Year in review

Deep freeze bookends year as sporting

JANUARY

The big freeze hit County Limerick hard, with the longest cold snap in a generation forcing the closure of dozens of schools, and leaving roads to major towns cut off. On January 2, the freezing conditions claimed the life of 80-year-old bachelor Francie Dowling, who lived just outside Templeglantine.

While Limerick City finished bottom of the Irish Businesses Against Litter (IBAL) league, with its main thoroughfares found to be "seriously littered", Newcastle West fared much better, with the group's surveyors describing the county town as 'clean to European norms'.

Labour city councillor Gerry McLoughlin came under fire for allegedly calling rugby referee George Clancy a "cheat" after a game between Shannon and Cork Constitution. Assistant referee Tommy O'Donoghue said Cllr McLoughlin was "leading an amount of verbal abuse, calling him "a cheat, a c***, and a b******." Cllr McLoughlin denied using those words.

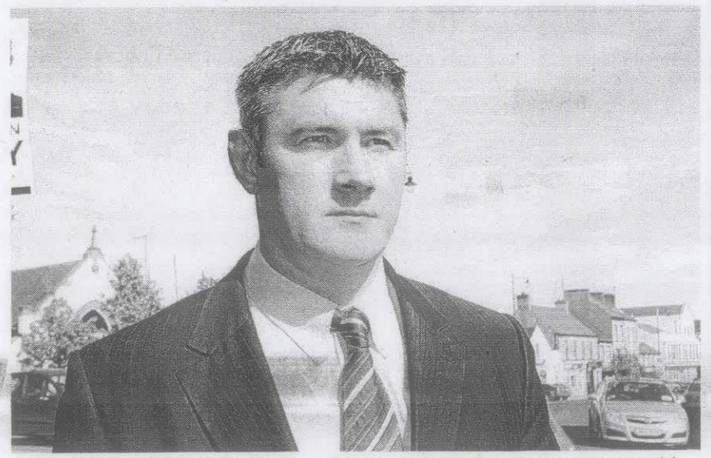
Lions and Ireland triple crown winning captain Paul O'Connell won the Limerick Leader Person of the Year Award. Steve Collins, whose son Roy was tragically killed in April 2009, won special recognition for raising awareness of Limerick's gangland problem.

One of Limerick's few remaining independent music stores Empire Music closed after 22 years. However, the premises reopened as Euro Empire.

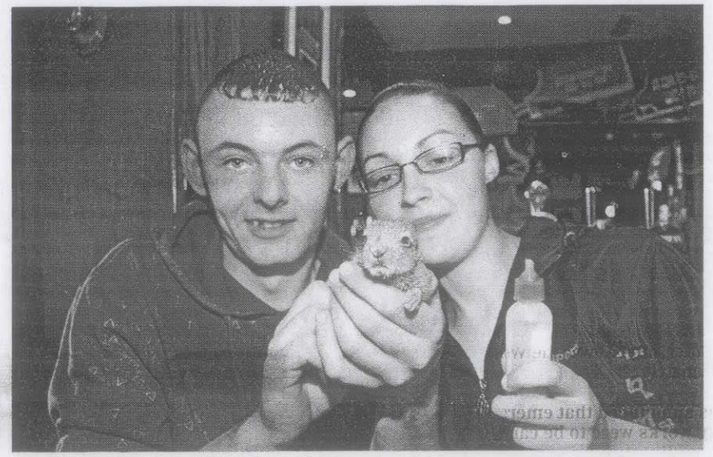
Sean McGowan from thomondgate celebrates after becoming the first Irishman to row solo across the Atlantic ocean. He finished the voyage in May

FEBRUARY

The month was dominated by Willie O'Dea's controversial resignation following comments he made linking Sinn Fein city councillor Maurice Quinlivan to a city brothel in 2009. The former Minister had signed a court affidavit denying he had made the comments to Limerick Leader reporter Mike Dwane. Despite political pressure from the opposition parties, Minister O'Dea survived a confidence vote in the Dail. But then Dan Boyle of the Green Party, wrote on Twitter, suggesting Fianna Fails coalition partners had been "bounced" into a yes vote, which spelled the beginning of the end for Limerick's poll-topping deputy. The following day, he resigned as Defence Minister.



