Exciting plan for former city church

Marie Hobbins reports

Set to become centre for cultural and artistic activities

A LANDMARK city centre building, once a place of worship, could soon be hanging a notice on its main door stating, 'Open For Business'.

The former Franciscan Friary and Church on Henry Street, is at the centre of a drive spearheaded by the trustees of the Bonaventure Trust to reactivate the spacious property.

Actively interested in developing the building as a pivotal link in a riverside chain of hospitality and leisure outlets, shops, services, etc, Shannon Development's Eoghan Prendergast, said:

"It would fit in with our investment in upgrading King John's Castle - our focus is on developing that side of riverside activity and extending it on the quayside up to Sarsfield Bridge, on to Howley's Quay and continuing up to the Shannon Bridge - our plans include the creation of a Hall of Fame along the Howley's Quay riverside and we see the friary as a strategic link in the overall development, which would be ideal for a range of cultural and artistic activities".

Mr Prendergast confirmed various sources of funding for their plans, including European funding and financial assistance from the Irish Diaspora in the United States.

Next week, 24 students of the Limerick School of Art and Design present a four-day exhibition of sculpture and mixed media in the church building, and other parties actively interested include Brendan Kenny, CEO, Limerick Regeneration, who told this newspaper that the building's great potential for cultural and community activities is on their agenda.

Since appointed by the Bonaventure Trust, Stephen Rourke, who accompanied this reporter on a tour of the property, has widely consulted with parties interested in exploring the potential of both the church and adjoining friary. The interest comes from a wide variety, including educational, cultural, community and commercial bodies.

"There has already been a huge amount of interest in short-term occupancy of the 10-12 rooms available in the friary. Mr Prendergast views the church and friary

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Swapping high heels for runners and announcing details of the May 28 Pink Ribbon Walk were; (l-r) Michelle Payne, Sara McGowan, Nicola Wood, Barbara McMahon and Maresa McKeogh. See www.pinkribbonwalk.ie for more.

Photo: Kieran Clancy