

# Owner laments lack of support as McCourt Museum set to close

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"I've given my heart and soul to this and I just want empathy, not sympathy," Una Heaton told *The Leader* following her announcement that the Frank McCourt Museum on Hartstonge Street would close on October 30.

The decision to close, announced on social media, was due, Ms Heaton said, to no longer being able to afford the rent, rates or insurance.

Ms Heaton's husband John - who had given her the building in 2011 to launch the museum - had to put it on the market in 2017 and it was bought by Ger Enright, who was praised for being as supportive as he could in the past two years.

She did not have such kind words for the local authority, however, accusing it of failing to support something that was attracting tourists to Limerick as well as celebrating one of its most famous sons.

"I've been asking the Council for help for as long as I've been in business and in nearly ten years I've got a grand total of €1,300 from them spread over a few projects.

"Before we had to sell it, I had a 40 foot high banner saying 'save our building'. I'll be putting up a 12 foot one now saying 'Museum closed'.

"I reached out and wrote to everyone, I knocked on every door and got nothing, and now we're losing an iconic building and museum. If I get anyone coming up from the council now saying 'is there anything they can do', I'll scream."

The only grants Ms Heaton says she received, included €3,500 from the enterprise board which had to be paid back within a certain time frame and two separate



Una Heaton with Frank McCourt's nephew Conor McCourt who visited with his family ahead of the return of Angela's Ashes the Musical this year

grants of €500 and €300 from the arts council for two projects she undertook in the museum.

The process for procuring public funding is notoriously arduous and competitive, which Ms Heaton says she recognised and for that reason had engaged a professional consultant from Dublin to manage the process for her.

"I had a catalogue with a thorough profile of the museum, what it would do in the future, how it would help attract tourism, detailed its projects and so on.

"That went out to all the powers that be, but I never got anything back." Neither, she claims, did she receive any feedback.

In response to Ms Heaton's comments Limerick City and County Council said it regretted to hear the "privately-owned and operated Frank McCourt Museum is due to close".

It said it had worked in partnership with the museum to promote and support events when opportunities arose, like Culture Nights and the Diaspora Fund and had recently made a financial contri-

butions to an event tying in with Limerick Jazz Festival.

The Council spokesperson said, "Cultural and Arts organisations have a number of funding schemes open to them as sources of funding including Creative Ireland, Grants Under the Arts Act, and Festival & Events etc. These are competitive open calls, which are independently judged.

"A large number of the necklace of museums dotted around the city and county have applied for and received funding through this avenue."

The council said Frank McCourt "will always have a presence in Limerick".

"His papers have been donated to the Special Collection in UL's Glucksman Library and the position of Chair of Creative Writing at the university also commemorates his name and achievements and association with Limerick."

The spokesperson added, "Limerick City and County Council would be delighted to accept a selection of the Frank McCourt collection on behalf of the people of

Limerick if it was offered by the owners.

"Unfortunately, Limerick City and County Council is not in the position to buy the collection or licence the rights to use the name."

This suggestion was not welcomed by Ms Heaton who told the *Leader*, "I'm going to return the personal items which are the ashes and the cap and gown in which Frank had his honorary doctorate bestowed on him and I'm also returning the rosary beads to Ellen (Frank's widow). But I'm going to publicly auction the rest."

Ms Heaton said another museum had offered to take some of the items, but only, they said, to store them.

"I felt that was an insult," said Ms Heaton, "I wouldn't hand over anything, let Ellen do it if she wishes."

"To me, the memory of Frank is in the school, so I couldn't, in my heart, hand over personal items to someone who would put them in storage. What is the point of that?"

All will be revealed in her memoir, she promised, which is to be titled 'I'll be Frank' and which will be complete next autumn.

"I tried so hard, I gave it all I had and the McCourt family have been brilliant, Frank's brothers and Ellen too.

"I reckon Frank is probably up in heaven now saying, 'That's Limerick!'"

"I haven't slept since I made the decision, I'm wrecked, and it's so frustrating. I never did it for praise, I did it for love of Frank, and for his old school, to celebrate what he had done.

"To me, reading between the lines, the council's attitude is shocking and I won't be afraid to say it."



The banner erected outside the Frank McCourt Museum this week notifying the public of its impending closure. PICTURES: MICHAEL COWHEY

## DEATHS IN THE

**MULCAHY** Patrick of Keane Street, Killalee. Late of C.I.E. Road Freight & Guinness Stores, Carey's Road, Limerick. Fondly remembered as Mick. Died peacefully at home surrounded by his loving family. Very deeply regretted by his loving wife Julia, sons Kenneth and Thomas, daughters Martina, Deirdre, Jayne, Jackie and Michelle. Brother Thomas, Sisters Susan, Marie, Betty, Rosaleen. Daughters-in-law, Sons-in-law, Grandchildren, Great-grandchildren, extended family and friends.

**HARRINGTON** Bernadette (née O'Dwyer) of Rostrevor Close, Caherdavin. Very deeply regretted by her loving husband Brendan, daughters Linda & Deirdre, sons-in-law Farrukh & Aaron, grandchildren Aleena, Zara & Hazel, sister Peggy Leo & her husband John, brother-in-law Joe, sister-in-law Helen, nephews, nieces, other relatives & friends. Bernadette was predeceased by her sister Mary Kenihan & brother Son O'Dwyer.

