

## News

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## ADOPTION

# Philomena's project will help reunite birth families

by **Bernie English**  
bernie@limerickpost.ie

NEWCASTLEWEST woman Philomena Lee, whose 50 year search for the son she gave up for adoption inspired the Oscar-nominated film 'Philomena', has launched an organization to help adopted people and their natural parents contact each other.

The Philomena Project was established last week in association with the Adoption Rights Alliance to lobby the Government to grant access to adoption records for both in-country and Irish-US adopted people and their families.

The group has called on the Government to release over 60,000 secret adoption files to assist adult children, now living abroad, in tracing their natural families. They claim that the HSE, private adoption agencies and church representatives are currently in possession of these adoption files.

Although information and tracing legislation for adopted people and natural parents has been promised as a priority by every Government since 1997, adopted people still have no right to their adoption records, birth certificate or medical records.

The Adoption Authority has consistently refused to inspect all files held by accredited adoption agencies, despite evidence that some knowingly arranged illegal adoptions.

The group aims to provide finance, campaigning mechanisms, supports, and services to natural mothers who have been unable to or prevented from tracing children taken from them by adoption, particularly forced and illegal adoptions. It will also assist children, particularly those taken to the US, trace their natural mothers, fathers, and extended families, and to obtain their birth certificates and other relevant records.

The project came about as a result of Ms Lee's efforts to find the son she was forced to give up for adoption in 1952 when she was just 19. Her son Anthony, who was renamed Michael Hess, went on to become a successful lawyer, serving as White House chief legal counsel under Ronald Regan and George Bush Snr. After contracting HIV, he died in 1995 and is buried in Sean Ross



““““  
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PHILOMENA LEE

Abbey, Roscrea.

The movie 'Philomena' is based on the book 'The Lost Child of Philomena Lee' by former BBC journalist Martin Sixsmith and stars Judi Dench and Steve Coogan.

Ms Lee said she established The Philomena Project with her daughter Jane because they had heard from many people who saw her story and wanted to help.

"I hope it will help find solutions that ensure every mother and child who want to be reunited are able to come together once again," she added.

She said her experience was similar to many Irish women who were forced into giving their children up for adoption.

"They told Anthony I had left him at two weeks old, that I had abandoned him. I reared him to three-and-a-half years, he was a lovely little boy. But I never got any answers to anything, I never knew anything about him at all. It was very sad to find out he had passed away, but at last I had found him," Philomena said.

## IN BRIEF

## Leaders allowance

■ PENALTIES should be enforced for the misuse of the Leader's Allowance, according to Limerick Fine Gael TD Patrick O'Donovan who has welcomed the fact that Independent TDs and Senators who receive the Leader's Allowance will be subject to scrutiny by the Standards in Public Office Commission (SIPO). "The Leader's Allowance is a long abused payment to Independent TDs and Senators which has escaped scrutiny over the years. From 2001 to 2013, €4,190,854.83 was paid to TDs and €1,691,944.25 was paid to Senators, amounting to a total of €5,882,799.08 without one cent being vouched for", he said.

## Road resurfacing

■ LABOUR councillor Joe Leddin has welcomed the news that City Council is to receive €3.2 million from the Department of Transport for spending on specific road resurfacing projects. This funding allocation will allow for more estates and street surfaces to be upgraded and resurfaced in addition to the existing works that have been completed in recent months. "This €3.2m allocation will also allow for flexibility in that off street surfaces such as laneways and secondary roads can be upgraded. Despite the economic challenges, Limerick has received its fair share of grants from the Department of Transport," he said.

## Drugs trial

■ A MAN is to face trial at the next sittings of the Circuit Criminal Court on charges of possessing of over €2,500 worth of drugs in three Limerick locations last year. David Heelan of Brendan Street, Limerick is accused of having sellable quantities of heroin in his possession at Henry Street on September 3 and at Wickham Street on September 19. A third charge relates to the possession of drugs on October 4 at Mount Kennett Place. The case was adjourned until March 10 with Heelan remanded on continuing bail.

## Arson attacks

■ TWO men will be sentenced on Valentine's day for a spate of arson attacks in county Limerick last year. James Considine (20), of Galvone Road, Kennedy Park and Denis Mulcahy (23) of Riverview, Ballyhahill pleaded guilty to causing damage to cars in Glin on February 19, 2013. Two cars were set alight by Considine at Coast Road and Church Street, Glin while Mulcahy pleaded guilty to a similar offence at Coast Road and to causing damage to a car at The Demesne in Glin on the same date. Sentencing was adjourned to February 14 to allow defence counsels have reports prepared.

## Dementia social

■ THE Alzheimer Society of Ireland holds a Social Club for people with dementia and their carers, in a supported environment, each Tuesday morning in the Woodfield House Hotel on the Ennis Road in Limerick between 11am and 1pm. Contact AIS, Limerick Branch at 061-313456 or just call to Woodfield House Hotel on Tuesday from 11am. There is no charge to attend and refreshments are provided.

## Milford quiz

■ THE event that elevated the humble table quiz from mundane to marvellous is making a return with Mike Finn, Myles Breen and Dave Irwin setting the questions for a table quiz in aid of the Milford Care Centre at Pery's Best Western Hotel, Glentworth Street on Thursday, February 5. The Care Centre provides specialist palliative care and older persons services to the people of the Mid West so round up your table of four with your cleverest friends or come along on your own and meet some other trivia fans. Entry is €10 per person and the quiz starts at 8pm.

## HERITAGE

# Saving Limerick's historic buildings

by **Brian McLaughlin**  
news@limerickpost.ie

LOCAL authorities in Limerick and Clare are to share €378,000 as part of a countrywide initiative to carry out conservation work on protected buildings.

The scheme announced by Heritage Minister Jimmy Deenihan will assist owners and occupiers of recognised heritage buildings and structures to repair and conserve these properties while supporting the employment of skilled trades people.

The allocation for Limerick County Council is €171,000, which is the third biggest allocation behind Dublin and Cork while

Limerick City Council will receive €86,000 and Clare County Council will get €121,000.

Public funding of €5million has been allocated for the project nationwide and this will be matched by another €5m from private sources.

Funding awards made under the scheme will be between €2,500 and €15,000 with applicants matching the grant allocations with their own money.

There are some 50,000 protected structures in Ireland and thousands of people live in historic buildings.

Announcing the scheme, Minister Deenihan said: "Our historic built environment contributes to the

vitality of our cities, towns, villages and countryside. It adds to our tourism product and it also makes a significant contribution to economic prosperity by providing direct and indirect employment in specialised construction and conservation work.

"This allocation of €5m from the National Lottery sale is an absolutely crucial investment in our heritage buildings," he added.

During the financial crisis built heritage schemes lost more than 90 per cent of their budgets.

The new scheme seeks to encourage the investment of private capital in small-scale, labour intensive conservation

projects and to repair and conserve protected structures. In certain cases, the scheme will also assist the conservation of structures within architectural conservation areas.

The scheme will operate through 2014 and will be administered by planning sections of the local authorities.

Works approved must meet all statutory requirements including the need for planning permission where appropriate.

The deadline for applications is close of business on Wednesday February 12 and application forms are available on the website of each local authority.