

## IN BRIEF

## Ah go on

■ THE spirit of Father Ted will be enlisted to support a major fundraising venture to fit out the new adult cystic fibrosis unit at University Hospital Limerick in Dooradoyle. The unit was provided at a cost of €5.3 million by the TLC4CF (Tipperary, Limerick & Clare for Cystic Fibrosis) group who are holding their annual run, cycle and walk on Saturday, September 12. Now in its fifth year, the event takes in the best of the glorious North Clare scenery, including the iconic parochial house made famous by the Father Ted comedy series. Online registration is now open at [www.TLC4CF.com](http://www.TLC4CF.com) and entries will also be accepted on the morning of the event at Kilnaboy school from 8.30am to 10am.

## It's Christmas

■ IT'S beginning to look a lot like Christmas at Brown Thomas in Limerick this week as staff prepare to launch the store's annual Christmas market. With just 127 days until Santa arrives, management at the luxury department store say they decided to open the Christmas shops in Limerick, Cork and Dublin early due to consumer demand. A spokesperson for the store said that many of its customers enjoy buying Christmas decorations months in advance. The Christmas markets will be filled with trees and festive decorative accessories and themes will include 'I Love Candy', 'Santa's Journey', 'Ice Palace' and 'Venetian Winter'.

## Castle sold

■ KIM Kardashian and Kanye West's County Limerick honeymoon hideaway has sold for around €3 million to an Australian family after more than two years on the market. Castle Oliver in Ardpatrick, in the foothills of the Ballyhoura Mountains, has been sold for an undisclosed sum through Dublin property agents Ganly Walters. Situated on 15 acres, the 14-bedroom castle covers 23,000 square feet and has a wine cellar with a capacity for 55,000 bottles. The property was advertised at €2.95 million and the former owners said they have received "a very good price". A family from Melbourne, who work in the transport industry, bought Castle Oliver. They now plan to use it as their family home for several months of the year.

## DROMKEEN FIRE

# Memories are all that remain after Oyster Ballroom blaze

by Andrew Carey  
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IT STOOD for almost 60 years and hosted the greats of the showband era before its reincarnation as a furniture store, but the life and soul of the Oyster Ballroom in Dromkeen came to an end in the early hours of last Sunday morning when a fire completely gutted the building.

Eight fire units from Cappamore, Newport, Tipperary and Limerick city spent several hours tackling the devastating blaze at the Furniture Man in Dromkeen, which broke out at around 3.30am on Sunday morning.

An estimated €500,000 worth of furniture stock was destroyed in the blaze, which started in an adjacent storage shed and quickly spread to the furniture store owned by Bernard Keogh and his family.

The N24 Limerick to Waterford Road through Dromkeen remained closed on Sunday morning with diversions in place, while three units of Limerick City and County Fire Service dampened down the smouldering shell that was all that remained of the iconic building.

No one was injured in the blaze and while full forensic analysis is underway, foul play is not suspected.

The fire sparked memories of the Oyster Ballroom, which was one of the most successful dance venues in the country in the 1960s and 70s where many young people from Limerick, Cork, Clare and Tipperary dated and later married.

Described as the 'largest ballroom in the south' when it first opened its doors in November 1958, the ballroom could accommodate up to 3,000 dancers and the stage could be wheeled forwards and backwards depending on the size of the crowd.

Proprietor, Packie (PJ) Hayes was renowned for his business acumen and saw a gap in the market for a dancehall in the region. Among the

many acts who took to the stage were US country star Jim Reeves, Joe Dolan, Dickie Rock, Brendan Bowyer and Thin Lizzy who played in April 1980.

Ironically, a special concert to relive the former ballroom's halcyon days, 'Rolling Back the Dromkeen Years', is due to take place in nearby Cappamore Community Centre on August 30.

Event organiser John Barrett expressed extreme shock at the loss of the Oyster Ballroom.

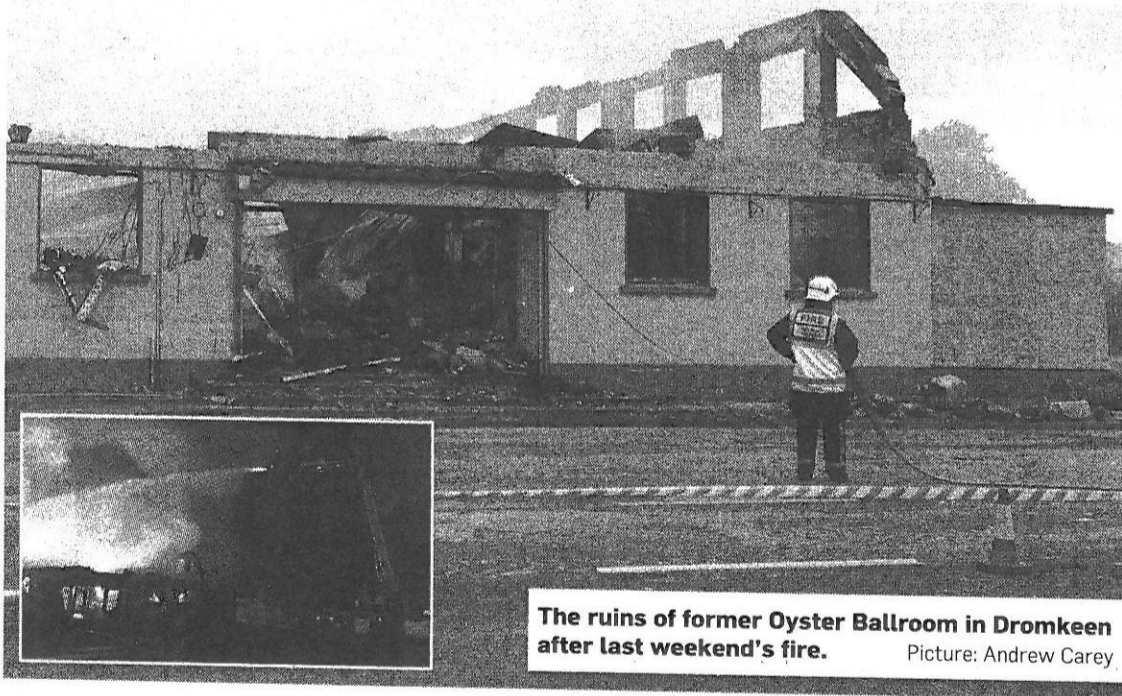
"I was horrified when news of the fire emerged. We had only met up with Brendan Bowyer, his daughter Aisling, Tommy Ryan and Pat Fogarty of Cappamore Development Association for a photoshoot at the ballroom last week."