**DALY** Noreen (née Ahern) of Ballybehy, Abbeyfeale. Very sadly missed by her loving husband Denis, her children Lorraine, Denis and Aoife, grandchildren Lilly and Donnacha, brothers John, Denis and Thomas, son-in-law Eoin, mother-in-law Lil, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, nephews, nieces, relatives, neighbours and friends. Predeceased by her infant grandson Robert.

**O'MAHONY** Phil (née O'Brien) of O'Dwyer Villas, Thomondgate. Beloved wife of the late Harry O'Mahony. Very deeply regretted by her children Carol, Kim, Mark, Jane & Harriett, fourteen grandchildren, five great-grandchildren, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, other relatives & friends.

**O'BRIEN** Sean (John) of Granville Park, St. Patrick's Road. Late of the E.S.B. Sadly missed by his loving wife Cora, daughters Siobhán, Caroline, Lynn & Sarah, sons Ivan & Martin, grandchildren, brother Gerard, sister Geraldine, daughters-in-law, sons-in-law, niece, nephews, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, other relatives & friends.

**BENSON** Gerard Lenihan Avenue, Prospect. Late of Dell. Beloved son of Eileen and Francis. Dearly loved brother of Jimmy, Nancy, Martin and the late Tina and Philomena. Sadly missed by his loving brother-in-law, sisters-in-law, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, grandnephew, extended family and friends.

**GALLAGHER** Marie (née O'Gorman) of Mussell Lane, Askeaton. Predeceased by her husband Leo. Deeply regretted by her son Brian, daughters Susan and Jannette; grandsons Adam and Jordan, granddaughters Chloe and Shannon, brother Eamon, daughter-in-law Jenifer, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, nephews, relatives and friends Lynda and Breda.

**BOWYER** Leslie of Newport, Tipperary. Formerly of London. Sadly missed by his loving wife Audrey, son Stuart, his three grandchildren, other relatives and friends.

**O'DONOVAN** Breeda (née O'Brien) of Ballymacreese, Ballyneety. Regretted by her daughter Kathryn and her son Sean; brothers Fr. Eamon and Patrick; sisters Carmel (Hurley), Kaye (Carroll) and Bernie O'Brien, son-in-law Bradley, brothers-in-law, nephews, nieces, other relatives, neighbours and friends.

**TREACY** Nora (née Nugent) of Gurtavalla, Doon. Late of the Park Retirement Village, Castletroy and formerly of Ogonneloe. Sadly missed by loving husband Paddy, son Brian, daughter Orlaigh, sisters, daughter-in-law Orla, son-in-law Ger, grandchildren Noah, Leah, Bóibhinn, Ella and Nóra, brothers-

ives and a large circle of friends. RYAN Eileen Sr. Sister: Athy, Kildare / Kiltree Town, Tipperary. Predeceased by her parents John and Ryan, her brothers Jerry, her sisters Sr Gertrude, Elaine. Deeply regretted by her sisters Sheila Roche, Calif Noelle, Bon Secours. Sisters, nieces, nephews and other Mercy Community family and friends.

**MCMAHON** Hugh of: and Abbeyfeale. Devoted father of daughters Alicia, Kim & Amy. Sadly missed by his brothers and sisters, grandsons, great grandchildren, grandsons in law, friends. Predeceased by his brothers Cyril and Sister Marie.

**HEALY** Jonathan of: enue, Kileely. Very deeply missed by his loving partner and Jason, brother of Natasha, grandmothers and Margaret, grandaunts, uncles, cousins, family and large circle of friends.

**JONES** Marie (née Ryan) of Newgarden, Lisnaw. Wife of the late Pat, sadly missed by her loving son Patrick, Helen, Patricia, Michael and Susan, loving daughter Patricia, sons in law Tom and Billy, grandchildren Paddy and Ned, cousins and friends.

**O'BRIEN** Shelina (née Mucknisk, Milford). Sadly missed by her husband, Leonard, Paul, Gerry, Martine, onard, David, Valerie families, her brother Joe, sisters Pauline, their families, other relatives and friends.

**STEWART** Roy of By Prospect. Beloved husband of late Margaret. Sadly missed by his children Cathy, David and Ian, sons-in-law, granddaughters, brothers-in-law and his many friends.

**BUTLER** Pat late of Road, Ballinacorra. Loving husband of the late (Pearl). Very deeply missed by his children Richard, Carmel, Patrick & Eileen, sisters-in-law, son-in-law, sister Mary, nephews, nieces, extended family and friends.

**HOGAN** Patrick of B Thomondgate. Sadly missed by his loving mother Irene, partner Grace and the late Mya and Macie, sisters Timmy, Peter, Brian and Tina, aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces, friends.

**LYNCH** Liam of Carrigrohane. Late of Liam Lynch Quarries Ltd. Very deeply missed by his sons Liam, Thomas, daughter Mary (Hannah), law John, daughters Catherine and Margaret, grandchildren, sister Bridget, brother Noel, law, brothers-in-law, nephews, nieces, relatives, kin and a large circle of friends. Brother of the late Gretta, and Josephine.

**O'DONNELL** Michael of Munchin's Street, Park. Son of the late deeply regretted by Margaret, Son David, Anne, Margaret, Bernadette, Caroline, brothers Seamus, nephews,