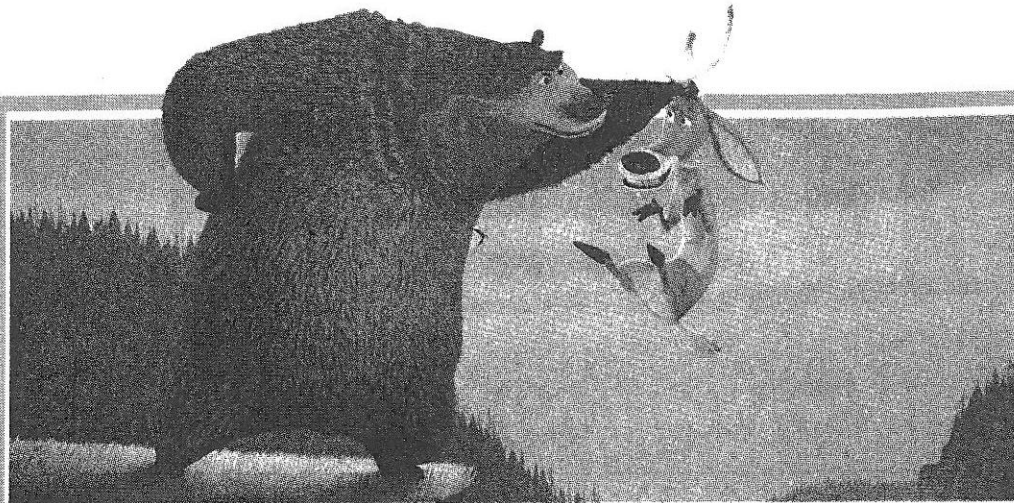


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14 OCTOBER 2006

Singing the praises of €250m Opera Centre

By ANNE SHERIDAN

SUNEIL Sharma, the Belfast-born property developer of the Opera Centre, is confident that the €250m plans for the centre will be approved by An Bord Pleanála by the end of this month.

Mr Sharma, of Regeneration Developments Ltd, told the Limerick Leader this week that the benefits of the 350,000 square foot development

were numerous, inspite of the objection to the plans by a local architect.

"This development will have a major impact not just for Limerick, but for the entire Mid-West. It will definitely consolidate Limerick's position as Ireland's third city and stop a leakage of talent out of the Mid-West. In many ways it will bring about a renaissance for the city," said Mr Sharma, who is also managing director of Befab, an engineering group based in Belfast. In spite of the objection by local

architect Cáit Ní Chealleacháin, the project has been largely supported by heritage groups throughout the city, including the Irish Georgian Society, Limerick Civic Trust and the Thomond Archeological Society.

"If we lose out on this development we're looking at very serious problems for the development of the area," said Denis Leonard of Limerick Civic Trust and the Irish Georgian Society.

"It has to be asked if something untoward happens and An Bord Pleanála rules against it, what will happen for the development of those two acres? Where is the money going to

come from? No one has come up with an alternative," he said.

Mr Leonard said that if the development went ahead, the best of the old architecture on this part of the city will be saved.

"Some of the architecture will be readapted to modern times. Overall, it'll do an awful lot of good for the region, not just for the city," he said.

Stretching from St Michael's Place, up Rutland Street and into Patrick Street, the building is to be named after the home of opera singer, Catherine Hayes.

"It will represent the cutting edge of

design. It's something very special that we want the people of Limerick to be proud of. It really will surpass the traditional image of a shopping centre," said Mr Sharma. A sky bridge will also connect the multi-storey car park with the anchor store.

The MBE also believes that as well as providing over 1,200 jobs, the centre would be the city's "focus destination".

"It will draw a huge number of people to the area, as it will be a unique shopping and retail centre, that will cover a wide spectrum. It's not simply a mall, it's also about lifestyle. We want to cater to all types of tastes and needs

so that it will very much be a focus destination," he said.

"It is certainly the biggest regeneration project in the country. Really, it will act as a catalyst for sustained and increased future investment in Limerick and the surrounding areas. All our attention is on this. It has taken considerable effort and time to get this far. It has the strongest design team possible, with people from both North and South of the border.

Mr Sharma is also director of Varsity Estates Ltd, IS Investment Ltd and Rochester Property Developments Ltd.



• The proposed Opera Centre: developer confident plans will be approved this month