne sufferers, however the drug comes with side effects. With increasing wait times affecting so many dermatology patients on public waiting lists in Limerick, some people have been forced to seek out appointments through the private service.



BY GARY O'HANLON AND HOLLY O'SULLIVAN

ROACCUTANE is a type of retinoid medication taken daily in pill form that treats severe acne. It must be prescribed, and a typical course of treatment lasts for six months. Side effects of Roaccutane include symptoms of depression, nausea, rashes, dizziness, liver damage, dry skin and muscle pain.

Women who are prescribed Roaccutane are also advised to take a course of birth control pills as the drug can cause extreme complications for pregnancies.

Holly Carey is a 21-year-old teaching student studying in Mary Immaculate College Limerick. She was prescribed Roaccutane through the dermatology unit in University Hospital Limerick after waiting eight months for an appointment.

“It's hard to live with, especially when you know you're going to have to wait so long for something to fix it.”

Holly suffered with severe acne that she said affected her social life and confidence in several ways. “It's hard to live with, especially when you know you're going to have to wait so long for something to fix it. I'd find it hard to come into school knowing that my face was breaking out.”

Holly was reluctant to take a course of Roaccutane as she was wary of the drug's side effects, she described seeking out a prescription as a “last resort” after “trying every other option.”

Holly experienced those side effects that she was hoping to avoid.

For the first two months of being on the drug she experienced regular fainting, severely dry skin and frequent nosebleeds. For the remainder of the course,



Jack O'Hanlon, 25-year-old apprentice electrician from Limerick

she suffered through joint and muscle pain.

Despite the difficult side effects and long wait time, she feels seeking out a course of Roaccutane is worth it for those who are suffering from severe acne. “I've yet to have a breakout since coming off the drug nine months ago. If it was possible to have less of a wait time when being prescribed the drug it would make the process easier as the worst part for me was waiting.”

Jack O'Hanlon is a 25-year-old apprentice electrician from Limerick. Jack went through an eight-month course of Roaccutane for severe acne. When enquiring about wait times for a public referral, Jack was told he would have to wait up to a year to see a dermatologist and get a prescription. Feeling that he couldn't wait that long for a solution, he sought out a prescription in the private sector. “Most GPs won't prescribe Roaccutane, luckily I was able to get an appointment with a private GP in Newcastle West who had an interest in skin and was willing to put me on a prescription.”

“Once I was on it, I had to see

him every month for a blood test to get next month's prescription. It's really bad for your liver so I needed to get those checkups before I was able to get more.”

For eight months, Jack paid 60 euro a month for a blood test and another 60 euro for the medication itself from the pharmacy.

Despite the high cost and facing side effects like muscle pains and severely dry skin, Jack feels the process of taking Roaccutane was worth it “by a mile, the difference in me was huge, I was happier, way more confident. I'd recommend it to people considering it, but it is tough on the wallet, and I wouldn't want to underplay that.”



Roaccutane for acne treatment

HEALTHCARE

Nearly 1,500 patients waiting for dermatology appointments

BY HOLLY O'SULLIVAN

ALMOST half of those waiting on outpatient appointments at University Hospital Limerick are dermatology patients, latest figures have revealed.

Skin disease is one of the main reasons Irish people visit their general practitioner disease, according to the Health Service Executive (HSE) affecting over half the Irish population every year.

Approximately 65,000 people are referred annually to specialist dermatology departments.

In University Hospital Limerick (UHL) over 3,000 people are on waiting lists for over a year for outpatient medical appointments.

Of that figure some 1,425 are waiting to access dermatology services.

According to the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) there has been an increasing number of people on dermatology outpatient waiting lists across the country over the last number of years

Patients who wish to access services in UHL must be referred by their GP or a consultant before they are considered for the waiting list.

When contacted about the private service Dr Naomi Mackle,

Medical Director of the Adare Clinic, said waiting times for cases that require hospital intervention are still extremely long even for cases of skin cancer.

“We are still experiencing extremely long delays, even with biopsy proven skin cancer.”

“We try to see all GP referrals in our dermatology clinics within two weeks. With public referrals, to the public hospitals, we are still experiencing extremely long delays, even with biopsy proven skin cancer. Regarding general dermatology conditions that need hospital intervention, there is no improvement at all with waiting list, the waiting lists are really quite long.”

“I don't see any improvement in waiting lists for dermatology referrals. We would mostly need to refer to plastic surgery not dermatology but there is no plastic surgeon at all servicing the Limerick area as far as I know, certainly not within the public system.”

APPROXIMATELY 65,000 PEOPLE ARE REFERRED ANNUALLY TO SPECIALIST DERMATOLOGY DEPARTMENTS



University Hospital Limerick. Photo from Limerick.ie

OPERA SQUARE: SPARKING LIMERICK'S URBAN REVIVAL

First phase of €80million opera centre development set to be completed in April. Approximately 1000 jobs will be created by 2027



BY ALISON REEVES

LIMERICK is no stranger to change. Over the course of the last century, the city has undergone a number of both social and economic transformations.

As a result of large-scale suburban developments and the growth of the University of Limerick, the city has become one that is a far cry from Frank McCourt's bleak portrayal in Angela's Ashes.

However, this successful growth of satellite towns in Limerick has undoubtedly taken its toll on the city centre.

A once bustling hub for thriving local businesses, grocers, butchers and factories has now become a skeleton of what once was.

In January of this year alone, the city was met with the closure of yet another two retailers - a mere drop of water in a sea of decline.

Rows of 'To Let' and 'For Sale' signs are a becoming a sight all too familiar throughout the heart of Limerick city.

Between derelict retail sites and a declining resident population amidst a severe lack in accommodation, the emptiness in Ireland's third largest city is palpable.

With the current state of the city in mind, it might be difficult to see the incredible potential it holds for economic development.

However, work to transform Limerick from a struggling city centre to a vibrant and sustainable hub for innovation is underway, and it's hoped, realised by the end of the decade by Limerick Twenty-Thirty DAC.

At the heart of the Limerick Twenty-Thirty plan are five key strategic sites that will play a vital role in developing the region.

These include Troy Studios Film Hub, Gardens International,

Cleeves Riverside Quarter, and one of the main contributors to the revival of a thriving city community in Limerick, Opera Square.

One of the flagship projects of the plan, Opera Square will include a mix of commercial, retail, and hospitality units, including a six-storey office building.

“It's going to provide much needed investment to the city centre.”

Overall, the project is expected to accommodate approximately 1,000 employees once completed.

Speaking to the Limerick Voice, Chief Economist at Limerick Chamber Seán Golden, highlighted the advantages of the Opera Centre in the city.

“It's going to provide much needed investment to the city centre, it's going to be sustainably focused which feeds into potential tenants ESG strategy and there will be a number of uses from commercial to leisure space.”

The Opera Square development includes six one-bedroom apartments, the lack of residential accommodation in the multimillion-euro development is a concern, as highlighted by Mr Golden,

“It would have been great to see more worker friendly residential options on site to make it a truly mixed development and bring more people back living in the city centre.”

A spokesperson for Limerick Twenty-Thirty confirmed there are no plans to increase the amount of residential accommodation in the site.

In response to the lack of residential units in the development, a Limerick City and County Council spokesperson explained, “The Opera Site is one of a large number of developments being delivered by Limerick Twenty-Thirty DAC.

“As part of its master planning it has been subjected to detailed scrutiny and financial viability assessment that has determined the optimum mix of uses for the development.”

“These assessments have concluded that the site is best developed in the manner proposed with a small level of residential development incorporated into the proposal. The development of the Cleeves site will see a larger element of residential development being provided.”

As of now, work on the Opera Square project is progressing steadily.

While the commercial development reached its mid-point milestone in February 2024, the first phase of the development is set to be completed by April of this year, and the wider project completed by 2027.

After reaching roof level, the development celebrated its ‘topping out’ milestone, where Mayor of Limerick John Moran underlined the transformative impact of the project on both the local economy and the city's urban landscape.



Opera Square artist's impression



David Conway, Barry O'Sullivan, John Moran, Mayor of Limerick, Sarah Hickey, and Colin O'Grady. Photo: Arthur Ellis Photography

INFRASTRUCTURE

Long-awaited works on Adare Bypass begin in time for Ryder Cup

BY EVAN O'SHEA

WORK on the design and construction of the Adare bypass has been accelerated ahead of the Ryder Cup, scheduled to take place in two years' time.

The 7km Adare Bypass, now fast-tracked for completion by June 2027 - aims to address severe traffic congestion, improve safety, and reduce journey times in the region.

The Ryder Cup, scheduled to take place in Adare Manor in September 2027, has fast tracked the timeline for this crucial bypass which is due for completion in June 2027. The Government is investing €155m to deliver the 7km bypass, which aims to address severe traffic congestion, improve safety, and reduce journey times in the region.

The Adare Bypass forms part of the larger 35km Foynes-to-Limerick project.

Construction of the bypass has been prioritised to facilitate smoother traffic flow during the Ryder Cup, which

already has 25 working groups established to organise the Europe v USA competition. The bypass will divert non-essential traffic away from Adare, alleviating one of Ireland's most notorious bottlenecks. The motorway section must be operational by mid-2027, according to project requirements set by Limerick City and County Council. Discussions are also underway

with Irish Rail to introduce passenger services in the village during the tournament. Adare has long suffered from severe congestion, with over 17,000 vehicles passing through its narrow streets daily. On busy travel days, such as bank holiday weekends, this figure can rise to 25,000. Commuters and residents often face delays during peak hours, with travel times through the village stretching up to 30 minutes.

Fergal Johnson, a University of Limerick student who travelled weekly from Tralee by bus experienced many a delay in the Co Limerick village “The journey through Adare was always the worst part. It added at least 20 minutes to my commute most Mondays and even worse going home on Fridays. I'd have loved to see this bypass while I was in college—it would have made life so much easier.”

Adare's local businesses also stand to benefit. Fewer cars clogging the village will free up parking spaces, making Adare more accessible for visitors. This is critical as the Ryder Cup, an international golf event, is expected to draw over 250,000 visitors to the area. Local accommodations, restaurants, and other businesses are gearing up to cater for an influx of tourists, with some homeowners already renting out properties for staggering sums.

THE GOVERNMENT IS INVESTING €155M TO DELIVER THE 7KM BYPASS

Trauma to triumph: Natasha O'Brien's fight goes on

From 'normal girl' to 'fearless campaigner', *Limerick Voice* reporter meets Goss.ie's Woman of the Year continues to tackle violence against women



BY CATHERINE DUGGAN

FROM a life she once described as "absolutely normal," Natasha O'Brien was thrust into a whirlwind of trauma, public scrutiny, and personal growth that changed her forever. In 2022, the 24-year-old Limerick woman, was attacked by former soldier Cathal Crotty.

O'Brien was named Woman of the Year at the 2024 Goss.ie awards in recognition of her strength and courage in tackling the issue of violence against women in the Irish judicial system. Crotty received a suspended sentence for the 2022 attack which was greeted with public outrage.

"I went from a normal girl, living a normal life, to my life being turned upside down."

Natasha's life changed drastically after her experience, but amidst the chaos, she found her voice. That voice is now one of strength and advocacy which she projects during protests and on her online platforms that have grown as large as 27,000 followers.

It's a voice she uses not only for herself but for the countless others who have faced similar injustices. On Saturday February 9 she organised a protest in Limerick City to show solidarity with Joe Drennan's family in their #JusticeforJoe.

"It's so difficult when you experience a very unfortunate event," she said. "You end up having to deal with that trauma. But I did not quit, even though most of me wanted to. I just felt in my heart that I do not deserve this."

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Natasha O'Brien's journey has been one of self-discovery. Her story, filled with pain and resilience, is one she is determined to share - not just for her own sake but for the countless others who are still searching for their voice.

"I have lived to tell the tale, so let's tell it the best way I can, to minimize this kind of thing happening again" she insisted. Through her ongoing advocacy, Natasha O'Brien is doing just that.

She has become an advocate for making changes in the Irish law.

Through meetings with TD's Simon Harris, Mary Lou McDonald, and Helen McEntee she has begun to share her perspective on how legislations could be mod-

ernised. Cathal Crotty was given a three-year suspended sentence for "undue leniency" by judge Tom O'Donnell. This decision has since been appealed by the Director of Public Prosecutions Catherine Pierce after Crotty's official sentencing in June of 2024.

Regardless of the legislation that is set out in Irish law, it is the judge's job to interpret the legislation and decide on the sentencing.

The Irish Constitution which entered into force in 1937 has been amended just 32 times since, showing how rare and significant these changes are. However, October 2024 saw the Irish legal system introduce a new law around hate crime with the passing of the Criminal Justice (Hate Offences) Bill 2022.

The legislation, which increases penalties for crimes proven to be motivated by hatred against characteristics such as race, gender, disability, and sexual orientation, marks a significant step in tackling hate-motivated violence.

Former Justice Minister Helen McEntee described the law as "much needed" to protect vulnerable communities, emphasising

““I went from a normal girl, living a normal life, to my life being turned upside down”

its role in ensuring that hate-fuelled actions are met with stronger consequences.

O'Brien has a keen interest in politics and is frequently encouraging people to get involved. "Too Into You" is one of the organisations, which O'Brien has aligned with.

The group aims to instruct people about the differences between a healthy and unhealthy relationship, featuring the red flags to look for and a helpline.

Advocating for organizations like this has become her focus since leaving her positions as a health-care assistant and social media manager following the attack.

OBLIGATION TO FIGHT

She learned that she did not just have the right to stand up for herself - she had the obligation. This



Natasha O'Brien pictured at rally against gender-based violence on Bedford row, Limerick. Photo by Eamon Ward.

conviction did not come easily. O'Brien admits she once held a "naive outlook" on how she would be treated as a victim, assuming justice would prevail.

"I thought I would be heard," she reflected. But instead of retreating in disappointment, she found her inner strength, realising that no one could invalidate her experiences or feelings. "No one can take your experiences and your feelings away from you," she said, a mantra that helped her navigate through tough times.

Her experience opened her eyes to larger societal issues, such as femicide and misogyny.

"We have so many issues with femicide and misogyny in our society," she said. The fight is far bigger than any one individual, but O'Brien's personal journey has become a symbol of resistance and the power of speaking out.

"If it hasn't happened to you, you know someone it has happened to, and that's why it's so real."

STAYING TRUE TO YOURSELF

"You have to stay true to yourself and stand up for yourself," Natasha emphasises, acknowledging that this is not always easy. "For twenty-five years, I thought I

was too much, too outspoken, but when I hit rock bottom walking out of that courthouse, I stopped caring. I said, you know what... I am full volume now."

