

Developer Michael Daly's Fordmount Group were behind the construction of the hotel and that company took responsibility for the hotel after Irresistible Hotels Ltd, who ran the business, went into liquidation.

Since then, an €86m judgement was entered against Mr Daly in the High Court over unpaid development loans of €165 million advanced by Anglo Irish Bank to three companies in the Fordmount Property Group, and two partnerships, to buy property in Limerick city and county. A number of its other assets in the city have also been sold.

"You could say the hotel has had a difficult upbringing," said Mr Branigan.

"It has required a lot of care and attention, but we are very passionate about it, as we are about Limerick and the region," said the hotelier, who has worked in Limerick on-and-off since 1987.

"The fact that we are a five-star hotel and have no parking continues to be a big issue, but it's something we've managed over the years. We took on a lot of challenges here, when the recession was at full belt, but we are looking forward to bringing the business forward.

"It's not a faceless business, it's a family run affair. My wife Ann works here, and we try to be here and greet customers as much as we can," he told the Limerick Leader.

The average occupancy rate in the hotel is at around 68%, he said, and operates at full capacity during Heineken Cup and Rabo Direct games in the city.

"We have brought it into profit but it's a tough business to run. There are a lot of hidden costs in running a five-star hotel, but it's on a sound financial footing."

"City of Culture is the best thing that has happened to Limerick in 10 years. If you had said to me a year ago we'd like Carmen in the Milk Market, I would have said 'you're mad', but if we had it again next year there's a sense it could run for three nights."

Mr Branigan called the hotel The Savoy in a nod to its history given that the premises is located on the site of the former Savoy, the legendary 1,500 seater concert venue and cinema which opened in 1936. He recently sold his restaurant, Saddlers in Mayfair, London, to a Russian investor for an undisclosed sum.

One-bed apartments in the site's prime location - City Central on Bedford Row - are currently being let for €700 per month.



Sweet taste of success: Pupils from Red Hill School in Patrickswell, with staff members, after being presented with their medals for taking part in a Special Olympics competition. Picture: Michael Cowhey

Students strike gold at Special Olympics

AINE FITZGERALD

AS the Special Olympics Ireland Games kick off in earnest this Thursday, students of a County Limerick school are already basking in glory.

A group of 25 children from Red Hill school in Patrickswell have been presented with medals having competed in Special Olympic competitions through the school for the first time.

"It takes a lot of dedication from staff and pupils in order to train regularly. The students

were very dedicated to training and they enjoyed practicing weekly," said Laura Ahern who is a teacher in the school and head coach with the Special Olympics.

In February 2008, Red Hill School received recognition as a school for children with autism from the then Department of Education and Science.

As 2014 is the first year the school participated in the competition - which is organised by Special Olympics - the students competed in two categories athletics-track, and the jumps - the standing jump

and the running long jump.

"There were two days of competition and two different groups went on each day. The students were very determined on the day of competition," said Laura.

The students, who ranged in age from eight to 12 years, were superbly successful for their first year winning 25 medals in total including 10 gold, eight silver, and seven bronze as well as ribbons for fifth and sixth place.

"The athletes represented the school in a positive light. Well

done to all involved," said Laura.

The medals were presented to the students by members of the Irish women's rugby team.

"It is great for the children - it gives them confidence and a sense of accomplishment," Laura added.

Red Hill school opened its doors on September 1 2008 on a site outside Patrickswell.

The school term 2013-2014 is their sixth academic year in operation.

There are currently 68 pupils, 12 teachers and 25 special needs assistants in the school.

Slipway and pontoon development will transform riverside

BRIAN O'CONNOR

PERMISSION has been granted for the construction of a new €100,000 slipway and floating pontoon to be constructed at St Michael's Rowing Club at O'Callaghan Strand.

The riverscape adjacent to the club will be completely transformed from the construction of this project. However, as a result seafarers and pleasure craft entering Limerick from the Shannon estuary will be able to moor safely at what will become the first mooring point in the city.