Eddie Halvey did not attend the inquest of Kevin Walsh, the 16-year-old whose death he caused in 2006 through dangerous driving



Marco Velocci, who discovered a leveret in its dead mother's womb, and his girlfriend Josephine Power tend the little fellow with some milk

Marco Velocci and his girlfriend Josephine Power.

Deputy Michael Noonan showed courage speaking about the Alzheimer's disease, which has left his wife Florence bedbound in a nursing home. The Fine Gael TD said: "Getting her to bed at night was a huge difficulty at one stage. Twelve o'clock would come, no bed – 1am, 2am, 3am. So you would end up putting her in the car and, like she was a child, driving her around for miles."

The inaugural Strongman Champions League drew 1,000 spectators to Limerick Racecourse in Patrickswell, where ten of the strongest men in Europe went for the title.

There was anger as HSE funding cutbacks of up to €1m forced the closure of Bawnmore Respite Centre. Some 63 families of adults with intellectual disabilities were affected by the closure. When Taoiseach Brian Cowen attended an official function in Limerick weeks later, Leader photographer Owen South presented him with a petition calling for its reopening.

Limerick enjoyed a €10m boost as the Special Olympics rolled into town. More than 20,000 athletes and families took part in the three day event, with the opening ceremony taking place beneath a stunning flame at Thomond Park.

Limerick was once again overlooked for a place in the finals of the Rose of Tralee. Ahane's Brid Richardson sadly missed out at a spot in the Dome for the contest, taking place late August.

More than 400 parents, teachers and students turned out to show their opposition to the closure of Ard Scoil Mhuire in Bruff. Some €60,000 was committed by local businesses to help meet a ten-year bill of €1.3m to modernise the school.

The Milk Market officially reopened following a €2m overhaul. Local government Minister John Gormley officially cut the ribbon in October.

City South councillor Maria Byrne was officially elected as Mayor. Adare area councillor Richard Butler of Fine Gael, was elected as Cathaoirleach in Co Limerick.

JULY

West Limerick had a brush with the stars as Dominic West, from hit TV

Despite political pressure from the opposition parties, Minister O'Dea survived a confidence vote in the Dail. But then Dan Boyle of the Green Party, wrote on Twitter, suggesting Fianna Fails coalition partners had been "bounced" into a yes vote, which spelled the beginning of the end for Limerick's poll-topping deputy. The following day, he resigned as Defence Minister. Clare TD Tony Killeen stepped into his shoes a week later. Untroubled by Twitter's role in his downfall, Deputy O'Dea confirmed he had set up a page of his own later in the year.

The Limerick Leader revealed that former Kerry Group chief executive Denis Brosnan had been appointed to chair the boundary committee, which would make recommendation's on the city and county's governmental make-up in future.

Residents in West Limerick mobilised against the construction of the N21 Abbeyfeale to Adare dual carriageway. More than 100 people from West Limerick attended a special meeting on the €400m proposals, which they say will bypass small towns in the area, leaving tourism at a major loss.

Limerick County Council was forced to write off €34m in predicted development levies after the economic downturn saw the shelving of a number of construction projects. The group threatened to highjack the controversial scheme.

Gerard Hourigan, from Upper Grange, Bruff, was one of two Irishmen shot during an altercation with an armed security guard at Queen's Bowling Alley in New York City.