That decision to live "full volume" has been transformative, not only for her but for those around her. O'Brien has found her authenticity to stand out. "People really appreciate that I'm authentically myself because you can see through a facade straight away."

Her willingness to embrace her full self has made her an inspiration to many.

"Someone once told me, as long as it's how you feel, you will never be wrong because that is a unique experience"

O'Brien has taken the above piece of advice to heart. She uses her platform to remind others that their feelings are valid, their voices are important, and their experiences matter.

Now, O'Brien finds passion in the power of her voice. "Having this voice now just fills me with passion," she says, recognising the potential she must make a difference. "It's amazing to feel like I could possibly make a difference."

With every speech, every interview, and every public appearance, she makes an impact. "I represent so much more than just me."

NEWS

Traffic concerns for busy suburb as Towlertown development in Limerick expands

BY ALAN WHITE

A Limerick city councillor has claimed the further development of a brownfield site on the outskirts of the city will contribute to "traffic mayhem" in the busy suburb.

Kirkland Investments are seeking a minor change in the planning permission previously granted to the development project 'Towlerton' to increase the number of housing units built in the area.

Situated in City East, Limerick, the expansion will result in an increase from 40 homes to 48 homes if further planning permission is granted.

Due to the ongoing housing crisis, Cllr Sarah Beasley agreed that we need new builds however she believes we could learn from the Dutch housing model, where they build upwards. "We need new houses, we need new builds." the councillor stated.

In addition to this, a plan has been developed by Healy Partners which is set to bring 300 apartments, offices and a Lidl supermarket, which has already begun construction.

Cllr Beasley shared that planning should ensure that the new housing units will "compliment the high-density area without adding any extra pressure."

Cllr Beasley is also calling for more inner-city development which will counteract the 'donut effect', where city centres lose population and economic activity, while suburban areas expand.

"Limerick needs more inner-city development as they are "drying up very quickly" she shared.

Cllr Beasley has also warned about the impact of increased traffic in the area where traffic has already begun to build up during peak times.

"If you try and drive around the city at the moment it's just mayhem. Once the hospital opens, its going to bottleneck everything," Cllr Beasley explained.

"Everyone's trying to manoeuvre into different roads just to try and get away from the really heavy traffic that's occurring."

Kirkland Investments continue to work on the Brownfield site as Limerick Educate Together is in its second year of operation, while Bon Secours also has permission in place for a private hospital.

The developer is also involved in the construction of the long-standing vacant lot 'Horizon' located on Dublin Road, which they say has the potential for over 600k square foot of commercial space and around 700 residential units.

Features

Rare syndrome highlights shortfalls in support services

The mother of a 14-year-old boy with a rare genetic disorder has hit out at the lack of support available for people with rare symptoms, comparing Ireland to a third-world country



BY ALAN WHITE

CAROLINE O'Connor's son DJ suffers from Bardet-Biedl Syndrome (BBS) which is caused by mutations in at least 14 different genes. DJ, born with extra fingers and toes - a characteristic feature of BBS - faced significant health challenges from the beginning of his life. At just eight days old, he experienced his first eye infection, and by his first year, he was battling heavy respiratory issues.

Frequent seizures followed until the age of three.

"Both me and his dad were tested, and we share the same gene, BBS6," explains Caroline, DJ's mother. "It's very rare."

Despite years of advocating for her son, Caroline says she has struggled to secure the medical support he needs. "Ireland isn't educated enough about rare syndromes or diseases," she says, highlighting the lack of understanding within the healthcare system.

DJ has been waiting for a medical procedure for eight years, with his case repeatedly delayed due to limited knowledge of the syndrome. Caroline

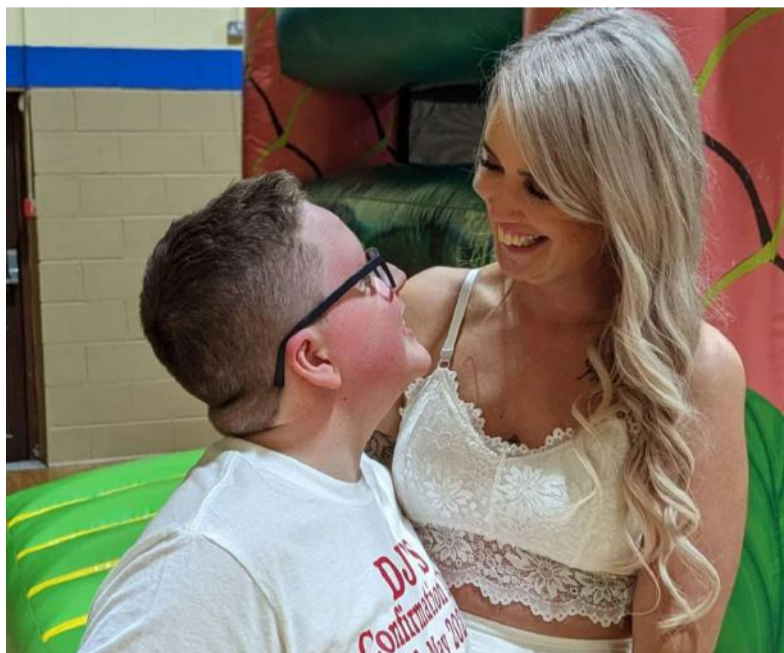
“We're like a third-world country when it comes to education on syndromes.”

expresses her frustration: "They don't know the syndrome, so they keep pushing it off."

"We're like a third-world country when it comes to education on syndromes."

Heart failure is one of the severe effects of Bardet-Biedl Syndrome. Despite this, DJ's heart has only been checked once in 14 years.

"Doctors here don't want to take on his case because of how complex the syndrome is. If we were in the UK, it would have to be checked yearly," she adds.



Caroline and son, DJ on his Confirmation Day: Photo provided by Caroline O' Connor

She also describes the difficulty of transferring DJ to a paediatrician, as doctors are too uninformed: "They want to transfer him to a paediatrician,

THE disorder is caused by changes in the BBS genes, resulting in a wide range of effects throughout the body. Some of these effects include, extra toes or fingers (polydactyly), vision impairment, and intellectual disabilities.

the waiting list for that can be one to two years, and that paediatrician might not be able to do that."

DJ began experiencing night blindness at three years old, another symptom of the syndrome. Over the years, his vision has continued to deteriorate. "The syndrome is attacking his retina," Caroline explains. "His peripheral vision is completely gone, and now his central vision is closing in. He could lose up to 100% of his sight."

Despite these challenges, DJ remains determined. Caroline shares her son's biggest fear is that he will be forgotten if he loses his sight.

"DJ's eyes are the last thing people

will worry about."

Caroline says, "he wants to live the teenager life independently, but we're at the stage where he's going to need a lot more support, she explains, "I find there isn't enough services down this way."

However, she also sees growth in his confidence. "He's learning to be proud of himself," she says. "He used to worry about when the syndrome would take over, but now he's proud of his independence."

STATISTICS for BBS syndrome are based on UK data, not Irish. While the data suggests that one in 50,000 to one in 100,000 children are born with this syndrome, the numbers do not accurately reflect the situation in Ireland.



SCAN QR CODE TO READ MORE

Limerick accessibility often fails disabled residents

BY MAGDALENA TANNEBERGER

DESPITE progress in urban development, Limerick city's infrastructure remains fraught with challenges for visually impaired and mobility-impaired residents. Understandably a source of criticism from disability advocates.

Robbie Sinnott, co-ordinator for Voice of Vision, an advocacy group for the visually impaired, has criticized the city's infrastructure. "It's appalling. Limerick city is the worst," he states.

Speaking about recent planning developments including continuous footways and bike lanes which have been prioritized over other traffic.

"None of this is functional for visually disabled people," Sinnott remarks, "Many of our members depend on cars." He also notes that bike lanes without clear separation pose risks for visually impaired pedestrians.

A major concern is the plaza in front of Colbert Railway Station, where Sinnott says there is no curb or marker between the plaza and the street, posing a serious hazard. "Streets wider than three meters are difficult for us to navigate," he says, adding that he is troubled that this layout is being considered as a model for Galway Train Station.

Sinnott criticized the Act of Travel Initiative, calling it "reckless planning" and noting that Voice of Vision, the only representative group for visually impaired individuals, was never consulted on these projects.

While accessibility for the visually impaired remains an issue, advocates for residents with mobility difficulties report some improvements. Rose Servitova, a Supported Employment Officer from Avista living and working in Limerick, highlights new crosswalks and flattened footpaths at crossings as beneficial changes.

Servitova also noted that people with Avista perceived upgrades at Colbert Station positively, "I was told that it feels safer, with better lighting and more signage," adding that these changes make it "more accessible."

However, other obstacles persist.

Rita Hughes and Lorraine Kelly, who have a mobility disability, mention narrow, slanted, and uneven footpaths with high steps as continuing challenges. They pointed to Parkway Roundabout as especially problematic, noting. "I put my hand up" to signal cars to stop, states Hughes.

Short-timed traffic lights also create difficulties.

Hughes and Kelly highlighted additional barriers from illegally parked cars and reckless scooter riders.

Hughes explains that high curbs often prevent her from stepping onto the road to bypass illegal parked cars, limiting safe mobility for those with disabilities.

In response to accessibility concerns, Limerick City & County Council's Active Travel team emphasized their commitment to upgrading walking, wheeling, and cycling infrastructure while adhering to national and international accessibility standards.

They also highlighted recent equality training with the Disability Federation of Ireland and the development of a dedicated Accessibility Strategy, currently under internal review, which aims to create a more inclusive environment across Limerick.



SCAN QR CODE TO READ MORE

INSIDE: Rise of sustainable fashion in Limerick

FEATURES PAGE 20



From the Treaty City to fresh starts: Limerick's emigration journey

As emigration from Ireland continues to rise, *Limerick Voice* reporters **Ailish Armstrong** and **Alan White** spoke to three young women who left Limerick for London, Australia, and Dubai in search of new opportunities. They discuss their individual experiences whilst maintaining deep connection with their roots on Irish soil.



EMER O'DONNELL FROM LIMERICK TO LONDON

LIMERICK native Emer O'Donnell made the move to London in 2022. Despite getting a job when she graduated, Emer had the urge to explore the vibrant professional scene that the UK had to offer.

"I wasn't enjoying my time at home. I was working in a job in Limerick that I was lucky to get but I wasn't feeling that satisfied in it - I wondered if this was the best I could get."

Emer began her job search and quickly realised how much the UK had to offer.

"I landed on moving to London. I applied for a couple of jobs and a really good opportunity came up."

The TUS Business graduate

- who works in recruitment - explained that she saw more opportunity in her role in the UK than in Ireland. While she explained that jobs do exist, it is just much more difficult to move beyond that.

"The job that I got in London definitely exists in Ireland, but the scope of clients and opportunities that I got from that role definitely don't".

Alongside Emer in 2022, almost 14,000 Irish people also emigrated to the UK seeking job prosperity and overall lifestyle change. However, the Irish always find a way to stay connected. Emer quickly found herself surrounded by familiar accents and faces. "I'm incredibly lucky that

there's a lot of Irish people in London, so it makes it a lot easier. Even for instance, my spin instructor Kevin from Cork, hosts a spin class every Sunday. It's just really nice. It's always full of Irish and everyone just has a laugh."

Looking back on her decision to emigrate, Emer is confident it was the right choice for her career and personal life. "I've since moved into another job that I wouldn't have got in Ireland without this experience," she says. "The company I work for now operates in Ireland too, so if I do want to move home eventually, I'll have transferable experience. It's been really positive for my career."

51% OF
TEACHERS HIRED IN
THE PAST DECADE
WOULD CONSIDER
MOVING ABROAD

IRISH PROFESSIONALS LEAVING: BY NUMBERS

In 2019, data from the Irish Medical Council revealed that 61% of Irish medical graduates intended to leave Ireland to practice medicine.

In 2022 alone, 442 Irish doctors had received temporary work visas for Australia.

A 2024 poll by the Teachers' Union of Ireland found that 51 percent of teachers hired within the past decade would consider leaving to teach abroad. The survey, conducted online in March, included 736 members.



ALEX O'SULLIVAN LIVING LIFE DOWN UNDER

AUSTRALIA has become a hot spot for Irish people and it's not just the weather. The CSO reported in 2024 that an estimated 10,600 emigrated to Australia, which is the highest number recorded since 2013.

Alex O'Sullivan (pictured on left) is included in this estimate, as she moved to Sydney, Australia in July 2024, just over seven months ago. The Kerry native graduated from Technological University of Shannon in 2021. She moved to Australia to broaden her horizons on culture, and to escape the "mundane" lifestyle in Ireland, stating, "there

wasn't much happening, I needed a change."

Alex is a healthcare support worker for people with disabilities. "Even though my job is the same as home, I feel my life is more enhanced," she says. Although Alex had the same job in Ireland, the differences between the same job are noticeable. "I can progress more in my job in Sydney as there are more opportunities here."

"I HAVE LESS RESPONSIBILITIES HERE AND I'M EARNING THREE TIMES MORE THAN I WOULD IN IRELAND"

"I have less responsibilities here and I'm earning three times more than I would in Ireland" says Alex.

She further explains that jobs in Ireland are more stagnant. To progress in Ireland, people need to take extra courses or training. In Sydney, it is easier to progress in a job without further qualifications.

Moving away from home can be difficult emotionally. The simplicities of hearing an Irish accent

or seeing Irish themed businesses can remind people of home. Alex discusses the Irish community and the ways she makes Sydney home away from home. "I feel like Irish people have a real sense of togetherness when they come together in places that aren't home, it's really comforting."

Alex has some bad days, sharing the support Irish people have given her while in Sydney. "I think we're really good at making sure we're all keeping well, especially because we're so far. It gives me a sense of home when I have hard days."



SOPHIE GILSON FROM MARY I TO DUBAI

TWENTY-THREE-YEAR-OLD Sophie Gilson, a graduate of Mary Immaculate College, made a life-changing move to Dubai in August 2023, just three months after completing her degree in early years education. For Sophie, Dubai offered unique opportunities unavailable in Ireland.

"If I was in Ireland, I wouldn't be able to do the job I'm doing now on a full-time contract. I would've had to stay in Ireland and do a master's in education or a Hibernia," she explains.

Her degree qualifies her to work

with children up to the age of seven, but in Ireland, further qualifications would have been necessary to secure similar employment. In Dubai, Sophie bypassed this hurdle and began her teaching career immediately.

