

DAY ONE

□ SOME WEEKS ago I referred to the unusually high number of shop closures in Limerick since the turn of the year.

The recession, I mentioned, was beginning to bite. Now there is a new threat — vandalism and intimidation. I was concerned by a report in our mid-week issue of last week which told of a German-born businessman and his wife with two premises in town who were obliged to bring down the shutters because of alleged harassment by teenagers, intimidation of customers and the larceny of merchandise. How sad. The business community certainly have enough to contend with nowadays rather than having to endure such inexcusable acts.

Limerick's image is bound to be tarnished further. The city centre is most days littered with young people who have nothing else to do other than congregate outside shop premises.

And you daren't ask them to move. In addition to those youngsters out of work you have teenagers on their way home from our various schools who team up with them on already crowded footpaths.

Steps should be taken to prevent such loitering. It is often the case that those going about their everyday duties have to push and jostle their way past such youngsters. And I certainly wouldn't like to get on the wrong side of them.

One particular afternoon I witnessed a shop manager make efforts to move them, without success, I might add.

School authorities and parents have a responsibility here. Should they not be prepared to get the message across then the men in blue might

show example and rid our main thoroughfares of such pests.

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□ THE other day I had occasion to visit a large city centre store and struck up a conversation with the security man on duty.

We got down to talking about the mini budget introduced by Fine Gael and the effects it would have on the ordinary Joe Soap.

He told me he was newly married and had one child and was finding it extremely difficult to survive.

When I mentioned to him that at least he had a job and a regular weekly income, he shrugged his shoulders and replied: "You know, I would be as well off on the Labour."

He told me he was paid £2.95 per hour and on average worked an 8 hour day, giving him a daily rate of £23.60. Over a five day week that works out at £118.00, without the usual deductions.

Such a paltry wage. He agreed that there was the possibility of supplementing his income by working overtime but I couldn't help thinking that his employer had him in a Catch 22 situation, pushing him to the limits to give him a decent wage packet.

After finishing his 8 hour shift that day he was going on security duty to a factory on the outskirts of the city, from 6 p.m. to 7 the following morning.

"I need the extra money," he confided. Here was a young man obliged to work for 23 consecutive hours to provide a home and food for his wife and child.

Here was case of one security firm failing to provide security for their employees.

JOHN O'SHAUGHNESSY

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Shaun aims at bringing new life to arts in Mid-West

□ THERE'S A healthy art scene here in Limerick — that's the view of our new Mid-West arts officer, Donegal-born Shaun Hannigan.

And now Shaun, an Arts graduate from U.C.G., is hoping to develop and expand this scene with many exciting plans in the pipeline for the entire region.

"The trend, countryside, seems to be one of development, particularly in the last 10 years," he said this week in an interview.

Here in Limerick, that period marked the birth of the Belltable Arts Centre, Theatre Omnibus, and All Plus 10 Sorts.

Arts

Shaun's own interest in the fine arts stems from his days as a student in Galway.

And though he admits that that city is now renowned for its strong tradition in the arts, Shaun is quick to point out that this was not something that could have occurred overnight.

"It was very gradual, and it took a lot of work, and it is something which could also happen here in Limerick," he declared.

Being a small-sized university city, Galway had the advantage of having on hand enthusiastic young people willing to become involved in the arts.

This tie between the arts and students is not so obvious here in Limerick — because of its distance from town, the NIHE campus is removed from much of this activity.

Also because the students have constant assessment, and due to the fact that they have to work in a company for a number of months, it would be very difficult for them to have a theatre group or other project on an ongoing basis.

Prior to coming to Limerick, Shaun, who also studied visual education at the Regional Technical College, Galway was involved in the Galway Arts Festival.

Projects

Since his graduation from U.C.G., he has worked on various projects in Galway and Donegal.

One of Shaun's main aims is that he would like to see the arts being opened up to everyone — "in the past an interest in the arts was classed as very 'bourgeois' — this I would certainly like to see changing," he commented.

"My definition of the arts is



Shaun Hannigan.

very broad, and there really are cultural aspects of some form or other in everyone's life.

"School is one of the most important areas where an interest in the arts can be developed — children just haven't the same conditioned bias that we have.

"And in order to have a balanced education, there is room for much more attention to the arts in our schools.