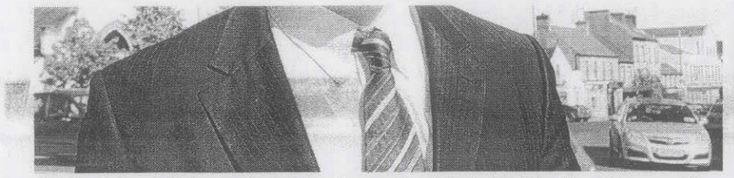
City centre traders brought O'Connell Street to a standstill in a protest aimed at making City Council aware of their concerns. Chief among those are a downturn in trade, unfair parking fines, begging, drug abuse, and high commercial rates.

MARCH

There was anger after it emerged the IDA's Horizon 2020 strategy, designed to help plug Ireland's jobs gap, bringing 105,000 new jobs to the country by 2015 - contained no reference to Limerick, despite the thousands of job losses suffered here.

Clare councillor Cathal Crowe provoked anger when he suggested the University of Limerick be renamed to include his native Banner County in the title. Cllr Crowe - who got unanimous support when he brought the motion up at Clare County Hall - pointed out half of UL lies in the Banner. But there was strong opposition to his proposals from founding UL president, Dr Edward Walsh, who said this could "weaken" the institution's international standing.

Thousands of people turned out to Saint Patrick's Day parades across



Eddie Halvey did not attend the inquest of Kevin Walsh, the 16-year-old whose death he caused in 2006 through dangerous driving

The Wire star Dominic West and Catherine FitzGerald married in Glin

County Limerick, with six girls from Salesians School in the city creating a giant tricolour pompom. Munster rugby star Keith Earls, from Moyross, led the city's parade, with his little sister Jenny.

An opinion poll conducted for the Limerick Leader showed that 66.7 per cent of respondents believed a shortage of jobs is the biggest problem facing the region today. Some 26.2 per cent believed crime represented the biggest challenge, while others thought the decline of the city centre, a lack of progress in Limerick's regeneration estates and the decline in Shannon Airport needed to be addressed first. Sixty-three per cent of people surveyed felt that Deputy Willie O'Dea had to resign his Ministerial portfolio.

City publicans won a landmark ruling allowing them to open on Good Friday for a limited number of hours to allow people watch the Munster v Leinster Magners League game. There had been outrage after the Thomond Park clash had been selected for live television by Setanta - a move which meant many rugby fans would be unable to watch the game at home. Judge Tom O'Donnell accepted the views of the Vintners Federation of Ireland (VFI) that the game represented a special event. Munster failed to rise to the occasion, however, going down by a point to their provincial rivals.

The family of Limerick teenager Kevin Walsh, who was killed when Eddie Halvey ploughed into the back of a stationary BMW in which he was a passenger, said the former Munster star did "not have the balls to show up" to the inquest. Four years after the tragedy, the inquest held at Nenagh Courthouse recorded a verdict of death by misadventure.

APRIL

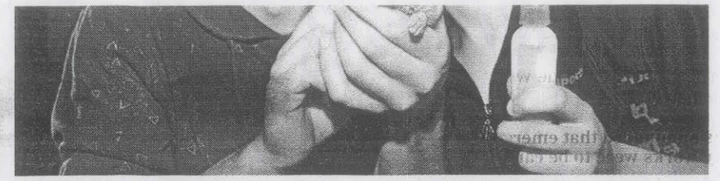
There was further tragedy on the roads this month when 30-year-old Seamus Maher was killed in a single car accident in Cappamore. The trained mechanic was very well known in local GAA circles, while his family were very popular on the farming scene. The following week, tragedy struck two Limerick man in Co Laois, as Jeffrey Power, Rosbrien, and Paul Considine, Dooradoyle, lost their lives, in a crash, as they travelled to work.

An after-work kayak-trip in Waterford tragically claimed the lives of one county Limerick man - with another narrowly escaping death. Philip Kelly from Cappawhite drowned in the Clodiagh River in Portlaw, Co Waterford. But it was his brave action which saved the life of Knockaderry man Derek Elliott, 26.