However, Sophie's move abroad doesn't mean she's turned her back on Ireland. "I definitely will return to Ireland at some stage. I don't know when though, because mov-

"IN MY CASE, AS A TEACHER, WE'RE GIVEN AN APARTMENT. I DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT RENT PRICES."

ing to Dubai has changed my perspective on what I want to do," she reflects.

Like many young people in their twenties and thirties, Sophie faced the growing challenge of Ireland's housing crisis. The perks offered to teachers in Dubai were a significant factor in her decision to move. "In my case, as a teacher, we're given an apartment. I don't have to worry about rent prices, which is obviously unheard of at home," she says.

Despite being thousands of miles away, Sophie has found meaningful ways to stay connected to her homeland.

"There's such a big Irish community in Dubai. I started back playing Gaelic football, which has been a great way to stay involved. Of course, there are lots of Irish pubs here too, and they often host events," she added.

For Sophie, Dubai isn't just a stepping stone in her career - it's a place that has broadened her horizons while keeping her ties to home alive.

Conquering the Seven Summits: One climber's epic journey to the top of the world

A Limerick based PhD student is on track to join an elite group of climbers who have scaled the highest peaks on all seven continents.



BY ERIN STEVENS

ANDY Nolan has already completed six of the seven highest summits on each continent, having climbed Vinson Massif in Antarctica in January.

With only Mount Everest in the Himalayas to triumph, Andy has previously tackled Mount Kilimanjaro in Africa (5,895m), Mount Elbrus on the Europe and Russian border (5,642m), Mount Aconcagua in South America (6,961m), Mount Kosciuszko in Australia (2,228m) and Mount Denali, Alaska, in May 2024 (6,194m).

When he completes the final challenge, he will become the 15th Irish person ever to complete the seven summits challenge. The 'Seven Summits Challenge' was first completed by American Dick Bass in 1985 and has currently only been completed by about 500 people worldwide.

In 2018, Nolan completed his first ascent, Mount Kilimanjaro, in aid of the Irish Cancer Society, after he "convinced a work colleague of [his] at the time to put a charity spin on it and train with [him]". The part-time UL lecturer enjoyed the experience and decided to try to become a part of the exclusive 'Seven Summits Challenge' club.

Despite successfully completing six out of seven climbs, Nolan has faced many challenges. From training while completing a PhD, re-organising climbs around the Covid 19 pandemic, to an airline losing his luggage and a major injury which took months to recover from.

After completing Mount Denali, the mountaineer broke his leg and ankle, having to undergo multiple operations, he described having a "euphoria" feeling knowing he would recover. He continued explaining that "it wasn't until the end

“ We receive minimal state funding annually so donations and fundraising like Andy's are our main source of income.

of last year, the end of 2023, that [he] was able to walk again”.

This major injury did not stop the Cork native as he tackled Mount Kosciuszko in January 2023, describing the climb as "really easy", following it with Mount Aconcagua a few months later in May 2023. When describing his mentality towards the challenges, Nolan said, "I don't tend to dwell on it, ... I forget about stuff really quickly and its on to the next one”.

Along with Mount Aconcagua, the quality engineer raised money for the Laura Lynn Foundation, a hospice for children with life-limiting conditions and residential care for children and young adults with disabilities. For his first two mountains, Nolan decided to raise money for the Irish Cancer Society.

For his most recent summit challenge, he chose to fundraise for The Children's Grief Centre in Ballinacorra, Limerick. The centre is a support service for school-aged children and young people who have experienced a major loss in their lives due to death, separation, or divorce.

The Children's Grief Centre was founded by Sister Helen Culhane, a Sister of Mercy, as well as a qualified social worker and psychotherapist, in 2009. Sister Culhane found there was a lack of services and support for

children experiencing loss in the Mid-West and decided to open the first Grief Centre in Limerick city.

Speaking to the Limerick Voice, Carol Fitz-Gough, Fundraising & Events Coordinator for the Children's Grief Centre, said "The Children's Grief Centre is so appreciative of fundraising events such as Andy's climb. The service we provide to children and families affected by loss is free of charge. We receive minimal state funding annually so donations and fundraising like Andy's are our main source of income.”

She continued by saying, "It's a real privilege to be supported by Andy as he takes on this immense challenge. Andy has been working hard fundraising for our service as well as working full time and also trying to fit in his training schedule for the climb in December.”

Mr. Nolan plans to complete his final adventure in April of 2026 to allow time to find corporate sponsorship while also fundraising for another local charity. Following on from his hopeful success, the PHD student is planning to become one of the first people to complete both the Seven Summits Challenge and the Six Major Marathons, where athletes complete the six biggest marathons across the world including Tokyo, Boston and London.

AFTER HE COMPLETES THE FINAL CHALLENGE, HE WILL BECOME THE 15TH IRISH PERSON EVER TO COMPLETE THE SEVEN SUMMITS CHALLENGE.



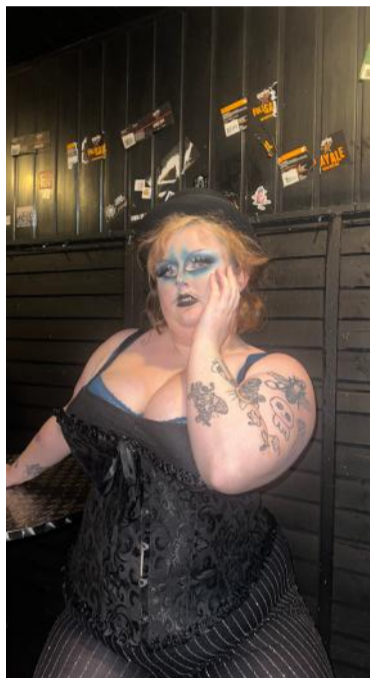
Andy Nolan on Mount Denali, North America



Andy Nolan on Mount Vinson

Limerick's drag scene dazzles and delivers

Limerick is 'more than beer and rugby': that's the view of one local publican who hosts several events for the city's growing drag community. Stewart Lyons owner of the Wickham insists his venue is a safe place for queer artists to express their love of drag. *Limerick Voice* reporter **Aoife McDarby** meets some of those involved in the drag queen community to find out how they started in the industry.



ASHLEY AWE TISM - @ASHLEYAWETISM

A native of Caherdavin, Ashley is an autistic drag queen who also suffers from an eye condition called oculogyric crisis. Despite these challenges, the 19-year-old is a talented drag queen who does not let these challenges interfere or define her as a queen.

Ashley also struggled with dysphasia growing up and uses drag to express her hyper femininity and gender. Ashley's experience in the drag community is a weird one for her, as she mentions there is "such a barrier for new performers to enter."

Ashley has started her own show 'Taste of Androgyny' which was made specifically to help new per-

formers debut and more importantly to "foster a safer environment for younger drag queens."

Ashley suffers from one particular side effect of the anti-psychotic drug she takes, called oculogyric crisis which leads to Ashley not being able to move her eye that well.

"[My eyes] just roll into the back of my head and it takes a lot of effort to move them down" she says. "When I'm Ashley I'm very confident."

She continues to say that she "loves performing, it's truly my biggest passion" and her world would end if she had to stop for any reason. "I'm not going to let my anxiety about being unsafe hold me back."



KARMA - @THEKARMAOHARA DOWN UNDER

KARMA is a 20-year-old drag queen originally from Cork, now living in Limerick city. The queen took inspiration from the movie 'Hurricane Bianca' which featured a diva named Karma, played by Bianca Leigh.

She's also "a firm believer in karma", so it seemed fitting.

She was always into theatre when growing up and that's what kick started her interest in drag. Karma's introduction to the Limerick drag scene arrived in 2019, when she performed at Limerick Pride for the first time. "Stunning, sassy,

talented and most all, kind" is how she described the Limerick drag queens, noting that there were not many local queens at the time.

Karma's experience in Limerick has mainly been positive. "We've received so much love and support from Limerick." However, there is another side to those who don't approve of the drag community.

"As queens and queer artists, we are trained to fight against the bigotry and support our community," Karma says, as she continues to express herself through drag.



MS BLISS - @MSBL_ISS

MS Bliss (pictured on right) is a 37-year-old drag queen from Limerick city.

Ms. Bliss wants the audience to be fully captivated by her drag act and be filled with joy, Ms. Joy did not have the same ring to it, so Ms. Bliss was born.

She was a drag fan long before anyone heard of RuPaul's Drag Race. She grew up admiring the "real OG queens of Limerick." Madonna Lucia, and Alternative Miss Ireland Sheila Fitzpatrick.

She recalls attending the first ever pride in Limerick and being captivated by their performances and the art of drag itself.

"I have to say I have never felt so

accepted and welcomed into the Limerick community and the Cork community where I worked and performed for seven years." She adds that there is "nothing sweeter than performing on your home turf," even though Limerick isn't as well known for its drag scene compared to cities such as Dublin and Cork.

Ms Bliss still feels "We are clawing our way and making our mark with so many alternative shows, and kings and queens popping up around Limerick."

With Wickham Way at the heart of many events, Limerick's drag scene continues to flourish, proving that the city's culture is as bold and vibrant as its queens.



EVENTS

Excitement building for 2025 Limerick St. Patrick's Day

BY DARRAGH MOLONEY

LIMERICK St Patrick's festival is promising a lot more fun according to the theme for this year's festivities.

"Delivering more for Limerick is the key ambition of Limerick City and County Council and that includes having more fun, so I am incredibly excited about this year's St. Patrick's festival theme. 'A More Fun Limerick' perfectly captures the essence of our community," explains Limerick Mayor John Moran.

"It is why we all love living here. We now look forward to seeing everyone come together to celebrate in a way that truly reflects the spirit of Limerick."

The city is set to transform into a sea of colour over the March bank holiday weekend, with the iconic St. Patrick's Day parade set to welcome big crowds on March 17.

The parade is set to follow the same route as 2024, making its way down O'Connell Street before moving on to Henry Street and ending at Arthur's Quay Park.

There are street per-

formances and cultural showcases planned for the festival, including the 53rd Limerick International Band Championship due to take place on Sunday, March 16. The public are invited to a musical jamboree at Arthur's Quay Park after the International Band Championship parade on the Sunday.

While the parade follows the same route as last year, the start point has moved to the junction of O'Connell Street and Barrington Street.

The universal access area for both parades is at The Crescent on O'Connell Street.

Elsewhere, Limerick native Michael Benn has been selected as the Grand Marshal of next year's New York City St Patrick's Day Parade.

Born in 1948, Benn emigrated to the United States in 1962 and has been heavily involved in the Irish community in New York.

The New York City Saint Patrick's Day Parade is the oldest and largest St. Patrick's Day Parade in the world.



WANT to find out more
Wickham Way?
SCAN the QR code

Limerick-based Russian dancer combining culture and community

Alex Vostokova is a 21-year-old dancer, who is mentoring up and coming dancers as part of her new role as Limerick's recently appointed Compass Associate Artist.

BY HOLLY O'SULLIVAN



Compass Associate Artist Alex Vostokova Photo: Darren Kenna

THE dancer, based both in Limerick and Dublin, began her artistic story in Izhevsk, Russia- where she developed her love for dance and theatre.

"I started dancing because I wanted to be a gymnast as a kid and there was never really an opportunity to do that," Vostokova begins.

"I continue dancing because it opened me to so many wonderful people and served as a mode of connection when otherwise there would have been a language barrier."

Dance has always been important to her; "It's a very resilient art form and there's something about carrying your medium with you wherever you go."

Vostokova engages with many different mediums of dance, in-

cluding both contemporary dance and Krump - a popular dance form, expressed through rapid, flowing movements.

"My practice is very much improv based, so I sometimes lose track of what type of dance it is that I'm doing," she says. 'But technically I've a background in contemporary dance and I've started getting into Krump in the past year or so.'

The Russian born dancer first made her solo debut '3 Sides to Shuji and Why He's All Alone Again', at the Irish Youth Dance Festival in 2021.

Since then, she has embarked on many different dancing endeavours; including performing 'Within This Party' by Stereo 48 Dance Company in France and Belgium in 2023, and in 'Palimpsest'

with the CoisCéim Dance Theatre. Progressing to directing was an essential move for Vostokova, who describes this shift as a natural extension.

"Movement is never a passive act in terms of creativity, so branching into directing and choreography is just an extension of that for

“It's a very resilient art form and there's something about carrying your medium with you wherever you go.”

me. It's not really a separate thing. Also, I enjoy giving the body a break sometimes," she admits.

In October 2024, she was appointed as Limerick's Compass Associate Artist for 2024/2025. The Irish World Academy along with Dance Ireland put out a call for dancers around Ireland, looking for those who wanted to forge a long-lasting relationship between the cultural side of Limerick and dance. A call to which Vostokova answered.

"I was due to start research and development for 'Logic of Wrong and Rehearsed Carelessness' anyway. The open call kind of came at the perfect time and opened up the possibility to spend much longer supported time on this proj-

ect," she recalls.

'Logic of Wrong and Rehearsed Carelessness' is a dance centred all around expression and movement.

The position of Compass Associate Artist allows the dancer to explore the arts creatively, while working closely with fellow dance artists and musicians.

In this role she has, and will continue to, immerse herself in Limerick's Dance community and the city's community itself.

"I'm delighted for this collaboration and grateful for Dance Limerick's support and trust in my proposal, I look forward to [further] engaging with the communities in Limerick."

"A bridge between cultures": Dancer describes bringing together Irish and Mexican dance styles in Limerick



Yovanna Torres photographed by Anne Sophie Gigan

BY ERIN STEVENS

YOVANNA Torres Blanco, Luna Celta Dance founder, discovered her passion for Riverdance when she was a teenager, following years of learning Flamenco and Mexican Folk dancing.

Originally from Mexico City, the dancer first opened Luna Celta Dance in Guadalajara, Mexico, 2011.

Upon receiving a scholarship to undergo a master's degree in Irish Dance Performance at the Irish World Academy in the University of Limerick (UL), Blanco opened Luna Celta Dance in Limerick city. "It allowed me to connect with an international community eager to explore Irish and other cultural dance traditions", explains the performer.

The self-taught traditional Irish

dancer began teaching the style in Mexico, whereupon she discovered a lack of tutors in the country.

Blanco credits being self-taught for driving her passion for teaching, describing it as a "challenging learning process." She gained confidence in teaching and continued to do

so after her move to Limerick; "I found a home in the city's vibrant international community."

The sense of community and ability to watch students grow confidence in their craft is what inspires the Mexican native to continue teaching.

"I'm also proud of how Luna Celta serves as a bridge between cultures", says Blanco.

