

# Menswear institution marks 80 years trading in the city centre

## THE LEADER QUESTIONNAIRE

**Brian 'Jack' Leonard** is part of the fabric of Limerick, with his popular store in O'Connell Street marking a special anniversary

**TELL us a little about Leonard's Menswear**

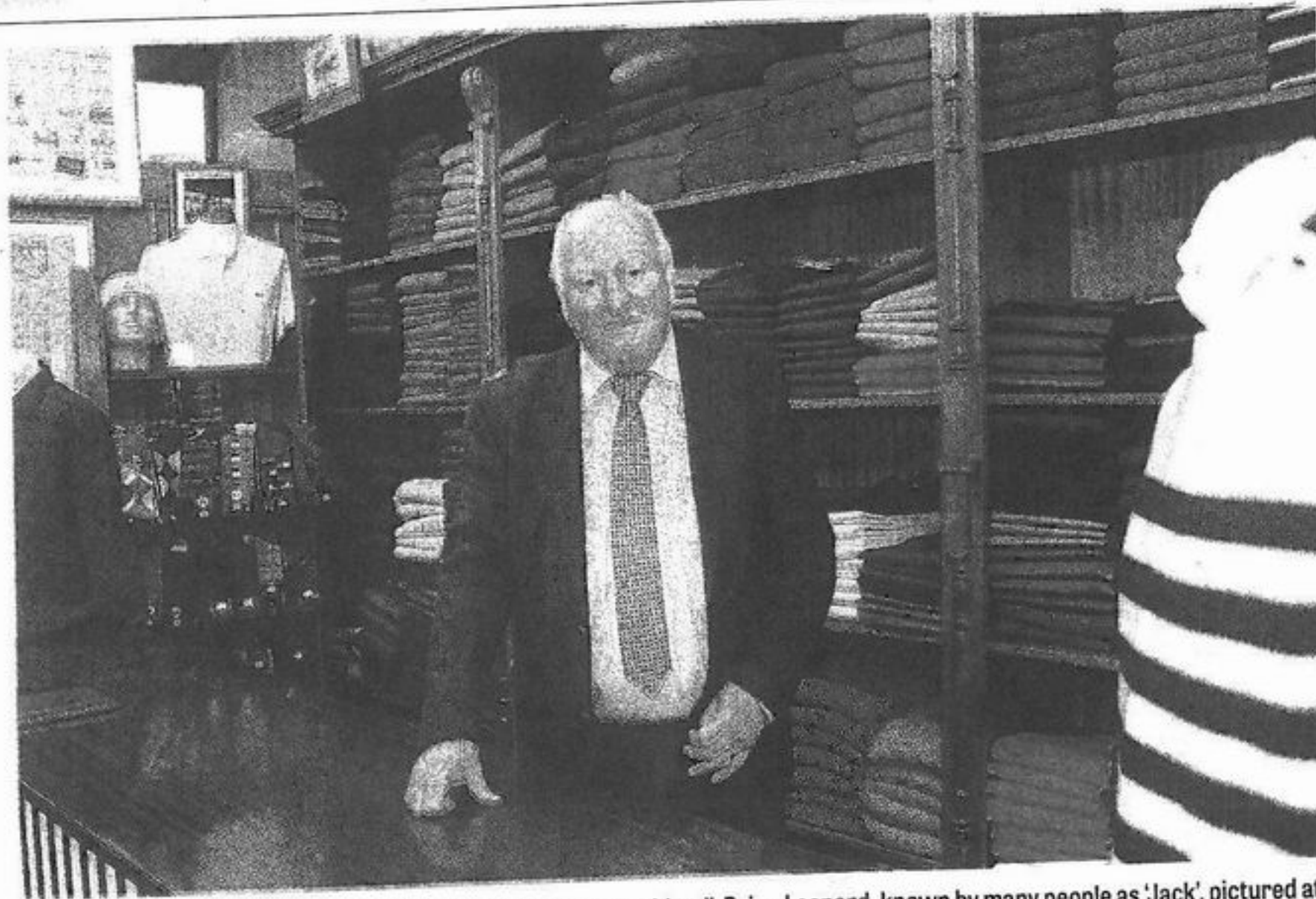
The shop opened on October 25, 1935 by my father John. It was difficult times as there was a very deep recession at the time. He was 21 when he opened the business and worked here for 50 years. He grew the business from strength to strength, specialising in courteous efficient service. He looked after people, and understood his customers. Fortunately I have learnt a bit from him. We sell both formal and informal menswear. We have a good suit trade, plus we have outdoor wear, as well as smart casual clothing. We cater for most men's needs. We have two employees, Eamon Ryan here 35 years, and John O'Riordan, who is here 28 years. We are a team - we have grown together and cover one another.

**What would you put the businesses longevity down to?**

It is very simple. We understand our trade, we understand what people's requirements are, and we personally sell. We are also conscious when we are selling that we do not give people the wrong advice because we want people to come back to us. This is very important to look at. We are fortunate we have had a good following over the years. I would be bullish about the future. I think Limerick is improving, but the city centre is hurting, because we do not have enough general shops.

**What does your job entail?**

I am working within this shop for 42 years. The most important part of my role is to meet and greet the customers and look after their needs. We make it a priority to salute



'I think you have to be born to retail, I think it has to be in your blood'. Brian Leonard, known by many people as 'Jack', pictured at Leonard's Menswear in O'Connell Street. This year has marked the 80th anniversary of the popular store. Picture: Michael Cowhey

everybody, and thank them for coming. Naturally, I do the buying. Next month, I will be attending trade shows to buy items for autumn and Christmas 2016!

**Where were you born and raised?**

I was born and raised in Limerick, and have lived all my life in Ballinacurra with my wife Suzanne. Our one daughter Jacqueline, currently lives in Vancouver.

**What is your educational background?**

I was educated at the Crescent College - doing two years in the Comprehensive, and the balance in O'Connell Street.

**How did you get to where you are today?**

After I completed my education in 1975, I went to Ipswich in England for a year to work in a factory called Lambourne Clothing. It specialised

in country-wear. I saw where the orders came in, how they were processed, and the cut on them. I spent six months there. Then they very fortunately organised that I go to a shop in Ipswich to get a bit more experience. I worked in a shop called Ridley's. They had branches in Bury St Edmonds, Norwich and London. It was a great experience, and from my father's point of view, he felt I learnt more in the 12 months as I was working for somebody else. When

I came back to Limerick, I started working in the family business. I was the youngest of four boys, and none of them showed interest in the business. I think you have to be born to retail: it has to be in your blood.

**What made you want to work in your family's business?**

I felt it was a lovely business. I enjoyed working here during school holidays. I felt I was cut out for it.

**What are your goals for 2016?**

To grow the business back to where it used to be. I also want to get fit, and play better golf! My handicap is a poor 12 at the moment.

**In business and life, who do you admire?**

I think Michael O'Leary would be my unsung hero. I think he is a wonderful man. He has revolutionised the aviation industry, making it accessible for everyone. He is just a role model for business, and now he has shown a human side, through the 'Always getting better' programme.

**Are you guided by any particular motto?**

To be honest, and give good, genuine advice, and hopefully the customer will come back.

**Away from work, what are your pastimes and hobbies?**

I love doing my garden at weekends. I enjoy cooking, especially barbecuing. I always cook the Sunday joint. I really enjoy my golf and I am fortunate to be with a group of people and we are playing well over 30 years together as a group.