Firefighters across the county took unofficial strike action after claiming Limerick County Council had not paid them a five per cent increase under the Towards 2016 pay deal.

Millionaire businessman JP McManus was once again the toast of the county after he held a massive celebration for his community of Martinstown and Bulgaden. More than 700 people turned up to help Mr McManus celebrate the fact his horse, 'Don't Push it', won the most prestigious race of them all: the Grand National at Aintree.

The tourism industry here was thrown into a temporary crisis after Irish airspace closed for a week because of a volcanic ash plume, making flying conditions hazardous. Shannon Airport was estimated to have lost approximately €1m for every day aircraft was grounded.



Marco Velocci, who discovered a leveret in its dead mother's womb, and his girlfriend Josephine Power tend the little fellow with some milk

Carers and their families protest for the retention of their respite house

But accommodation providers were left celebrating an extra revenue boost after many tourists were left stranded in Shannon.

Two of Limerick's most influential businessmen were at loggerheads this month, over the proposed use for a €1m development in Croom. Task force chairman Denis Brosnan and revenue sheriff Plunkett Hayes questioned the need for such a facility, which is being spearheaded by Mr Brosnan.

West Limerick suffered a major blow after it was confirmed the 2010 Athea Road races in June had been cancelled. The event was expected to bring more than 20,000 people to Athea.

MAY

Thomondgate yachtsman Sean McGowan became the first Irishman to row solo across the Atlantic ocean. He spent 118 days alone during his 2,500 nautical mile journey, before arriving in Antigua on Sunday, May 2.

A brave Boher family were left celebrating after winning the Walkers Family of the Year award. The O'Fahy-Donnell's won the accolade - and €20,000 - for leading the fight against a condition called AV malformation, which affected sons Ronan, 13, and Tiarnain, 11.

One of Limerick's most feared criminals, gangland boss Wayne Dundon, gave an interview to the Leader, after calling to the office complaining at coverage of the First Communion of his daughter Linda Margaret. Dundon claimed to Leader editor Alan English that he is "scared" to leave his home on the Hyde Road. He blamed Steve Collins, who lost his son Roy in a shooting in 2009, for this. "I can't leave my house in case Steve Collins sees me and says I threatened him again. All he has to do is say that and I get another 10 years." Mr Collins dismissed the claim as nonsense.

Pallasgreen teenager Kevin O'Mahony tragically died this month after his car hit a telegraph pole. His death brought to 11 the number of students from St John the Baptist Community School who have lost their lives through road crashes.

The Garda Siochana Ombudsman Commission launched an investigation after a member of the armed emergency response unit was injured when gardai rammed a car near Ballyneety. Three men and a woman were arrested after gardai from Roxboro station, assisted by members of the ERU forced their car off the road when the vehicle failed to stop. The action was as part of ongoing investigations into organised crime in the city.

A young man from Ballinacurra Weston was left fighting for his life after a gangland style shooting near St John's Cathedral. Daniel Phillips, 20, almost died in the shooting but, six months on, the Limerick Leader revealed he had popped out of a box to propose to girlfriend Sarah Power.

JUNE

Lee Slattery became the latest gangland style shooting-victim. His remains were found in a shallow grave behind Delmege Park in Moyross. A handgun was recovered at the scene.

An unborn baby hare was miraculously saved from its dead mother's womb. The leveret was nursed back to health by Oola man was officially elected as Mayor. Adare area councillor Richard Butler of Fine Gael, was elected as Cathaoirleach in Co Limerick.

JULY

West Limerick had a brush with the stars as Dominic West, from hit TV show 'The Wire' married his long-time sweetheart, Catherine FitzGerald, the daughter of the Knight of Glin.

Almost €30m was raised for charities across the region as over 90,000 people flocked to Adare Manor to watch the five-yearly JP McManus pro-am. Former world number one golfer Tiger Wood joined a host of Hollywood A-listers at the tournament, including Samuel L Jackson, Hugh Grant and Catherine Zeta Jones.