Continuing, she acknowledges the encouragement she has felt, "The support and enthusiasm from the international community in Limerick reaffirms the importance

of sharing these beautiful dance forms."

Aside from Luna Celta, Torres Blanco is involved with many other cultural events in Limerick. She is the co-founder of Viva la Vida, Limerick's first Latin American festival, an event which aspires to exhibit Latin American culture while incorporating Irish culture.

It has earned much recognition since its creation in 2019, such as the Creative Ireland's Made in Limerick grant and the Stepping Stone Scholarship.

After recently completing her master's degree from UL, and expanding her knowledge of the different dance cultures, the Luna Celta Dance founder hopes to encourage more people to dance regardless of their age, experience, or background. She explains, "It's not about perfection but about enjoying the process, feeling the music and allowing yourself to experience the joy that movement brings."

"IT'S NOT ABOUT PERFECTION BUT ABOUT ENJOYING THE PROCESS, FEELING THE MUSIC..."

From campus to CEO: UL alumni start-up success

University of Limerick graduates are turning bold ideas into thriving businesses



BY LEAH HOGARTY



Seán Leddin promoting his brand on the streets

SEÁN LEDDIN FÍOR JEWELLERY

AT just 22 years old, Limerick-based entrepreneur Seán Leddin is already making waves in the jewellery industry with his brand, Fíor Jewellery. A proud Gaeilgeoir, Seán has a deep passion for Irish heritage, which he has woven into his brand's identity— from its name to its unique designs. Fíors tarnish free claddagh rings and Irish pendant necklaces have become a popular gift for the Irish diaspora, offering a meaningful way for people abroad to stay connected to their roots.

Seán's entrepreneurial journey started early. While still in school, he dabbled in various small businesses, teaching himself how to set up e-commerce stores through YouTube tutorials.

However, it was his experience living abroad during his third year of International Business at the University of Limerick that truly inspired Fíor Jewellery.

"When I lived in Nice, I was working in an Irish bar, but I had nothing apart from my accent to show where I was from. I thought it would be a nice idea to have something small on me, so I got a few samples and got

feedback from people, and it gave me confidence to start the business."

The business name is with thanks to Seán's sister Emma; "The name Fíor, means true or real in Irish, when she suggested it, I felt it coaligned with the business idea of keeping a true or real sense of home with you at all times."

What started as a small project, quickly grew into a thriving business. Seán recalls a stand-out moment—the Fíor Jewellery x Whack Vintage pop-up shop in the Crescent Shopping Centre, which he co-hosted with Oisín Fahy.

"Seeing something you started from your attic a couple of years ago, to having people fill up a shop to look at your products, it's really surreal."

Seán's ambition doesn't stop at jewellery. He has recently launched his second venture, 'Perfect Scent 4 U', alongside two friends. This on-the-go fragrance brand features an atomiser with three interchangeable scents.

"I've applied the same business model from Fíor to this new venture, and I'm hopeful it will be just as successful."

LIMERICK is quickly becoming a hotspot for young, dynamic businesses, with university graduates opting to pursue their own ventures.

The University of Limerick in particular, has become a breeding ground for entrepreneurial talent, producing graduates who are making waves in the business world.

These alumni, armed with innovative ideas and a strong sense of purpose are making their mark on Limerick's vibrant business landscape. Coming from diverse backgrounds, each of them have forged their own path to success.

From vintage fashion to local eateries, their path from university to entrepreneurship is one

filled with creativity, resilience, and determination.

Their success stories serve as inspiration for future graduates, reinforcing the idea that with the right support, entrepreneurship can be a viable and rewarding career choice.

FOLLOW ALONG ON THEIR JOURNEY ON INSTAGRAM!

@FIORJEWELLERY_
@WHACKVINTAGE
@THEPOPPYCUP
@ACES_LIMERICK



OISÍN FAHY WHACK VINTAGE

OISÍN Fahy spotted a niche market for vintage clothing and sustainable fashion while studying Sports and Exercise Science in UL. In early 2020, Whack Vintage came to life.

It started as a Depop drop every Tuesday - where broke students would spend their Covid payments on stylish 'old' clothes. When students returned on campus, he decided to reach out to the UL Student Life team to create Ireland's first ever on campus vintage clothing market.

"The success in UL helped us to expand our market, now we visit colleges in Galway and Cork with our pop-up market on a regular basis."

After graduating, an opportunity arose to open a permanent Whack Vintage store in Limerick's Milk Market, where the shop now operates Friday to Sunday. Despite having a physical location, Whack Vintage continues to host pop-up markets across Ireland while maintaining a strong online presence.

In early 2023, Oisín took his entrepreneurial spirit one step further by creating The Ivory Ele-



Oisín Fahy at the Milk Market, Limerick.
Photo by Mark Kochetkov.

phant Market - a platform to promote small Irish businesses.

"I wanted to put local jewellers, artists, food vendors, and fashion brands in the spotlight."

Since launching in March 2023, the market has grown rapidly, now with over 20 vendors. Held several Sundays throughout the year at The Milk Market, the most recent event took place on February 9, drawing a strong crowd of shoppers eager to support Irish businesses.

To meet increasing demand,

Oisín has hired his first full-time employee, a UL Co-op student, to help streamline stock management and e-commerce operations.

"It's pretty scary, being responsible for paying a full-time wage to someone but it's what we need to do in order for the business to expand."

With a keen eye for opportunity and a drive to innovate, Oisín Fahy is shaping the future of sustainable fashion while championing local businesses across Ireland.



Evelyne Mancassola at her graduation. Photo by Arthur Ellis

EVELYNE MANCASSOLA THE POPPY CUP

EVELYNE Mancassola, owner of The Poppy Cup Café in Adare, is a shining example of young entrepreneurial spirit. While still in her final year of her International Business degree at the University of Limerick, Evelyne took the bold step of opening her own café. Balancing the demands of business with her academic studies seemed like no problem for Evelyne, who managed to graduate last August with a 1:1.

“Starting it in my final year made me more resilient... I had deadlines to meet in college and The Poppy Cup was always on my mind, but I made it work.”

Evelyne is no stranger to the world of hospitality, she grew up working in her parents’ café, Stacpoole Coffee House, where she learned all the tricks of the trade. When they sold the business in late 2023, it gave her the push she needed to open her own.

“It really gave me an itch, they were finished with it, but I wasn’t.”

She took out a lease on a small unit on Station Road in Adare in January, and by February 16, The Poppy Cup opened its doors.

Now celebrating its first anniversary, The Poppy Cup has flourished, with Evelyne leading her dedicated team of ‘Poppy Cup girls.’

“We’ve grown from strength to strength, it’s not just a café in Adare. I’d like to think I’ve created a Poppy Cup community...” she shares.

Collaboration is at the heart of this community. Evelyne has teamed up with other local business owners to host events. Evelyne and Aoife Lennon, who owns Vanilla Matcha Pilates came together to host multiple sold out ‘Poppy’s P’lattes’ events, bringing like-minded young people together to meet new friends through exercise.

Her latest project, ‘Poppy’s Park Runs,’ is set to launch soon, encouraging people to stay active while building friendships.

Evelyne has her heart set on making the café become award-winning.

“We asked our customers to vote for us in the Irish Times Restaurant Awards in the ‘Best use of social media’, ‘Best newcomer’ and ‘Best cafe’ categories. Fingers crossed that something comes of it...”

They’ve also hosted events with ‘The Anxious Girls Society’ - reinforcing its mission to be more than just a café, but a place where people can meet and feel safe, secure and welcome. Their most recent ‘paint and sip’ Galentine’s event on February 9, was a real success.



ACES Brothers in their restaurant
Photo by Anne Marie Roberts

AARON & CONSTANTINE DOHERTY ACES

AARON and Constantine (Con) Doherty, brothers and business partners from Westport in County Mayo, are the dynamic duo behind Castletroy’s exciting tapas restaurant - ACES. Both graduates of the University of Limerick, the Doherty brothers, returned to the city after completing their studies, drawn by Limerick’s entrepreneurial opportunities.

“While we were students, we were thinking of opening a nightclub for students in Castletroy to prevent students from having to go into town.”

Neither of the lads had any hospitality experience so they turned to friends in the hospitality industry who showed them the tricks of the trade. However, post-Covid they noticed the decline in the nightclub industry and decided to switch up the idea to work in a changing Castletroy.

They both loved their time in UL, where Con studied Product Design and Aaron studied Sports Science, Con explained; “It’s great to be able to put something on the doorsteps of it that’s adding value. There are very little recreational amenities in Castletroy for people with a bit more disposable income.”

The brothers spotted a unique opportunity and decided to open Castletroy’s first and only

tapas restaurant. “Tapas allows people to be more laid back and relaxed in the setting, and we can focus on the taste as the portions are small. The fact that you can share food brings the cost down for our customers.”

When choosing a name, they decided to include their other brothers. ACES is an anagram of Aaron ,Con, Ethan and Sean. “Our younger brother Ethan is still in college, but he works in the restaurant, Sean was home from China when we were trying to pick a name, and he suggested it.”

All four brothers play a role in the restaurant.

When it comes to the managing dynamics Con and Sean work well together; “90% of things we agree upon but there’s 10% of things that we’re poles apart, but at the end of the day we typically come to a really good solution.”

Con attributes some of the businesses success to their sporting careers; “We were both high performance athletes, Aaron was a cyclist, and I was a triathlete.

“We both competed at world levels - we took this commitment to excellence from sport and now we apply it to our business”

ACES has been open just over a year now, and the brothers are already excited at the idea of expanding in the future.

“90% OF THINGS WE
AGREE UPON BUT
THERE’S 10% OF
THINGS THAT WE’RE
POLES APART”

SCAN THE QR CODE
TO CHECK OUT THE
LIMERICK VOICE
FEATURE PAGE



BUSINESS

The growth of SOS cookies

BY AOIFE MCDARBY

SOS cookies is a bakery based in Limerick that sells all things sweet treats, be it cookies, birthday cakes or brownies.

Sarah O’Sullivan opened in December of 2020 and has reached new heights in her career since then. SOS was founded in Limerick city but now the business is available all over the country.

They have a shop in the Milk Market as well as now having three locations in Dublin. SOS cookies also offer an online delivery shop and stock lists.

Sarah started up the business due to her love for baking and her story is inspirational with her production almost doubling in just one year from 300,000 in 2023 to 500,000 cookies by the end of 2024.

SOS Cookies is now supplied in over 40 cafés nationwide as well as opening three permanent locations in Dublin: Arnotts, Dundrum Town Centre and Swords Pavilions.

“Having a great passion for what you do,” is the most important thing for wanting to start a business, says Sarah.

“We didn’t think, we would be seeing the growth we’ve seen in the last couple of years.”

SOS Cookies has gone from what started as a mere lockdown pastime to an empire that is on its way to making a €1 million profit for the young entrepreneur.

Remarkably in 2024, O’Sullivan’s team has grown from six to 35 people.

SOS cookies have received huge support around the city and country, and O’Sullivan’s Instagram account has amassed over 21,000 followers.

Hoping to further expand the reach of SOS Cookies - Sarah has big plans for the company in the future.

“I want to bring SOS cookies to as many people as possible”.



SOS Cookies photo by Laoise Moggan

Beyond trends: Why consumers are choosing sustainability over fast fashion



BY AILBHE MCHALE

ACCORDING to Oxfam Ireland, over 60,000 tonnes of textiles end up in Irish landfills each year. Ireland is one of the most wasteful countries in Europe. The textile industry produces more carbon emissions than air traffic and international shipping combined; making fast fashion one of the biggest problems in society currently.

As awareness grows, consumers are shifting their focus to sustainability - and Limerick is emerging as a prominent hub for this movement.

In recent years, there has been an increase in the popularity of sustainable fashion. "I think people are waking up to the harm that fast

fashion does - not just to the environment but to the workers producing these clothes," says Gracie Collier; founder of Spice Vintage, a sustainable clothing brand.

In 2017, this enterprising entrepreneur opened her first pop-up in Cork, before opening her second location in Limerick city, at just 26 years of age.

Sustainable shopping is no longer a niche trend, but rather a growing movement that is reshaping how we think about our wallets, our wardrobes, and our world.

Limerick has become the Irish epicentre for innovative sustainable fashion. Businesses like Vito Vintage and Spice Vintage are leading the way, proving that you can look

stylish in pre-loved clothes while also caring for the planet.

Former student of Limerick School of Art and Design (LSAD) Caroline McBrearty says; "people have become more eco-conscious and are more aware of the environmental impact of fast fashion. They want to shop more responsibly."

The LSAD graduate runs Vito Vintage; one of the aforementioned Limerick businesses paving the way in the slow fashion movement.

For Caroline, vintage fashion is an opportunity to blend style with sustainability; "I think people want to buy unique pieces that carry their own story."

Spice Vintage founder, Gracie Collier also highlights how; "people are beginning to realize that second-hand clothes are not only affordable but also fun and unique."

Demonstrating how, for her, sustainability is about more than just

saving the planet - it's about encouraging consumers to see fashion as a form of self-expression, free

from the constraints of blindly following fleeting trends.

Both entrepreneurs rely on social media for promoting their businesses. Caroline shares how crucial a role she thinks it plays in educating consumers and making sustainable options more visible. "I think everyone is now realizing just how important sustainable shopping is given what is happening to our planet. I have seen a huge upsurge in shopping vintage here at the Milk Market."



Hand picked sustainable vintage from Vito Vintage
Photo: Ana Elizabeth Aguila



Hand picked sustainable vintage from Vito Vintage
Photo: Ana Elizabeth Aguila

FASHION

Sustainable fashion just got even easier with Vinted

BY MAGDALENA TANNEBERGER

SINCE November 11, 2024, Vinted has been available in Ireland, marking another step in the country's shift toward sustainable fashion.

The online resale platform allows users to buy and sell second-hand clothing, taking a small fee for its service.

With the app, anyone can enter the resale market, setting their own prices, negotiating deals, and giving pre-loved clothes a second life while making some extra money.

Its user-friendly layout mirrors traditional online shopping platforms, making second-hand fashion more accessible than ever.

Founded in 2008 in Vilnius,

Lithuania, by Milda Mitkute and Justas Janauskas, Vinted has expanded across Europe. In 2023, Vinted reported over 105 million registered users and 32.8 million downloads globally.

The Irish marketplace is connected to France, offering users a wider selection of listings.

By combining convenience with affordability, Vinted is helping to normalise second-hand shopping.

As the circular economy gains momentum, digital platforms like this are reshaping how people engage with fashion.

IRELAND JOINS THE GROWING LIST OF COUNTRIES EMBRACING SECOND-HAND SHOPPING.



