

SECOND SECTION

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Celebrating 50 years of Shannon duty-free

By **RON KIRWAN**

THE Spirit of Duty Free was unveiled at Shannon Airport, this Monday night, with a Gala Banquet to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the beginning of airport duty free shopping at Shannon in 1947.

Over 370 distinguished

guests from 24 countries were present to honour Dr Brendan O'Regan, the founder of the Airport Duty-Free concept and his colleagues from the first sales staff.

They were there, too, to witness the unveiling of a 12ft sculpture in bronze by Sandra Bell, entitled "The Spirit of Duty Free", be wine and dined by superb cuisine — prepared by Shannon Catering and served by the students of

Shannon College of Hotel Management — in the specially created and lighted banquet room in the Departures Hall, and be entertained by top class Irish artistes and performers.

The Gala Banquet was the culmination of a weekend of events for 250 delegates from all points of the compass who gathered to sample Irish hospitality, tradition and continuing innovation, and to confer in the

University of Limerick on the next 50 years of Duty Free.

The weekend activities included golf and cruising, shooting and driving among other leisure pursuits and a traditional Sunday night in Bunratty Folk Park.

Street theatre was given full rein throughout the Folk Park — with surprised visitors re-living the 1973 All-Ireland Senior Hurling Final interactively, while the 40-strong Limerick troupe Planxty O'Rourke and the Tralee-based Siamsa Tire gave lessons to their willing guests in the joys of sets and the traditional moves of the Siege of Ennis and Walls of Limerick, under the verbal baton of master of ceremonies, Noel Murphy.

The small beginnings of Duty Free in a kiosk at Shannon Airport selling souvenirs, Limerick Lace,

and other locally-produced crafts has grown today to a £7 billion global business.

Honouring Dr Brendan O'Regan, the pioneer of Duty-Free, were Aer Rianta, with the Group's chairman Noel O'Hanlon making a presentation of a unique miniature of the new Spirit of Duty Free sculpture — and Tax Free World, the Paris based association of all major duty free organisations.

Tax Free World chairman, Jacky Pacquet presented Dr O'Regan with a gold medallion in recognition of his services to the industry and a framed copy of the, as yet unpublished, 'Golden Book' which will be produced this October to celebrate the first 50 years of Duty Free.

Also honoured were former Sales and Catering staff members, three Limerick



Attending the Aer Rianta Gala Banquet in Shannon Airport were, from left, Chris and Evelyn Nash, Dave Condon, Helen and Tom McInerney. (LL)



Pictured at the re-created shopping kiosk at Shannon Airport are Dr Brendan O'Regan, Eileen Hannon, Garryowen Road, Kitty Downes Burke, Ennis Road - the first member of the duty free sales staff, Noreen Lynch, North Circular Road and Jackie Collity, Coonagh, who attended the Aer Rianta anniversary Gala Banquet to celebrate 50 years of Duty Free. (LL)



Jim and Ann O'Dowd who were pictured at the Aer Rianta anniversary Gala Banquet to celebrate 50 years of Duty Free at Shannon Airport, with Kieran Gibbons. (LL)



Attending the Aer Rianta Gala Banquet in Shannon Airport were: Yvonne Fox, Teresa Kelly and Nora Fitzgibbon. (LL)

ladies, Kitty Downes, now Mrs Kitty Burke, Noreen Lynch and Eileen Hannon, and Patsy McHugh from Ennis, who worked in duty Free in 1947.

Compere for the evening's entertainment

was the multi-lingual RTE presenter and journalist, Mary Kennedy, who introduced the internationally known Cafe Orchestra, Pamela Scott Trio, Mary Black and her band, the Seville Suite — with instru-

mentalists, Davy Spillane and Mairtin O'Connor — and the world famous Corrs, followed by dancing to the Jim Farley Big Band.

Generous sponsorship for the weekend's events were provided by Jameson, Tax

Free World and Bahrain Duty Free, who with Dubai, Moscow and St Petersburg Duty Free Centres presented Aer Rianta with momentos to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Duty Free shopping.