Amy St John, just 16, became the latest casualty of the roads this month. Amy was the passenger in a car which collided with another vehicle at Culhane's Cross between Feohanagh and Dromcollogher on July 10.

The Limerick Leader revealed task force chairman Denis Brosnan spent more than €1,000 backing Croom resident Seamus Sheehan in the local elections last year. Mr Sheehan failed to win a seat at County Hall. Fianna Fail's James Cavanagh, who failed to retain his seat, spent the most during summer 2009 - some €12,175.

First again, the Leader disclosed contents of the recommendations of the boundary committee's report. The group, chaired by Denis Brosnan, recommended the Clare suburbs of Shannon Banks and Westbury be brought into an enlarged Limerick City and that Limerick City Council and Limerick County Council be amalgamated to create a single local authority.

Taoiseach Brian Cowen officially opened the €660m Limerick Tunnel, which stretches for 670m under the Shannon. It was estimated that the tunnel will remove up to 20,000 cars daily from Limerick's congested streets.

Some €1.2m in funding was approved for the expansion of the Foynes Flying Boat Museum. The plans will see the construction of a new maritime museum, documenting the history of Foynes Port, as well as the installation of a life and further fit-out of the control tower, the creation of a new exhibition space, a children's area and other works.

AUGUST

The campaign to reopen the historic mart in Rathkeale was dealt a fatal blow after its owners Golden Vale Marts Group had completed the sale of the site.

Gardai from Limerick City had to be drafted in to quell a riot in Kilmallock. Sticks and broken flower pots used as

Year in review

triumphs command the centre stage

AUGUST (CTD)

weapons, leaving one Gardai sustaining facial injuries. Around 14 gardai from the city were brought to the county.

Limerick model agent, Celia Holman-Lee, who celebrated her 60th birthday this year, announced she is to write her autobiography.

The row over whether to introduce a bus lane from the county/city boundary to the Mallow Street/O'Connell Street junction turned bitter, with residents protesting en masse at city hall. A proposal to introduce the first half of the €5m scheme - which would see a green bus route start at the county boundary and end at Punch's Cross - was accepted by councillors. But a legal challenge from some residents looks to have halted the proposals as the year comes to a close.

Seventy jobs were saved in Raheen after the St Paul's Nursing Home was sold to the Kilmallock-based Maria Goretti Nursing Home. The previous owners, the Bon Secours Nuns, admitted they would be unable to continue the nursing home, potentially leaving 50 elderly people homeless, as they could not finance a major overhaul ordered by the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA)

SEPTEMBER

Industrial workers at Aughinish Alumina returned to full working hours on site. Management at the plant - which employs 450 people in West Limerick - said production had soared by 61 per cent.

An Bord Pleanala gave planning permission for a two storey, 60 bedroom nursing home on the grounds of Adare Manor. It followed the planning authority's decision to grant Adare Partners permission to construct a massive housing development on the outskirts of Adare village.

Jemma O'Sullivan, a 22-year-old student at the University of Sunderland, tragically died in an accident on a busy stretch of motorway in Yorkshire, in the north of England. Former Castletroy College student Jemma was described as a "generous loving angel" by her devastated brother, Justin.

Ryanair announced it was to axe

was officially opened by Transport Minister Noel Dempsey.

Adare Manor enjoyed some international exposure, after it was used as Louis Walsh's "judges house" on hit television show the X Factor.

Rathkeale man Paul Hogan, 20, was found dead in a river near Paris in France. The father of one, who was living with his partner in Ballysimon, had been well known locally as a sportsman. He played wing back for the St Mary's/Sean Finns junior B hurling side, which won Limerick and Munster titles and reached the All-Ireland final last season. Paul had been working for Croom Tarmacadam in France before his tragic death.