Gracie Collier in Spice Vintage Store; picture by @spice_vintage



Meghann Scully pictured holding a framed photo of her late brother, Marcus. Photo by Keith Arkins

DEADLY DISTRACTION: The fatal consequences of texting and driving

Well known broadcaster Meghann Scully, who lost her brother in a double road fatality has warned of the dangers posed my motorists using mobile phones.



BY ANNA POWELL

ROAD ACCIDENTS IN IRELAND. STATS BY RSA.

In 2023, a study conducted by the Road Safety Authority found that 9% of drivers on Irish roads were using a mobile phone while driving.

According to information provided by the World Health Organisation in 2021, motorists are four times more likely to be involved in a collision if they are using a mobile phone while driving.

19% USE THEIR MOBILE PHONE AT LEAST SOMETIMES WHILE DRIVING TO READ MESSAGES

23% USE THEIR MOBILE PHONE AT LEAST SOMETIMES WHILE DRIVING TO CHECK NOTIFICATIONS

29% OF MOTORISTS REPORTED THAT THEY TALKED ON A MOBILE HANDS-FREE OFTEN OR VERY OFTEN

13% USE THEIR MOBILE PHONE AT LEAST SOMETIMES WHILE DRIVING TO READ MESSAGES

63% REGULARLY PRACTICE AT LEAST ONE OF THESE SAFE BEHAVIOURS, WHILE **37%** DO NOT REGULARLY PRACTICE ANY OF THESE SAFE BEHAVIOURS

THE Galway native was just 15 years old when her older brother Marcus and his friends were killed in road accident travelling home from rugby training.

Now, almost two decades later, the road safety champion fears that some motorists are still taking too many risks on Irish roads.

“I’m on the road so much with work and I’m very observant on the road and you know, speed is one thing, but it’s distraction and phones.”

“You always think; ‘oh I’ll be fine on the roads’, I guess, until it happens to you, or if you know someone it has happened to.”

“I’m seeing an awful lot of people with their phone in their hand, and their cars are pretty new and you know their car has a hands free so I just don’t understand why people are still driving with their phone in their hand,” Meghann remarks.

The continued use by motorists of mobile phones while driving is an ongoing issue according to Inspector Padraig Sutton of the Limerick Divisional

“We all see it, when you are out driving, and you see the driver coming towards you or beside you where the head is down,” said Inspector Sutton.

“They are focusing on something down around where their knees are or down around the lower part of the car. The vast

majority of times they are on the phone.”

According to Inspector Sutton, gardai have observed motorists using their phones to watch television while driving,

“Officers under my supervision have reported people watching television on phones, watching TV programmes while driving. People doing make up whilst driving; reading a newspaper; or reviewing delivery documents or work documents on the steering wheel whilst driving.”

Warning of the dangers this poses he continued:

“You are taking your focus away from doing what you should be doing which is controlling your vehicle.”

“You have to realise a majority of vehicles weigh a lot. You are driving something that weighs 1000 kilograms or more at speed.

According to the latest figures from the Road Safety Authority, 174 people lost their lives on Irish roads in 2024 in a total of 160 fatal collisions.

This compares to 184 people from 170 collisions in 2023

Speaking about the day her brother died on March 6, 2005, Meghann recalled:

“It was just a normal Friday evening, he went to Rugby training, I went to pony club and unfortunately and sadly there was an accident on the way home.”

“My brother and his friend were in the car together and both of them lost their lives.”

“Marcus will be twenty years gone in March. “When I think about that figure it’s just so overwhelming,” she admits. “Even though, it only feels like a few years ago that we lost him.”

“It just completely plunged our whole family into darkness” she admits. “It wasn’t just for us as a family, but the whole community and outside Galway and beyond were hugely affected by the accident.”

Since her brother’s tragic death Meghann says she has always been “super cautious” on the road.

“I guess I’m very aware of what’s on the road. I always say to people like you might think you are a really good driver, a safe driver but you just don’t know who is coming against you, you don’t know who is distracted or who is on their phone, or who’s speeding.”



Small acts, big impact: How volunteering is changing Limerick

BY AILBHE MCHALE

LIMERICK city is not just shaped by its buildings but by the people who quietly work to make it better.

Among them are dedicated volunteer groups whose efforts often go unnoticed but impact their communities. Whether they are organising cleanups, supporting those in need, or creating welcoming spaces, these volunteers take time out of their own lives to give back and make a difference.

Volunteering is a powerful way to connect with others and create positive change, and it's something that resonates across Ireland. According to the 2022 Census, over 700,000 people nationwide regularly volunteer their time to help others.

The benefits of volunteering extend far beyond those who receive support. Research shows that volunteers, regardless of gender, are more likely to report high levels of life satisfaction.

One organisation quietly making a significant difference in Limerick

is Serve the City, an international movement of volunteers dedicated to showing kindness through practical acts of service.

In Limerick, the initiative is led by Michelle Quigley-Chapman and her husband, Lonnie, who moved to the city in January 2021 with a strong desire to give back. "Volunteering has always been a huge part of our lives—we've worked with vulnerable people in various capacities for most of our adult lives," Michelle shares.

The response from the community has been overwhelmingly positive. At the heart of Serve the City's mission is a commitment to addressing the practical needs of vulnerable groups in Limerick. "It's not just about big gestures; sometimes the smallest acts of kindness can make the biggest difference," Michelle says. From assisting elderly residents with household tasks to organizing language exchange programs for newcomers, the organi-



Serve the City volunteers prepare hot meals for the homeless in partnership with Help the Homeless Limerick



sation focuses on filling gaps where support is most needed.

This flexibility allows Serve the City to respond quickly to the unique challenges faced by the community.

Serve the City's projects are as diverse as the people it supports. Their work ranges from small DIY tasks, like deep cleaning and decluttering, to larger community initiatives, such as litter clean-ups and providing companionship to those who may feel isolated.

Vulnerable groups such as the elderly, single parents, and those dealing with physical or mental health challenges have all benefited from the organization's work. "Any given month, we probably work with 30-40 volunteers, some of

whom come back regularly. Serve the City is designed for people to help on a project-by-project basis, so there's no need for a long-term commitment," Michelle explains.

For many volunteers, the experience has been transformative. "No matter what challenges we face in our own lives, we all have something to give," Michelle shares. Beyond completing tasks, Serve the City is about creating meaningful connections and spreading positivity.

Volunteers often leave projects with a deep sense of fulfillment, knowing their efforts have made a real difference. While their work may not always be visible, its impact is deeply felt - by both those they support and the volunteers themselves.

HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?

- Email limerick@servethecity.ie to join the volunteer list.
- Follow Serve the City on Instagram (@stclimerick) and Facebook (Serve the City Limerick) for updates.

SCAN TO READ MORE VOLUNTEER STORIES



Catching up with past Limerick Voice editors



Molly Cantwell, Limerick Voice Editor 23/24



Nicole Glennon, Limerick Voice Editor 19/20

BY ANNE MARIE ROBERTS & MAGDALENA TANNEBERGER

EACH year, Limerick Voice provides aspiring journalists with hands-on experience in a fast-paced newsroom. But what happens after they move on? We caught up with two former editors to see where their careers have taken them and to hear their favorite memories of working on the paper.

Molly Cantwell, Managing Editor of the Limerick Voice 2023/2024

1. WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

I work as a freelance digital reporter for Bauer Media Audio Ireland - primarily with Newstalk. I freelance for the Irish Examiner regularly, writing frequently for the Weekend magazine.

Recently, I've also freelanced for the Irish Times and Dara & Co. As well as my writing, I work as the social media manager for Fresh In-

ternational Film Festival.

2. A MEMORY FROM THE LIMERICK VOICE

MY favourite memory of my time

at Limerick Voice was definitely when we won 'Newspaper of the Year' at the 2024 Smedias. Being surrounded by all my classmates while accepting that award and being able to honour our Joe Drennan in that way was such a huge achievement.

I also think our day shooting the Limerick Voice 2023/2024 Launch Video was so much fun. I still get emotional thinking about it!

Nicole Glennon, Managing Editor 2019/2020

1. WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

I work as an Assistant Editor for the

Irish Examiner's Weekend magazine. The role involves idea generation, commissioning journalists/photographers, liaising with PRs and agents, copy and subediting all content, liaising with various desks within the examiner (analytics/advertising/marketing etc as well as other editorial desks), representing the Irish Examiner/Weekend at relevant events etc.

While I don't write as much as I'd like to, I do still write on a freelance basis for both the Weekend mag and the Arts/Culture pages in the main paper.

2. A MEMORY FROM THE LIMERICK VOICE

MANY late nights in the newsroom. I have some great memories of working late with the team of editors in the final few weeks, and many of them ended up in the examiner where we continued to work together.

I graduated in 2020, so those memories were actually the only

real experience I had of working in a busy newsroom for a long time!

WANT TO READ HOW OTHER FORMER EDITORS ANSWERED THESE QUESTIONS? SCAN THE CODE AND READ ON.



Sport

Cathal O'Neill: Bridging Ireland's native sport and language

Exploring how Limerick hurler Cathal O'Neill is using his passion for Gaeilge to inspire a new generation on and off the pitch



BY CATHERINE DUGGAN

CATHAL O'Neill, a 22-year-old Limerick hurler, well known for his ability on the pitch. But when it comes to his grá for Gaeilge he has a few more skills up his sleeve. O'Neill is currently in his third year of studying PE and Irish at the University of Limerick.

He hopes to be in the classroom in the next two years inspiring a new generation in the same ways he was once inspired. Beyond the pitch and the seomra ranga, he's a champion for the Irish language advocating for a greater use and appreciation amongst young people.

BACK TO THE BEGINNING

O'NEILL'S love for the Irish Language began fadó during his time at Adare Boys School where he was inspired by his teacher Stephen Lavin. "Stephen Lavin probably stands out for me in Adare Boys School," O'Neill recalls. Lavin, a sportsman who played football and hurling for Limerick, had gained young O'Neill's attention given their similar interests in the world of sports.

For O'Neill, this connection between sport and Gaeilge left a lasting impression on him. "Stephen emphasised Irish a lot, I still have his grammar books," he says. This gave O'Neill his "solid base" for the language.

He is confident that he owes this seed that was planted in primary school to his teacher, who encouraged him to "put a lot of work into the language."

GAEILGE FOR A NEW GENERATION

WITH record numbers of Irish students not sitting Irish leaving certificate exams last year (2024) there is a pressing question about the curriculum and the way the language is being taught to students.

O'Neill believes that there should be a stronger emphasis on spoken Irish in schools.

He is certain that many students become discouraged when the focus is solely on grammar. "Kids get disheartened when they have to write as Gaeilge, Irish grammar is tough, there's no getting away from that. But they get bogged down on that and they don't see the history of the Irish language," he explains.

“If you're playing our native sport, why not learn bits of our native language

"Irish is a really nice language to listen to and to speak," O'Neill says, and he's eager to see it taught in a way that focuses more on daoine ag labhairt instead of ag scríobh.

He hopes to inspire his future students to embrace Irish as a living language, not just a subject to learn at school.

SPÓIRT AGUS GAEILGE

WITH hurling playing a large role in O'Neill's life, he sees the importance of blending the country's native sport with its native language.



Cathal O'Neill during a 2024 Allianz Hurling League match between Galway and Limerick at Pearse Stadium in Galway. Photo by Stephen McCarthy/Sportsfile

TG4 submitted a bid to buy media rights for GAA senior championship games in September of last year, viewers quickly shared their concerns around not understanding the commentary. However, O'Neill sees this as "a great initiative for people to learn."

O'Neill points out that the language used in match commentary often repeats key phrases, making it easier for viewers to pick up on the cúpla focal, like cúl (goal), cúlín (point) or isteach (in).

"If you're playing our native sport, why not learn bits and pieces of our native language?" he asks, emphasising how this small step could make a difference to the tír.

THE BALANCING ACT

BALANCING a demanding sporting career with his studies has presented its challenges, but O'Neill takes it in his stride. As a third-year student with a busy schedule, he is familiar with the sacrifices that it involves, "when you're in the heat of it, other things might not get as much time," he admits.

During the off season, he enjoys having a bit more time to socialise with friends and do the "normal" things people do in college but once January hits, his focus shifts to training, gym sessions and studies.

"If people are asking you to go out on a Monday or a Thursday, like is normal in college, you just wouldn't be able to."

However, he sees this as a small sacrifice for getting the chance to

pursue his passion "I enjoy it, and I wouldn't change it".

TEACHING PASSION AGUS BRÓD

AS a future teacher, O'Neill hopes to encourage his students to speak Irish as often as possible and will try

to create a positive and enjoyable atmosphere for them. He hopes that people begin to see Irish as more than a subject and begin to use it confidently in their lives gach lá.

"Is teanga álainn í an Gaeilge agus ba mhaith liom go bhfeicfeadh daoine é sin."

limerickvoice

Note from Sports Editor



JOHN O'DONNELL

HI everyone, welcome to this year's Limerick Voice sports section.

Together with our talented sports team and multimedia reporters, we've created a section packed with stories that reflect the passion, resilience, and diversity of sports here in Limerick and beyond.

This year, we've placed a spotlight on topics close to our hearts, including the promotion of the Irish language, the challenges of securing state funding for smaller sports, and raising the profile of women's football in Limerick. These aren't just stories—they're conversations

we hope to inspire.

We had the privilege of sitting down with local sporting heroes, who shared both their triumphs and the struggles they've faced on their journeys.

We also met the unsung heroes behind the scenes: the people running Limerick's vibrant clubs, from an LGBTQ+ rugby club to two top-tier basketball clubs and a growing social run group.

From GAA in Asia to powerlifting and horse racing, there's something for everyone and our aim this year was to highlight stories that too often go untold.

It's been an honour to be part of this year's edition, and I hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed putting it together.



Have new rules revived Gaelic football?

LIAM WHITE

THE 2025 GAA season sees a new beginning for Gaelic football, as it progresses with new rules that will try to help the game improve. The changes are welcome, after a few seasons of what has felt like total regression for football.

The man behind the rule changes is the former six-time All-Ireland winning Dublin manager Jim Gavin alongside the Football Review Committee.

The new rules have been implemented for the 2025 National Football League and include - only one player from each team contesting throw-ins at the start of each half, points scored from outside the 40-metre arc being worth two points, a minimum of three players inside the opposition's 65-metre line at all times, and dissent or challenge to a referee's decision resulting in the ball being moved forward 50 metres, up to the opposition's 13-metre line.