"Bernard Keogh of Furniture Man told us that hardly a day went by without customers recalling their dancing days in the Oyster Ballroom. Many had met their wife or first girlfriend at a dance there."

He said that 'Rolling Back The Dromkeen Years' had attracted a lot of interest, with a large number of tickets already sold for the night in Cappamore.

"It will not only be a night of great nostalgia but also a special occasion now with the loss of the ballroom", he added.

Tickets for the Brendan Bowyer concert are available from Murroe Post Office, O'Dwyer's Bar, Cappamore, Pa Creamer's Butcher, Cappamore, Tommy Ryan Cappamore, Anne's Shop, Doon, Hourigan For Men, Tipperary or telephone 087 6123334 for further details.



The ruins of former Oyster Ballroom in Dromkeen after last weekend's fire. Picture: Andrew Carey

## HEALTH

## Crew shortages putting ambulances off the road

by Bernie English  
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LIMERICK ambulances face being stood down, leaving gaps in the life-saving service, due to under staffing and what has been described as a "lack of forward planning".

Following on claims that there was no trained paramedic to go out to calls with an intern on the night that Leaving Cert students hit the city to celebrate their results, SIPTU ambulance service representative, Ted Kenny confirmed to the Limerick Post that the service is understaffed by up to seven people in a compliment of almost 30 paramedics.

"With that kind of shortage, it is very difficult to get cover if a paramedic calls in sick. If there are not two paramedics, one to stay with the patient and one to drive, then that ambulance has to be

stood down," he explained.

Mr Kenny warned that the situation is "an accident waiting to happen. It's only a matter of time before something serious happens and there won't be an ambulance to cover. It will be two years before this can be rectified because there is a lack of forward planning to recruit and train people to replace those retiring or leaving".

In a press statement, the National Ambulance Service said that Limerick city was operating at its normal levels last Wednesday night and denied that two intern paramedics worked together that night.

It added that an intern paramedic was working alongside another paramedic in an emergency ambulance in the city and that they would have been supported by other crews in the area if the need arose.

## EMPLOYMENT

## Young jobseekers not using scheme

by Bernie English  
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MORE than a thousand young Limerick jobseekers are missing out on a scheme that could give them a boost into the workforce.

While there are 1,134 young Limerick people on the live register who could be availing of the Department of Social Protection's JobsPlus scheme, only 39 young Limerick people were employed under the scheme which pays employers a grant if they take a person under 25 off the dole queue.

Employers are paid €7,500 over two years if they employ a young person under 25 years of age, who is in receipt of a jobseekers payment for at least four of the previous six months. The employment must be at least 30 hours a week over at least four days a week.

National Youth Council deputy director James Doorley said that many young jobseekers and employers were not aware of the incentives available to those who take on young people.

Full details on [www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Jobs-Plus.aspx](http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Jobs-Plus.aspx)

## WELFARE FRAUD

## Facebook may be used against welfare cheats

FACEBOOK pictures and posts showing people living beyond their means may be used as evidence against social welfare cheats, the Department of Social Protection has warned.

With a large-scale crackdown on welfare fraud currently underway in Limerick, department officials and investigators, along with a Garda seconded from the Limerick division, are using social media as part of their background checks into people who travel from other European countries to make fraudulent welfare claims.

The investigators will be looking for pictures of holidays and cars along with any signs of excessive spending outside the scope of normal welfare allowances.

According to the department, claims can't be suspended on the basis of information found on social media but it can be used along with

other evidence as a basis to review a claimant's eligibility.

A spokesperson from the Department of Social Protection said that "fraud investigative staff, as part of their ongoing targeted fraud and error control activities, may refer to social media sites as part of investigations.

"Details obtained from social media are examined and if relevant, will be used a part of the overall investigation. A payment is not suspended or stopped on the basis of any social media site posting but may, however, be used as part of the information corroborated with other evidence to review a customer's eligibility to a payment," the official said.

Recent figures indicate that 5,233 reports of welfare fraud were made to the Department of Social Protection between January and mid-April this year.