Another addiction to Limerick's enviable sporting infrastructure, the €20m Greyhound Stadium at the Greenpark officially opened. The stadium can take 2,900 spectators, including 190 in a restaurant.

Google StreetView captured some of Limerick's most iconic sights online for the first time. But there was controversy after it emerged some of the city's regeneration estates were omitted. The computer giant promised to fix the error, but there were claims that Google's omission was deliberate.

A Garda investigation was launched into the cause of a freak explosion outside a house in Shanagolden, where two women and one man were injured. Gordon O'Donovan, from Shanagolden, suffered serious burns in the accident which took place when the black boiler at a house in the townland of Parkmore, between Shanagolden and Foynes, exploded without warning.

County councillors demanded an immediate apology from city councillor Gerry McLoughlin, who described Newcastle West and other parts of the West as "the a*****e" of the county. Cllr McLoughlin was speaking during a heated meeting of the city council, where councillors objections to a single local authority were noted. The former Ireland rugby star also labelled county councillors as "country bumpkins who have no regard for Limerick city". Cllr McLoughlin later apologised for his comments, and ate a slice of humble pie when he visited Newcastle West for a rugby match.

It was announced that emergency safety works were to be carried out on the N21 outside Newcastle West

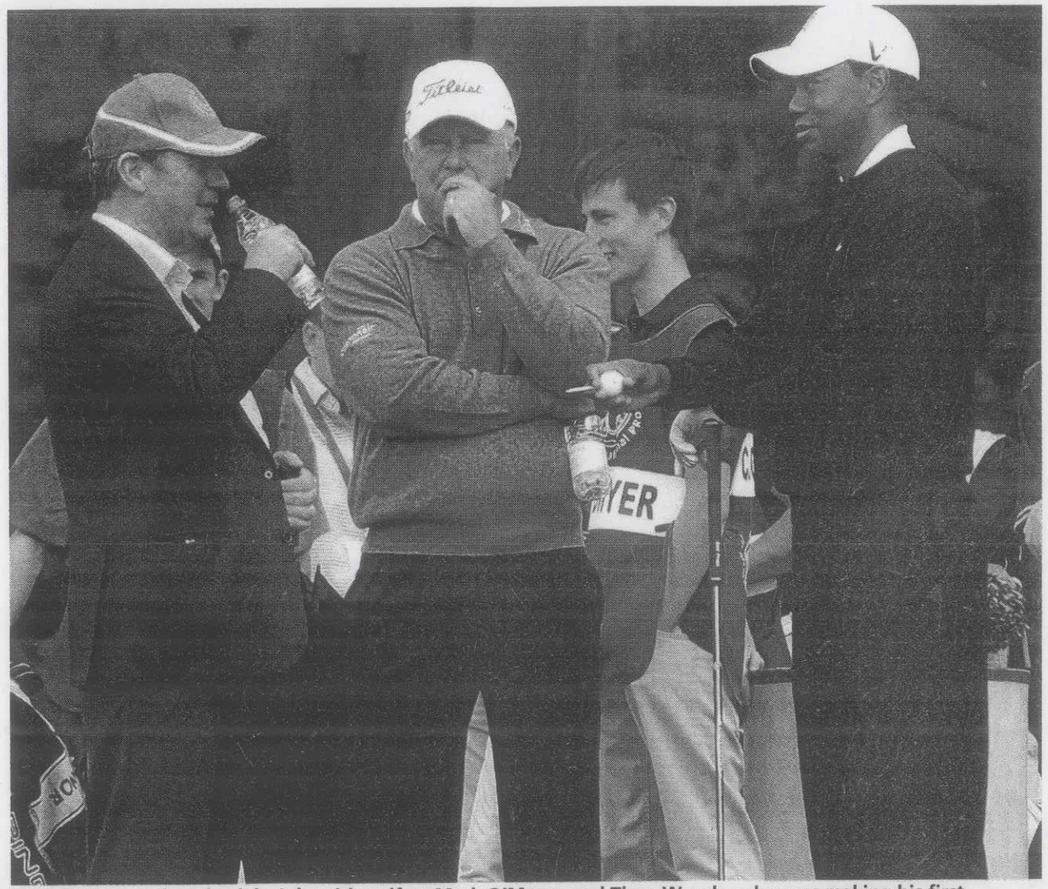
months to the end of October. The top claimant in the county was Cllr Wade.