Limerick footballer Darragh O'Hagan spoke about the new rule changes and is positive about the game going forward.

"They've made the game a better spectacle because it's faster and more exciting. People are quick to say some of the new penalties are too harsh, but the rules are the same for both teams.

"I would say how harsh the penalty is for rules like backchatting to the ref has meant that it has already been stamped out in the games we've played so far."

He also spoke about the confusion around the new rules, as well as how the team are preparing to adapt in their training sessions.

"When we first got back to training it took a bit of time for everyone to get up to speed on them, but our management has been diligent.

"We had a referee in at training a few times just to make sure that everyone had a good understanding of the rules and if anyone had questions, he could give us clarity."

Limerick GAA massively dropped the ball in promoting Club Hurling Championship

OPINION

BY JOHN O'DONNELL

LET'S go back in time and set the scene. It's October 2024.

The Bons Secours Limerick senior club hurling semi-final is in full flow. Doon's Darragh O'Donovan and Cian Lynch of Patrickswell tussle for possession of the ball.

Adam English, Diarmuid Byrnes and Aaron Gillane look on. Some of the finest players in Ireland. Countless titles and awards between them.

The four in-a-row All-Ireland winning Limerick hurlers. One

of the greatest hurling teams of all time.

Yet, the only way to witness this titanic battle is by taking a seat in the stand in Kilmallock.

In the year 2024? Surely not.

Without any public explanation, Limerick GAA failed to provide a streaming service for their senior club hurling and football championships last season after having one in previous years.

Each week, All-Star talents took to the pitches across the county, yet if you weren't there

in person - there was no way to watch it.

It's hard to believe that one of the best products in the GAA had nowhere to showcase it to the masses.

Especially when it's being run by an organisation who put so much effort into raising funds each year.

I don't exaggerate either when I say it's one of the best products we have on offer.

Nobody can say there isn't an appetite to watch the hurlers that

have taken the game by storm over the last seven seasons.

To watch players they know from top teams Na Piarsaigh, Doon, Kilmallock, and Patrickswell in action at a local level.

But also to get to know the players they don't, from top clubs like Mungret St Pauls, Monaleen, and Ballybrown.

An opportunity to see the Morrissey brothers, Kyle Hayes, Declan Hannon, Barry Nash, and David Reidy take on different positions on the field.

An opportunity to see them challenge the status quo and push their clubs on to greater success.

Every week you could have watched club championships from across the country - on either a streaming service like Clubber or dedicated streaming services in respective counties.

If you had a subscription to Clubber, you could've watched junior club hurling and football championships from across the country.

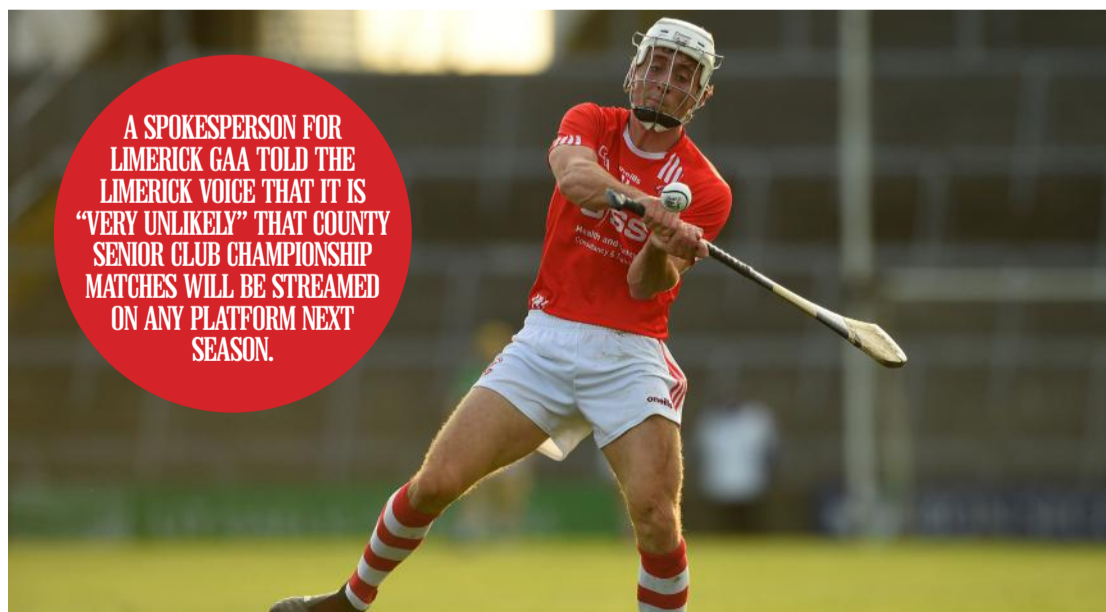
But Limerick's senior grades in both codes were locked away.

This has been a massive issue for supporters this year and it hasn't gone unnoticed with the players either.

Former Limerick player Pat Ryan who played a big part in Doon's county final win noted this issue in an interview with Sporting Limerick: "I've a



Darragh O'Donovan and Cian



A SPOKESPERSON FOR LIMERICK GAA TOLD THE LIMERICK VOICE THAT IT IS "VERY UNLIKELY" THAT COUNTY SENIOR CLUB CHAMPIONSHIP MATCHES WILL BE STREAMED ON ANY PLATFORM NEXT SEASON.

Doon's Pat Ryan was critical of Limerick GAA County board's decision not to provide a streaming service for the 2024 senior club championship. Credits: Photo by Diarmuid Greene/Sportsfile



Lynch battle for possession of the ball. Credits: Sport Action Photography

“I’ve a brother and friends in Australia, I’ve elderly people in the street that were asking me after the first round and second round – ‘why wasn’t the game streamed, my son usually puts on the stream for me, I don’t go to the matches anymore, they put it on the telly for me’”

brother and friends in Australia, I’ve elderly people in the street that were asking me after the first round and second round – ‘why wasn’t the game streamed, my son usually puts on the stream for me, I don’t go to the matches anymore, they put it on the telly for me’ you know it was asked of me so many times.

“I just hope that next year these people will be able to watch every round of the championship because the appetite is there to watch it so hopefully whatever the issue it was this year – that the standards are upped next year to what they were previously.”

As pointed out by Ryan, it’s the elderly who can no longer physically attend games and those living abroad who are most affected by the lack of a streaming service.

These are people who have kept GAA clubs going in our communities throughout the years who are now being shut out. It just isn’t fair.

So, what about next year?

A spokesperson for Limerick GAA told the Limerick Voice that it is “very unlikely” that county senior club championship matches will be streamed on any platform next season.

The spokesperson said the decision not to provide the service in 2024 was made at the start of the season due to financial reasons and based on sales figures for the service over the last few years.

It is understood that increasing attendances at championship matches this season is one of the reasons why there might not be a streaming service for the upcoming senior club championships.

If this is the case, it would be a massive disappointment for those who wished to see the return of a streaming service this year.

Those who are unable to attend games due to health reasons or living abroad.

They’ve been left in the dark.



Niall warming up for action with some of his clubmates. Credit - @Saigon_Gaels Instagram

Saigon Gaels: A hurl in hand from home to Ho Chi Minh

BY DARRAGH MOLONEY

AFTER travelling around Asia for over a year, 25-year-old Niall Moloney settled in Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam, getting a job as a teacher.

Despite being some 10,000 miles from home, the former UL student has a piece of Ireland with him in the bustling city, in the form of the Saigon Gaels.

Formed in 2011, the Gaels are the most successful GAA outfit in Ho Chi Minh, but as the Clareman explains, the club is much more than that.

It has brought back his love for his national sport.

A promising young hurler, the schoolteacher represented both club and county in his youth in Killaloe, Co. Clare.

He went on to represent the University of Limerick where he completed his engineering degree, graduating in 2021 and embarking on a tour of Asia that brought him to Thailand, China, Japan and Vietnam.

The 25-year-old had no initial plans to keep hurling while on his travels and admits over time he grew apart from the sport he once loved.

“Being far from home for so long made me realize that I needed a connection to my Irish culture and roots, and playing GAA provided that,” he explains.

On a sporting level, GAA in Asia is much different to its Irish equivalent. Newcomers are welcomed to the sport in Asia. As a result, there is a stark contrast in quality and ambition with players of all skill levels turning out for clubs across the continent.

Yet, it’s clear that there is so much more to this game than winning. The sport is building a bridge between communities, cultures and countries.

“The Asian and South Asian Gaelic Games are huge events. Teams from countries across the continent all come together for a weekend tournament. It fosters a real sense of community among Irish people and others across the region.

“The sense of community in GAA in Asia is very strong, especially because we are all far from home,” he says. “The importance of that connection grows when you live abroad.

Irish traditions are celebrated here – GAA clubs even host Irish nights with traditional music, and holidays like St Patrick’s Day, Christmas, and Halloween are still observed.”

“My proudest moment was winning a Gaelic football tournament in Vietnam. That victory, playing in front of a home crowd, was incredibly special. I think living abroad has made me appreciate how lucky we are to have GAA.

“Many expats, particularly from Canada and France, often remark how fortunate we are to have such a strong Irish community centered around this shared sport. At home, GAA can sometimes feel more about competition, but here, it’s all about community and connection.”

While the club serves as a hub to connect Irish living abroad, it also allows people of other nations to get involved playing GAA. In fact, the story of how the Saigon Gaels formed in 2011 demonstrates the togetherness in

the region.

“Initially, the South Asian Gaelic Games were supposed to be hosted in Hanoi, but they couldn’t find a venue. So, the community in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) stepped up, founded a team, and found a venue, leading to the creation of the Saigon Gaels,” Moloney explains.

“Most of the men’s team is Irish, with a few exceptions like a Scottish player with Irish grandparents. There will be a person from France or Italy or even Vietnam that comes the odd week also.”

“The sense of community in GAA in Asia is very strong, especially because we are all far from home”

Like many college graduates, Moloney lost contact with some of his friends following graduation in 2021.

Little did he think that he would end up lining out against one close friend Conor on a GAA pitch in Ho Chi Minh three years later.

“I thought it was extraordinary really, maybe I should have known it would happen at some point!

“There were several teams visiting from all over Asia for a tournament the Gaels were hosting, and his team were competing. I ran out on the pitch and there he was, I hadn’t seen him in years.

“It was just surreal realising how GAA can bring people back together.”

Breaking barriers: Empowering women in the world of powerlifting

Anna Powell speaks with Laoise Quinn about her journey as female powerlifter and how the sport has the ability to empower young women.



BY ANNA POWELL

AT just 14 years of age, Limerick's Laoise Quinn decided to enter her first powerlifting competition with only one month of training behind her.

"It was really impulsive of me," admits the 21-year-old as she reflects on her start in powerlifting. "I squatted 80 kilos, I benched 32 and a half and I deadlifted 80 kilos."

As Laoise just proved in her first Open National Championships in the under 63kg weight class, she can now squat 160kg, bench 85kg and deadlift 190kg. With a whopping 435kg total Laoise was crowned Open National Champion in this competition.

"I was the youngest person to win at nationals, so that was cool," Laoise admits. "It was a big achievement for me, it's my second Open Nationals and my first one in this weight class, so to win as a junior was huge for me."

"I knew going into it that it was going to be a tough battle. I've learned over the years that those battles help me dig deep and get hyped up!"

It took Laoise two years to place for her first powerlifting competition. At just 18 years of age, she won sub-junior worlds in the 57-kilo class. "That was huge for me," recalls Laoise.

"It's funny I didn't win any competition in Ireland until I went international and then that was the first competition that I won."

Shortly after the competition, Laoise decided to train for the Euros and picked up a back injury.

"I trained for about a year and a half with a back injury. I think going through those parts of my powerlifting journey showed me that I am

“I'd love to see younger girls taking it up. It's done so much for my self-esteem. I feel so strong



Laoise Quinn competing in the Open National Championships as a junior. Photo Credits: @lifteiremedia on Instagram

definitely in this for the long haul".

Laoise has documented the highs and lows of her journey as a female powerlifter on social media. With over 24k followers on Instagram, over 9k on TikTok and a few hundred followers on YouTube, she has used her platforms to share her experience as a female athlete.

Social media has also helped her to put her progress into perspective.

"I'm so happy I started sharing it because I think it's hard, especially when you are in the sport a while, it's hard to like measure progress and you don't see it as clearly as you would when you started."

"You get newbie gains where you get strong pretty quickly but when you are a couple of years into it, you could be training for a year just to get a 2.5kilo personal best."

"I think being able to zoom out and look at the bigger picture and look back on when I just started and my first competition, that that's when you can really see progress."

Laoise loves to encourage other young women to take up the sport. "I would definitely recommend it. It has done so much for me. I'd

“I do think it's been so empowering for me... lifting heavy.. It's not kind of a usual thing for a woman to do... I find that cool

love to see younger girls taking it up because it's done so much for my self-esteem. I feel so strong.

"I think it's made me a more confident person. I do think it's been so empowering for me to be lifting heavy and it's not kind of a usual thing for a woman to do and yeah, I find that cool."

Even though most would assume otherwise, Laoise has found powerlifting to be a very inclusive sport, "It did surprise me how gender neutral it was. At competitions, the boys support the girls, and the girls support the boys" cheered Laoise.

Although Laoise's recent win at the Open National Championships qualified her for Open Euros, Laoise has decided to focus on her junior career this year.

ATHLETICS

Miles together: The joy of friendship in running clubs

BY AILISH ARMSTRONG

RELOCATING to a new country is often filled with excitement and new possibilities, but it can also be a lonely experience, especially when it comes to building connections outside of work. Married couple Prav and Aimee Dana, originally from South Africa, were confronted with this reality after moving to Ireland. "The only place we really had friends was within the workplace," Thirty-one-year-old Prav recalls. "We were looking for interactions and like-minded friendships outside of that space."

In a bid to foster meaningful connections, following their passion for running, the couple began an Instagram page with modest expectation. "We set up an Instagram page that was quite innocent and didn't expect it to grow legs. We thought we'd make one or two friends, but as luck would have it, it's kind of grown, and we've made a ton of friends and great connections through this," Prav reflects.

What began as a simple endeavour soon blossomed into something much greater - a community.

From humble beginnings with just four members, including its founders, Run061 - named after Limerick's area code - has quickly grown to encompass a vibrant group of around 120 individuals. "I think we have been very fortunate for it to grow exponentially already," Prav shares, "It's incredible."

Beyond the numbers is a group of individuals who reflect the genuine connections which Run061 has established. Co-founder Aimee describes this evolution:

"You come into a place where strangers turn into your biggest fans and cheerleaders."

