Prendergast puts people first

How we reported it...

ONE of Limerick's best known trade unionists and politicians, Cllr Frank Prendergast, celebrated his retirement as SIPTU district secretary this month with the approval of an MA in industrial relations from the University of Limerick.

He bowed out on July 31 — his 60th birthday — after giving 20 years as a full-time official with the ITGWU and SIPTU, serving Limerick city and county, Shannon and Tipperary and 40 years of involvement in local trade union affairs.

He will, however, continue his career as a city councillor and hopes to do a bit of writing and indulge in one of his great loves — historical research.

Frank’s family background is steeped in trade unionism.

For over two centuries, the Prendergast family were involved in the bakery trade in Limerick and a great aunt, Michael, became the general secretary of the first National Bakers’ Union in Ireland in the last century.

He was later to become one of the founders of the Bakers’ Union of America.

His mother’s side of the family was also prominent in the trade union movement. The Murphy’s belonged to the old Limerick Firefighters Society and his grandad, William, led the support of this society for the workers involved in the 1913 Dublin lock-out.

“Tucked behind the house was greater than any other trade union in the country,” says Frank, “and Lennox said of him that ‘their names will be written in the gold’.”

His own career as a trade union official began in 1968, when he finished his apprenticeship at the old Crom Mills Bakery (where Sarsfield House now stands).

He became branch secretary of the Limerick Bakers Society and was elected to the national committee of the Irish Bakers’ Confectioners and Allied Workers Union and was national president from 1966 to 1968. He also served as president of the joint council of the Bakers Union of Scotland, England and Ireland.

He was also, in those years, elected president of the Limerick Council of Trade Unions.

His career in the ITGWU began as branch secretary at Shannon, where he spearheaded successfully the major equality claims in Aer Rianta and Aer Lingus and became actively involved in the campaign to stop the overflying of Shannon. In 1977, he was promoted ITGWU Regional Secretary. His political career took off when he was elected to represent Labour on Limerick City Council in 1984-85.

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