Meanwhile, in the city, the 17 councillors had claimed nearly €68,000 in conference fees and subsistence. Six councillors spent more than €500 each at the Merriman Summer School 'Faith: Beyond Belief' conference, which stretched over four days in Ennis. The top claimant in the city was Cllr Pat Kennedy of Fine Gael.

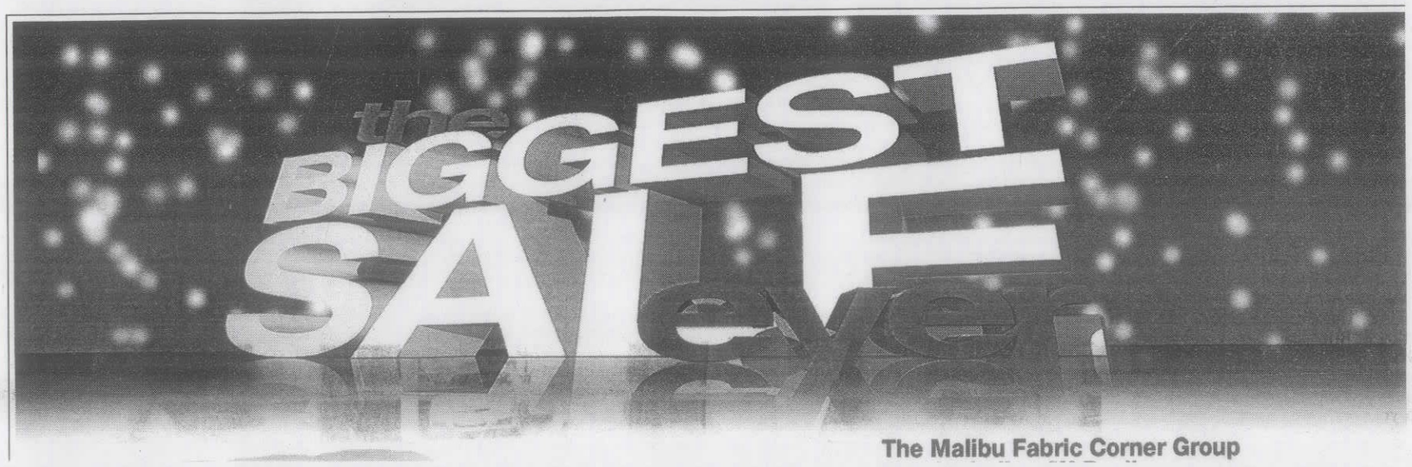
DECEMBER

Eric Fitzgerald, who was living in Ballysimon, became the latest casualty of Limerick's roads. The 23-year-old, who died alongside best friend Cornelius Fitzharris, passed away after a car they were driving in crashed near Croagh on Tuesday, December 7. Eric had worked alongside his self-employed father in laying tarmacadam for the last six years since he left school. The third eldest of 12 children, Eric had been living with pregnant girlfriend Kerry, and they were expecting their second child early next year.

The big freeze once again hit Limerick, as salt supplies ran low, and rationing of water was introduced in county Limerick. Despite a thaw in mid-December, the coldest conditions in living memory later returned with a vengeance, leaving many households without water over Christmas and others with burst pipes. Thankfully, as the new year approached, the arctic temperatures dropped again.



JP McMcManus chats back in July with golfers Mark O'Meara and Tiger Woods, who was making his first appearance on a golf course since his affairs scandal broke, at the charity pro-am, which raised €40m



The Malibu Fabric Corner Group

stretch of motorway in Yorkshire, in the north of England. Former Castletroy College student Jemma was described as a "generous loving angel" by her devastated brother, Justin.