'Language'

"Visual arts and music are a language, just as English is a language, and they should also be treated with the same priority."

According to Shaun, moves are now afoot to vitalise this awareness in our schools. The Arts Council has been working for some time with the Curriculum Development Board and, recently, the Government has produced a detailed document on the arts.

"The Arts Council did a great deal of research for this document, and now we are glad to see that the Government is taking up a lot of the recommendations."

At the moment, Shaun is busy putting the final touches to 'Poetry Month' — February has been designated poetry month in Limerick city.

During the month, the Mid-West Arts will hold an extensive series of poetry and literary events — these will include twice-weekly readings in the Glentworth Hotel, on Tuesdays and Fridays, as well as the Kate O'Brien weekend, which will be held at the end of the month. And there will also be a poetry workshop for local writers.

This workshop will be conducted by the celebrated poet and short story writer, John Montague, who is currently based in Cork. This will take place in the Teachers' Centre, Summerhill Avenue, on Saturday, February 21.

invited to submit two pieces of their work prior to the event, so that Mr. Montague will be better able to advise and assist them.

There is a fee of £8, and this, together with an application form and the applicants work, must be returned to the Mid-West Arts committee before Friday, February 6.

Further details can be obtained from Shaun (061) 314181.

He continued: "Poetry Month was a great success last year, and it is now hoped that it will become an annual event in the city — there is a strong interest in poetry here in Limerick. We have a healthy Irish language group — Ur-Chuir — and Eigse-na-Maighe — and the Limerick Writers' group meet every month. There is also an active writers' class in the city."

And even though this month may be catering for a small group, Shaun is adamant that their needs must be catered for.

The theme for the forthcoming Kate O'Brien weekend is "The Writer in Contemporary Irish Society," and Ms. Nell McCafferty will perform the official opening. Well-known writers who will be taking part include Benedict Kiely, Michael Harnett, Kevin Barry, Jennifer Fitzgerald, Nuala O'Faolain and Paul Durcan.

A festival for Limerick is also on the cards for Shaun: "There is no reason why we can't run something on the lines of the Dublin city carnival," he remarked.

Enthusiasm
"But we do need enthusiasm and a lot of good will if it is to be successful — Limerick is not used to this type of

Profile by MARY HEENAN

event, and therefore it would take some time for it to build up to a major event."

However, Shaun is very excited about the forthcoming Sculpture symposium, which will take place in the city this summer — in conjunction with Limerick Corporation and the Sculpture Society of Ireland. Six sculpturers will visit the city and will design specially-commissioned pieces for each site.

Speaking of the Belltable Arts Centre, Shaun said that it was a welcome addition to the arts life of the city "and I am now anxious to see how it will continue to develop."

And he added: "However, the centre could certainly do with more public support — many good quality shows are just not being attended. People are just not used to attending the theatre, but that "feel" of people acting live is impossible to capture at the cinema or on television.

"The Belltable must be congratulated for bringing top-quality professional theatre to Limerick.

Facilities

"It also provides top class facilities for local groups to stage their productions."

And according to Shaun, the Belltable, over the next few weeks, should provide us with a variety of top class plays.

Involving people in the arts is what it is all about — "I love to see people participating and enjoying themselves in whatever aspect of the arts they are involved."

And it is that general "buzz" that Shaun would like to instill in the arts scene here in Limerick.

Shaun is particularly interested in developing community arts: "There is a big movement towards community arts in Britain, at the moment, and I believe that there is scope to develop this here in Limerick."

Speaking of funding from the Arts Council, Shaun said that, of course, they could do with a lot more: "A few thousand pounds from a local authority is not much in their budget, and it could do a lot for the arts."

He continued: "Also you tend to find that people involved in the arts scene tend to be young and enthusiastic, and they would certainly give value for money."

At the moment, two young people from the Teamwork Scheme are working with Shaun at the Mid-West Arts Office — one is involved with Theatre Omnibus, and the second project involves the All Plus 10 Gallery.

As the region's officer, Shaun travels extensively throughout the county and throughout Clare and North Tipperary, where, he claims, the arts are alive and vibrant.

And anyone who has an interesting project or even an idea is invited to visit Shaun at the Mid-West office in Henry Street, where he will be on hand to give professional advice and assistance.

"We would be delighted to talk to anyone with ideas and, hopefully, we could give them some professional assistance," he concluded.

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