For many women, running is not as straightforward as it seems, particularly when it comes to

safety. Vicky Graham, a member of Run061, articulates the common concern. "I have always liked running, but I felt pretty unsafe running by myself as a woman, especially after work in the dark."

“You come into a place where strangers turn into your biggest fans and cheerleaders.”

Aimee echoes this sentiment, sharing her own harrowing experience. "I was attacked while running, so I understand how important it is to feel secure," she explains. In response to these concerns, Run061 has introduced a dedicated women's night on Mondays, providing a supportive environment where women can run together, especially as the darker evenings of winter approach. This aspect of the run club has been met with enthusiasm by the women of Limerick.

For many, joining Run061 has transcended their routine run. It has become a vital source of companionship, particularly for individuals like Jastelle Hugo, who moved to Ireland feeling isolated.

"When you are in your twenties and thirties, it's harder to find friends," Jastelle says. "I'm not from Ireland, so when I move here, it was quite lonely at the start. Finding new friends along the way in a new home, made it feel more like home because you have something to belong to," she adds.

Looking to the future, the founders of Run 061 see the club as far more than a hobby. "Run 061 is not our job - it's my passion project," Aimee explains. "It's something we're very proud of and something we want to grow as much as we can."



Follow Prav and Aimee's running journey on Instagram @Run061one.

Fighting, faith and the future for Jamie Morrissey

From struggling with mental health to becoming a dual-weight Irish champion, Morrissey spoke to *Limerick Voice* deputy sports editor Daragh Coyle about every step of his combat sports journey.



BY DARAGH COYLE

WHAT makes a champion?

In the case of 30-year-old, multi-weight Celtic champion Jamie Morrissey, the answer seems to be a mixture of a youthful mischief, unparalleled determination as a young adult, and unbreakable faith as a man.

The Raheen native - who retired in October - didn't start fighting until the age of 22, a late bloomer in terms of combat sports.

Most of his childhood was spent "completely out of the sport" and he credits the "middle-class suburbia" that was his hometown for being an incredible place to grow up at the time.

His strong relationship with family was a source of pride when he eventually transitioned into boxing. "I had a great childhood and was very, very close to my brother growing up, [I] still am," he remarks.

"[Raheen] played a part in having a lot of pride in where I'm from."

Speaking passionately about his home, Morrissey says, "Raheen has just received no investment, I don't

believe any longer that it is a middle-class area", the former champion continues, "I believe Raheen needs a massive amount of investment".

It certainly is an admirable quality that Morrissey not only fights for Raheen in the ring, but out of it too.

A lesser-known side to the fighter is his struggles with OCD, which he spoke openly about while discussing his youth.

A strikingly honest reflection of his early adolescence reveals the struggles that brought for him, "From 14 or 15, I was always a 'straight A' kind of kid and behaved myself, you know. I was suffering from OCD and that kind of started to display.

"I would have lost control along with, like, other social issues. We were quite troublesome, troublesome enough."

It was something that affected the successful son of Limerick all the way through his career, who explains "It's massively affected my career from mental fatigue and ex-



Jamie Morrissey celebrates after a hard-fought victory. Credit: @j_morrissey_ on Instagram

haustion, and it has played a massive role in me retiring."

For Morrissey though, there's always a positive outlook. His religious faith has been integral to the highs and lows of boxing.

The "born-again Christian" opens up about how Christianity has become such a massive part of his life, with Morrissey having "a couple of very profound experiences over the last three or four years" and stating that his faith is now "central" to him.

It is this belief in his faith that made the difficult decision to retire easier, "I just feel this time that God is calling me elsewhere," Morrissey explains.

What next for the former fighter's journey with his faith?

"I want to get into other elements of media, but I want to get into full time ministry. I'm going to go abroad and study a masters in theology."

Even when asking about his boxing story, he states that "God is central", with Christianity helping to build his character and surrender his ego.

But what is the thing that stands out to the Newport-based Morrissey about his career?

"Just memories. The memories I have. It's unprecedented by the grace of God, what I was able to do with his grace in the last seven or eight years," Morrissey says. "There's a lot of good memories. A lot of tough losses and unbelievable wins, lots of blood, sweat, and tears."

“It always meant the world to me to represent Limerick ... In fairness, they get behind their own. You see that with the hurlers and you can see that with the boxers

"It's brought a lot of tough nights after fights, concussions, getting sick. Lots of character building."

What would the Limerick Youth Service worker name as his biggest achievement after accomplishing so much?

"For me, winning what I won despite my mental state for a lot of it and the fatigue I would have been going through.

"I was stopped for the Muay Thai Irish title, which was devastating for me. But I came back, I won a four-man tournament in my next fight and I actually beat the man who beat me in the first round.

"I don't think I mention that - or people mention that enough - what that represented for me."

Throughout it all, the Limerick man proudly represented his home. What did it mean to him?

"It means a lot to me, it really does. It's a tough place to grow up. I think Limerick from what I've seen in the world - I don't know maybe it's because I'm from here - I believe there's an unprecedented heaviness here.

"We're seeing that with suicide rates and addiction. To be someone that people out there may have got some element of hope, or some amount of inspiration means more to me than anything."

He continues "It always meant the world to me to represent Limerick. In fairness, they get behind their own. You see that with the hurlers, and you can see that with the boxers."

And that's what makes a champion.



Morrissey makes his ring walk with both titles in the background. Credit: @j_morrissey_ on Instagram

Hero Ní Ríain continues to inspire

Paralympic medallist talks motivation, goals and being a role model



BY JOHN O'DONNELL



Róisín Ní Riain celebrates after winning bronze in the Women's 200m Individual Medley SM13 Final at the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games. Photo by Ramsey Cardy/Sportsfile

TEAM Ireland came home from last summer's Paralympics in Paris with six medals. Visually impaired women won all six medals with two of them won by Limerick swimmer and UL student Róisín Ní Ríain.

Ní Ríain can only be described as a true local hero for Limerick. A science student and accomplished swimmer on the world stage, Ní Ríain grew up in Drombanna, Co Limerick and started swimming aged just four in UL's swimming pool, where she would later go on to study.

“Setting those goals literally on a day-to-day basis that keep you working and keeps you striving for something every day

Reared in a family where she and her three younger sisters also swam, she went up through the age groups at Limerick Swim Club before deciding she wanted to take things more seriously and started para swimming internationally at

the age of 15.

This led her to the Paralympics in Tokyo in 2020. While she didn't medal at the games, it served as a tough learning experience, as the COVID-19 pandemic meant nobody was there to support her from the stands.

Fast forward to last summer's edition in Paris. Ní Ríain transfixed the nation by winning silver in the Women's 100m Backstroke S13 final and followed it up by clinching bronze in the Women's 200m Individual Medley by .08 seconds.

The silver was Ireland's first medal of the games and garnered major media coverage. For Róisín, this was something she never saw growing up:

“I didn't know of many visually impaired people when I was younger, so for those coming up, it's something I would've loved to have seen. To show that is something I would hope means a lot to them.”

Despite being just 19, the Limerick swimmer has a long list of accomplishments. Before even setting off for Paris she was named The Irish Times Sport Ireland Sportswoman of the Month for

April 2024 and was nominated for an RTÉ Sports Award in both the Sportsperson of the Year and Young Sportsperson of the Year categories for 2023.

“You may not be motivated every day, but that's the discipline you must have to get up when you don't want to

Add a nomination for a Her-Sports award in the Young Athlete of the Year category and winning Para Swimmer of the Year at the Swim Ireland awards, and you've got yourself a long list.

With this, Ní Ríain acknowledges that she's found herself in a position as a role model despite being so young herself:

“For me to inspire especially kids with a visual impairment as well, to show them that they can go on to do what they want to do... it's nice.”

After a brilliant time in Paris, Róisín now finds herself back at UL balancing an intensive course

with swimming commitments. She credits the college's sports scholarship program with helping her find the balance between athletics and academics and says when motivation is tough to find, discipline kicks in.

“You may not be motivated every day, but that's the discipline you must have to get up when you don't want to.

To go in and push hard in training so there is a discipline aspect. I live with six other swimmers, 13 of us over two houses so we're always there for one another to help out when we might not be feeling 100%. They're who I see day-to-day, it makes it that bit easier.”

While Los Angeles 2028 is the long-term goal for Ní Ríain, she's also careful to keep on track by setting short-term goals:

“It's important to set goals on a day-to-day, weekly, and monthly basis that you can keep working towards in training,” she explains.

“Obviously you'll have your one or

two long-term goals at the end of this year or every four years but it's setting those goals literally on a day-to-day basis that keep you working and keeps you striving for something every day and I think that's the key for me to stay motivated.

“It may just be something in my technique I want to fix this week, or we may have some sort of testing session at the end of the month, and I want to hit certain times. It's little things that help me stay motivated because you mightn't always be competing.”

Whatever this young star decides to do, one thing is for certain - the sporting community in Limerick and UL will look on with pride.



ROISÍN NÍ RIAIN'S TIMELINE TO OLYMPIC SUCCESS

Paralympian in Tokyo 2020

World Para Swimming Champion in the 100m Backstroke

Paralympic Silver medallist in the Women's 100m Backstroke S13 final
Paralympic Bronze medallist in the Women's 200m Individual Medley

Young Paralympian of the Games at the Paralympics Ireland 2024 Paris Ball

European Championship Bronze medallist in the S13 backstroke in Madeira in May 2021

World Record in the 200m backstroke

Para Swimmer of the Year 2024

RTÉ Sport Young Sportsperson of the Year for 2024

Inclusive by name, inclusive by nature:

Limerick's Sarsfields Rugby is a beacon of sport's identity



Sarsfields welfare officer Alison Griffin. Photo by Paul Barrett

BY CAOLÁN SCULLY

SPORT, when done right, should represent everything good about society.

It should be a social event that intertwines several communities. It should allow people of all ages to become the best versions of themselves. That's where the local communities and grass roots become the true driving force.

That's the aim among those at Sarsfields Rugby. As Limerick's only inclusive rugby team, this young club reminds us of what sport should be all about.

Founded in 2022 as "the brainchild of Dan Mooney, Ross O'Donoghue and Gearóid Folan", the club - based out of Young Munster RFC - have grown year on year since their inception. As they now surpass 100 members early in their third season, it's fair to say this project is booming.

PRO Elysha Folan runs the club's socials, one of the driving factors for the consistent rise in playing numbers. It's also been impactful in helping to sell Sarsfields' brand, ethos and community. That being said, they remain humble, with Folan adding they never thought the club would be this big this soon.

Still from day one with 15 members, to now, the core principles

have remained.

An inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ people from across the Midwest to come together, play rugby, have fun, and make great friends. President of the club Gearóid Folan says the club strives to bring inclusivity to all elements, be it training, matches or events.

“You may not be motivated every day, but that's the discipline you must have to get up when you don't want to

That is something that seems to overlap in both team and community. When you see the president of Young Munster RFC walking with Sarsfields rugby at the Limerick Pride Parade, you are reminded that inclusivity is all around. It's a "committed" relationship that reflects wonderfully on both parties.

Their season runs from September to June, with the year littered with fixtures and events. Yet, it's nights like when I visited that remind you of what it is all about. On a typical cold, dark and wet Limerick night training numbers were still

better than most club sides.

You would be hard pressed to find many clubs who have 40+ players at training on a given week.

Why? It's because players are not just going for rugby, they are going for social interactions too.

That great friendship can be hard to find, but it was evident in every conversation I had. Team Vice Captain Jason Power often has multiple teammates turn up to support his shows, for example. "You cannot ask for anymore from the group," he says.

Teammate Robert Conway is one of the club's sponsors through Chefhouse, but like that he is just another one of the lads and ladies who tog out on a regular basis.

He is proud of the relationship between the two, claiming Sarsfields to be "more than a sport, but a community," which is something every business would like to be aligned with.

You could travel the length of the country and struggle to find a club quite like Sarsfields.

They are a perfect snapshot of what sports clubs should be - inclusive, welcoming and fun.

As coach Eric Fitzgerald so succinctly put it, Sarsfields rugby are "inclusive by name, inclusive by nature".

It might be the motto of a Limerick tag rugby team, but it should be a motto for all of us.

RUGBY

Limerick man to travel 300km a day in bus across Australia in ultimate Lions tour fan experience

BY JACK MCKAY

SPORT brings people together in many different ways. Whether it's playing or watching - there's a community element found in sport that does not exist elsewhere.

It's hard to think of a better example than the adventure Limerick native Brian Hayes is set to embark on with his friends from Brighton Rugby Club, situated in Adelaide, South Australia.

This summer, the British and Irish Lions head to Australia for a six-week tour. They'll also take on the Wallabies three times throughout July and August.

Brian and his friends from the club will follow the tour in a journey that is set to span 17 days.

Their planned route will see the group cover 300km per day in their bus, from Adelaide to Melbourne, and then to Sydney.

“We wanted to stick with 15 - 15 people on a rugby team, 15 people on the bus”

Along the way, they will stay at rugby and community clubs, sleep in swags, and connect with local communities by volunteering their time to help with jobs organised by charity group Lions Club International.

All of that stemmed from a conversation while having a few beers.

"Thirteen of us are all past members, or parents of kids that

have played with Brighton Rugby Club," Hayes begins. "There are two guys who would be friends of the group.

"It's a small rugby community of eight or nine clubs; everyone knows each other in a way. We wanted to stick with 15 - 15 people on a rugby team, 15 people on the bus.

"The best part of this thing so far has been our monthly meetings," he explains. "We pick a Saturday every month where someone hosts it at their house.

"We probably talk about the tour for 10 minutes and then chat for the rest of it!" he laughs.

"We've all got little jobs, someone is looking after the finances, others the uniforms, and someone is looking after the sponsor boards.

"I think everyone is so keen to do it, [so] it's fairly easy."

The South Australian Lions Tour 1st XV (or SALT, for short) is the name Brian and his mates have chosen.

Hailing from all over Australia, England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales and Zimbabwe - the group have a multicultural mix and a near 50/50 split between fans of the Lions and Wallabies.

But after 22 years of living down under with his Australian wife Kirsty and their two children Hamish and Lily, will Brian be supporting the Lions or Australia?

"Oh, the Lions, absolutely!" he laughs. "Ireland first obviously; I'll always have the All Blacks second. To my wife's disgust, Australia third."



Brian and his friends pictured outside Brighton Rugby Club. Picture: Brian Hayes

Lack of budget funding for basketball raises concerns



BY LIAM WHITE

WARNINGS have been issued about the disparity in government support for basketball and the impact it could have on the future of one of the most popular school sports in the country.