Ryanair announced it was to axe further services from Shannon Airport, as a direct response to the imposition of a 33 per cent hike in charges at the base. Routes cut by the budget carrier included Nantes, Paris (Beauvais), while there were reductions in frequency of routes to London. There was better news for Shannon in October as Aer Lingus announced it was to introduce a service to Paris Charles De Gaulle Airport.

The problem of falling enrolment numbers in county schools was laid bare after one teacher who returned to school following the summer holidays had no pupils to teach. An eerie silence greeted Mary Kelly, of Ballyorgan National School.

Newcastle West was left to come to terms with Limerick's worst car crash in over a decade. The Sunday, September 12 crash claimed the lives of locals Richard Furey, 37, Tommy Holmes, 32, and Tommy Murphy, also 32. The crash took place on a dangerous stretch of the N21 between Newcastle West and Templeglantine at Barnagh at 9.10pm.

Fianna Fail West Limerick Deputy John Cregan came to the defence of Taoiseach Brian Cowen who caused a national outrage when he appeared to be drunk on a national radio interview, following the party's annual Galway 'think-in'. Deputy Cregan insisted Brian Cowen did not appear to be drunk the night before the now infamous radio interview.

OCTOBER

JP McManus's eldest son John married his girlfriend Emma Leadbetter during a "quiet family ceremony" in the Algarve. Thirty-one-year old John is the eldest of JP and Noreen's three children and the last to tie the knot.

The M7 linking Birdhill and Annacotty comments, and ate a slice of humble pie when he visited Newcastle West for a rugby match.

It was announced that emergency safety works were to be carried out on the N21 outside Newcastle West after a fatal accident claimed the life of Liva Eglite, making her the fifth person to be killed in the deadly stretch of road this year. Ms Eglite was a law student at the University of Limerick. Later on this month, another man from the West, Croagh's Paddy Fitzgerald, was laid to rest following a car crash in Donegal Town.

In a black day for Shannon, more than 200 jobs were axed from the area. Shannon Aerospace cut 107 jobs after a major restructuring of its operation took place. Meanwhile, scientific publications company Elsevier announced cuts of 100 jobs.

Newcastle West pensioner William Madden was found dead in Brosna, Co Kerry, following a major search across the October Bank Holiday weekend.

NOVEMBER

The news this month was dominated by the worst human tragedy ever to befall County Limerick. On Tuesday, November 16, the bodies of 25-year-old Sarah Hines, her three-and-a-half year old son Reece, her five-month-old baby daughter Amy and 20-year-old Alicia Brough from Rockchapel in Co Cork were discovered in the sleepy Hazelgrove Estate. All four had been violently stabbed to death. The horrific murders stunned the nation, forcing a massive outpouring of grief in all of Limerick. The stepfather of Sarah Hines, Peter Rolfe, said life will never be the same again. Speaking in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy, one resident said: "I am just sick at what we are hearing. There are no words. I never thought i'd hear anything like this. What is the world coming to?" Shortly after the incident, a full-scale investigation was launched. A 31-year-old man, John Geary, was arrested at the Central Bar in Kilkee and charged with all four murders.

Stark evidence of the building frenzy which gripped Limerick during the boom years was revealed this month with the publication of the names of 74 'ghost' estates across the county and city. Towns and villages with the largest number of incomplete estates included Murroe, Castleconnell, Castletroy and Kilmallock.

A unique Co Limerick fenian flag used in demonstrations from the 1860s to the 1920s took €50,000 when it went under the hammer. The flag, thought to have been made at the request of Anglesboro man Willie Condon, was up for auction at Whyte's Irish Auctioners in Dublin.

The Limerick Leader revealed that county councillors had claimed more than €61,000 claiming expenses for various trips across Ireland in the ten