The development also stems from an increase in membership of St Michael's Rowing Club and the club has said: "Our current slip needs to be upgraded to a more

modern, safer and larger one with greater capacity for our growing membership."

According to the plans one of the existing slipways leading to the river from the club grounds will be demolished and a new slipway will be constructed on the eastern side of the building and will lead to the proposed floating pontoon which will run alongside the club's property to the slipway closest to the Shannon Bridge as our image of the plans shows.

St Michael's member and consulting engineer on the project Pierce McGann said: "We have recently commenced fund raising and the hope is that we will have the costs, which are in the region of €100,000, gathered and the project will be underway

within twelve months, so we're looking to turn the sod by next June."

St Michael's Rowing Club is one of the largest in the country with over 120 active members and throughout its 113-year history the club has provided a sporting and social outlet for young people from all over the city and through their achievements have kept Limerick on the sporting map.

Pierce added: "There is an unfortunately high number of marine rescues launched from the area near St Michael's and this new facility will greatly help with their work. The current facilities are at best inadequate there for such rescues to be launched."

"We need the support from the city, this is a community project that will ultimately

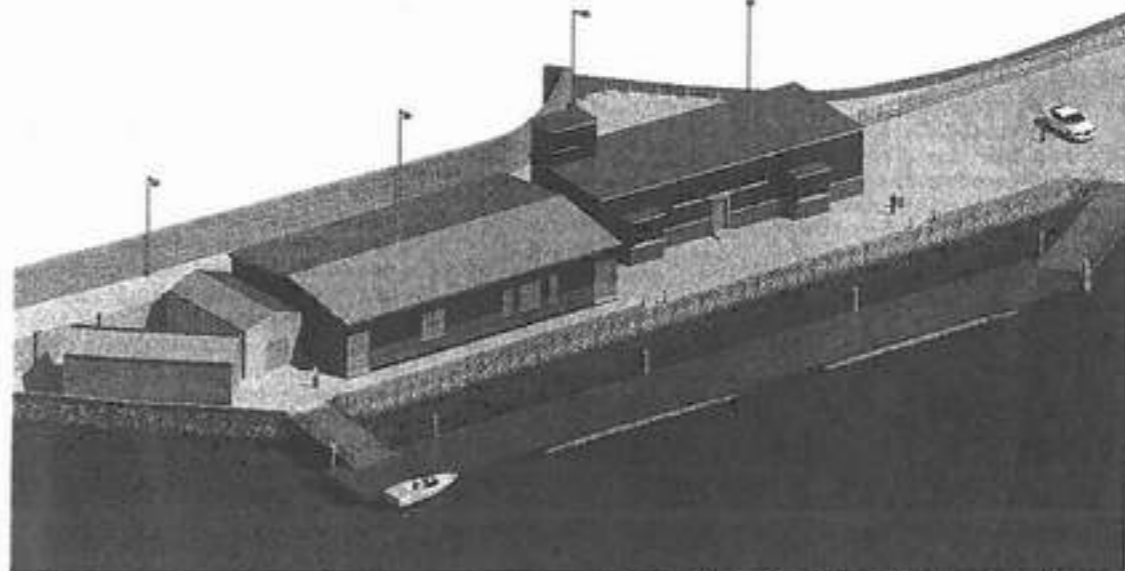
benefit Limerick Marine Search and Rescue, seafarers, rowers and pleasure craft and that is why we are launching the lotto and we will be having a fund raising fun run later in the year.

In an effort to raise funds for the development, St Michael's Rowing Club have established an online lotto.

Club president Austin Reid said: "We're very excited to be launching this new fundraising initiative. We truly hope that all our current and past members get behind the lotto and that we can generate the money needed to upgrade our slip."

The project has received the backing of Waterways Ireland.

To register to play at €2 per line please visit their website www.smrc.ie.



A 3D depiction of the slipway and floating pontoon development at St Michael's Rowing Club on O'Callaghan Strand

EX: LIMERICK LEADER