Budget 2025 saw the largest ever funding announced for sports facilities in Ireland, with €230m in grants announced.

The biggest winners from the allocation were GAA clubs, receiving 42% of the overall funds, while basketball only received 2.3%, comprising of eight grants.

While Irish sports enthusiasts celebrate the continued success of traditional games like Gaelic football and hurling, basketball is facing a funding crisis that threatens its growth and development.

This will also be a huge talking point when you see Cuala GAA club in Dublin being approved for a grant worth €4.6 million for the

Hyde Park Community Sports Centre Project, which is four times the amount basketball overall is receiving.

Tony Hehir, club secretary with Limerick Celtics Basketball Club, feels that basketball should be given “a far greater percentage” of the money which was allocated in the most recent Budget.

“Basketball is the biggest schools sport in the country right now and for those numbers to develop into senior level, you need funding,” he begins.

“You need to be able to provide better facilities, encourage the growth of new clubs and provide more technical services to coaches, referees and players.

“Basketball worldwide is an incredible membership of people watching and playing the sport, the NBA has 16 million people watching women’s basketball which is incred-



Tony Hehir at President’s National Cup Final.. Credit ©INPHO/Bryan Kean

ible. Last year you had over 60,000 at one game in America.

“The turn out at the games at the Olympics was huge, tickets were difficult to get. The sport has huge potential in this country, but it needs funding and needs to have a plan to develop it.”

“I think the community is great and is being a bit left behind when it comes to funding in comparison to other sports”

The difference in basketball’s funding is massive.

Limerick Sport Eagles head coach, Niall McDermott, highlights the fact that basketball’s biggest challenge is “it’s a very expensive sport to play,” with club fees currently standing at €175 and college fees at €150.

For contrast, the most expensive membership for GAA clubs in the country is in the capital, Dublin, which the average yearly adult price in Leinster, excluding Dublin, is between €20 and €230, while adult membership at clubs in Munster runs from €50 to €240.

He continued, “The vast majority of basketball facilities in the country are multi-sport, which means you are competing with other sports for time ... It makes it harder for indoor sports in comparison to outdoor sports who can train outdoors, but with ours you realistically can’t

because of the weather for most of the year.

“Whenever we look at contacts in Europe or America, money is the number one factor as to why we struggle to get people to come over here to play and grow the sport further.”

Limerick Celtics U20 captain Cian Gleeson agreed, saying: “I think the community is great and is being a bit left behind when it comes to funding in comparison to other sports, but then there is also the idea that we are a smaller sport.

“It’s not a community that is as big as the others and the general scale hasn’t been brought up to the level it needs to be at yet, but I do believe we are on the right track, and I can certainly see it growing over the next couple of years hopefully.”

Limerick’s racing legacy: JP McManus leads Cheltenham charge



Owner JP McManus on day four of the 2024 Cheltenham Racing Festival at Prestbury Park in Cheltenham, England. Photo by David Fitzgerald/Sportsfile

BY LEAH HOGARTY

GAA fans have the All-Ireland Final, American Football fans have the Superbowl, but for racing fans it’s all about Cheltenham...

The Cheltenham Racing Festival is just around the corner. The world’s finest horses and jockeys will battle for supremacy between March 11-14.

Limerick’s racing connections are once again set to play a significant role in the pinnacle event of National Hunt racing.

Few names are as synonymous with Cheltenham success as JP McManus.

The Limerick-born billionaire has enjoyed countless victories at Prestbury Park and was crowned Leading Owner at the 2024 Festival after securing four winners, four second places and five thirds.

Heading into 2025, his famous green and gold silks are certainly ones to watch.

The Arkle Chase is famously known as being a real test for young horses, McManus’ ‘Majborough’ looks like he’ll go off as second favourite.

Willie Mullins has trained six of the last 10 winners, and 14 out of 15 of the last winners won on their last ride out.

‘Majborough’ cruised to victory in the Dublin Racing Festival Goff’s Irish Arkle earlier this month, putting him in real contention for victory on March 11.

JP splashed out a rumoured seven-figure sum earlier this year on ‘The New Lion’, a Dan Skelton-trained unbeaten novice hurdler, with hopes of a triumph in Cheltenham.

He looks to be a huge contender in either the Turners or Supreme Novices’ Hurdle.

‘The Wallpark’ failed to impress in his first run out in JP’s silks last

December at Aintree. The progressive seven-year-old is the antepost favourite for Thursday’s Pertemps however, with a slight but unlikely chance he might go in the Stayers Hurdle.

Nicky Henderson-trained ‘Jonbon’ will be chasing his 10th Grade One title for McManus at the Festival, after being withdrawn last year.

He’ll head off favourite in Wednesday’s Champion Chase, where he’ll be tested against seasoned Cheltenham winners such as ‘Energumene’ and ‘Gaelic Warrior’.

Every owner dreams of winning the Cheltenham Gold Cup. McManus achieved this dream in 2012 with ‘Synchronised’.

Lightning could strike twice if ‘Fact to File’ can stay against back-to-back winner ‘Galopin Des Champs’ in the feature race.

Galopin recently won his third Irish Gold Cup, meaning it’ll be a tough task for ‘Fact to File’.

Treaty United women driving change in football



BY DARRAGH MOLONEY

IN a world where football has long been a male-dominated industry, women are driving change in Treaty United, Limerick City's premier football team.

The League of Ireland football club was acquired by former Republic of Ireland women's international and Treaty player Ciara McCormack, in partnership with a Canadian-based investment group led by Tricor Pacific Capital.

In turn, McCormack became the first female co-owner and CEO of a men's and women's club in the League of Ireland.

Emma Dineen, a 20-year-old University of Limerick student is facing into her third season on Treaty United's media team. When Emma joined Treaty's media team ahead of the 2023 season, she became not only the youngest among them, but also the only female.

“It's been a season full of personal and team milestones, and we've seen the team train harder, going from three to five days of training per week

Both Dineen and McCormack are paving the way for young women across Limerick to get involved in football.

“I was 17 or 18 when I got involved with Treaty. At the time, I think I was the only female on the media team, and there were maybe 12 males.

“I was the youngest and the only female. They gave me a great amount of trust, which I respect, because it's hard for young people to gain responsibility so early,” Dineen explains.

“In my first season, I was given the role of handling the women's social media, which meant producing most of the content for the women's team.

“I did the build-up to matches, live updates on social media, the match graphics, post-match interviews, and pre-match interviews with the captain.

“Last season, I was also in charge of six academy teams, which was way too much work alongside the senior team,” she explains. “Eventually, I passed that responsibility on because it was too much to handle.”

Dineen's work with Treaty has furthered her interest in the women's game, as she has grown close to several players and staff, and witnessed them working day-in, day-out.

A fan of Manchester United, she admits that her focus had always been on the men's game growing up, but through her work she has gained an interest in women's football and has even gone to watch the Irish national team on several occasions.



The Treaty United media team. Credit - Treaty United FC

“I think the game is ever-growing, and it's gaining more attention, even faster than men's football in some cases.

“Personally, I didn't have much interest in women's football initially.

“The main challenge isn't just for women's football, but Limerick football in general

“I was always a fan of the men's game, particularly in England. But over time, I've become more engaged, especially after attending women's national team games. Now, I'm excited to see how it continues to grow in Ireland.

“The main challenge isn't just for women's football, but Limerick football in general. Limerick has a long history, with the original club being founded in 1937, and Treaty only came along in 2020.

“Some of our best young players are choosing to play in places like Galway or Cork instead of Limerick. That's a big issue we need to address.

“We've had a recent takeover, and now we have a female CEO, which is a step in the right direction. They've

worked to bridge the gap between the old Limerick fans and the new Treaty supporters, which I think is important for the future of football in the region.”

Treaty United's women's team took huge steps forward last year. They recorded their highest league position, as well as their best tallies for goals scored and conceded, a clear indication of the way the club is heading.

“The only way is up” says Dineen. “We finished this season with 23 points, which is a 15-point improvement from last season. We've seen significant growth, both in performance and team composition.

“Players from all over the world—Canada, Japan, America, Australia—alongside Irish players, have been a part of this success,” she says. “It's been a season full of personal and team milestones, and we've seen the team train harder, going from three to five days of training per week.

With the 2025 season soon commencing, Dineen is adamant that further investment is needed.

“We've only seen the team go up and up in the past three seasons, and I believe that will continue,” she remarks. “But for that to happen, there needs to be heavy investment. “When we brought in interna-

tional players, we saw how much the team improved because they brought different experiences and work ethics, especially from countries like Canada.”

Perhaps it could prove that diversifying the club with talent from outside the island can in turn bring about an improvement at local youth level and set up for a better future.

If the past season is anything to go by, one thing is certain for Treaty United and women's football.

“The only way is up.”



Emma Dineen. Credit - Treaty United FC

TREATY UNITED — UPCOMING MEN'S FIXTURES



Athlone Town v Treaty United - Friday February 21 (7.45 pm KO)

On Friday, Treaty travel to the midlands looking to banish the ghosts of last season in the second round of the season. ‘De Town’ proved to be a bogey team for Tommy Barrett's side who suffered four losses from four in the fixture last season.

Treaty United v Finn Harps - Friday February 28 (7.45 pm KO)

The following week, the Shannonsiders will welcome Finn Harps to Markets field on what they have billed as a ‘student night’. This goes alongside a February and March student offer where you can buy a student ticket and bring a friend along for free.

Dundalk v Treaty United - Friday March 7 (7.45 pm KO)

Treaty head back on the road on matchday four, this time to Oriel Park to take on recently relegated Dundalk. The Limerick based side will hope to improve their away record this season - they won just six out of their eighteen games on the road last season.

Treaty United v Wexford - Friday March 14 (7.45 pm KO)

Goals are expected when Tommy Barrett's men welcome Wexford to Markets field. The two sides combined for 14 in their four league meetings last season - Lee Devitt and Yoyo Mahdy will fancy their chances, both hit the net twice against this opponent last year.

Cathal O'Neill: Treaty star adamant against sidelining Gaelge

SPORT: 23



Róisín Ní Ríain continues to inspire

Paralympic Medalist talks motivation, goals and being a role model

SPORT: 28



FAMILY AFFAIR

Rugby prodigy Evan O'Connell's bright career start

Evan O'Connell in action on his Munster debut vs New Zealand All Blacks XV. Photo Credit: Ken Sutton/Inpho



Further history within reach for groundbreaking Irish side

BY CAOLÁN SCULLY

TWO games down, three to go. England was edged out and Scotland smothered. Now, the Simon Easterby-led Ireland head into the back half of the 2025 Guinness Men's Six Nations with a confidence of successive victories but a burden of history.

They looked primed for the unprecedented glory of three straight Six Nations titles. It seems only 'Les Bleus' stand between Ireland and immortality.

When you think about Ireland's two performances on a rational, analysis-based level; it has been imperfect. . . Despite some positives, mistakes were apparent in tackling and set pieces.

Yet, two wins from two against fellow title contenders where four tries were scored in each game without getting out of third gear? That's the mark of a good team.

Before their return to action, Ireland will try to get Mack Hansen, Joe McCarthy and Tadhg Furlong fit again. From there, they will use the Wales game to clean up their act with one eye on France.

Ireland have defeated France on the past two occasions, but after their last-gasp loss to England, there will be an added layer of spite from Antoine Dupont and co. A tidier Ireland performance should be more than enough, even if it means leaning on the less impressive defensive focus versus the potential for a swashbuckling tête-à-tête. It's Cardiff next for Ireland, followed by home comforts of Dublin then the exotic pageantry of Rome. A dilapidated Wales should be no match for Ireland; and the Italian rising might still be some time away.

It all hinges on Saturday, March 8. Lansdowne Road the venue, France the opponent. Win there, and Ireland are destined for history in bold, capital letters.



Ireland's Calvin Nash against Scotland. INPHO/Billy Stickland

Munster and Ireland U20 second-row Evan O'Connell talks to Managing Editor **Jack McKay** about recent success, biggest achievements and carrying a name etched into Irish rugby history.

FOR those with a keen interest in rugby, Evan O'Connell's name is one you've probably heard. You may have even heard of his father, Justin O'Connell.

But for Irish people with no interest in the sport - you've definitely heard of his uncle, Paul O'Connell.

As one of the all-time Irish rugby greats, Paul won many titles - with the most notable of those being Ireland's Six Nations Grand Slam in 2009.

Now, his nephew Evan is paving his own way and already boasts an impressive career, following in his uncle's footsteps in the second row.

At the end of January, the 20-year-old third year Business student at UL signed his first senior contract with Munster, which will come in for the 2026/27 season.

"It's a very proud feeling," he begins. "It's unreal and my parents and family are just delighted for me."

"It's an honour to sign on and be a full senior player with the team I grew up supporting and going to games with. To be a full professional with Munster is all you

“To be a full professional with Munster is all you dream of.”

dream of.”

In a growing book of highlights, that contract was only one chapter. His Munster debut in November was another.

"It was unreal," Evan recalls. "I couldn't have asked for anything better really. A packed-out Thomond Park against a very good All-Blacks XV side who came over."

"Unfortunately, we lost, but I was delighted to get it and being at home in Thomond Park where I had gone to so many games before. Having the crowd be full was unreal."

Domestic success is one thing, but O'Connell has also proven himself at international level, captaining Ireland U20s at the Six Nations and World Cup.

"It's been a good couple of years," Evan explains. "Obviously my first year out of school we won the grand slam with the U20s, went on to come second in the World Cup."

"The following year I was lucky enough to captain the U20s. We had a great campaign there, just lost out on the Six Nations, my World Cup was cut short by an ankle injury which was unfortunate."

"I was delighted to come back then and get a shot on the Emerging Ireland tour."

"Off the back of that then got my first cap and got a few more since then. I'm delighted with how things are going recently."

It's hardly much of a surprise to see O'Connell take the rugby path given his origins - but it wasn't the

only sport he has played.

"I played a lot of sports growing up. Other than rugby I'd still be massively into hurling," he says. "I played all the way up to minor and I loved it."

"I was sad to give it up to play rugby, but I'd still take a lot from it."

"When you're a bit younger you have loads of energy to do that and I suppose sports isn't as taxing."

"As I got older, I started enjoying rugby more, so I stuck with that from then."

As Evan has grown, so has the pressure associated with his name. Yet all he's done is thrived

"I'm kind of used to it by now really, I don't really think about it," he explains. "I kind of just do my own thing and not really think about it too much but obviously it's something in the back of your mind that you do think about sometimes."

"I'm making my own career, and I take as much help as I can from the two of them."