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A quarter century in business for Limerick clothes retailer

The Leader Questionnaire Mungret man Mike O'Connell has been selling menswear from his Catherine Street shop for exactly 25 years this week. He speaks about his years in business

Tell me a bit about Mike O'Connell Menswear.

The business is very much the same as it was 25 years ago. The most important part of the company remains looking after customers.

We deal with customers of all ages. It makes me smile when I go into bigger stores which have a customer care counter for people with problems. Every customer who comes in our doors is taken care of.

We do a vast selection of menswear for all ages, including modern German and Italian brands, as well as suits and school uniforms.

We sell a large variation of clothes in all sizes from medium to 5xl. Along with myself, five people are employed in the store.

What have been the highlights of your 25 years in business?

The highlight to date is that during this recession so far, I have managed to hold on to all my staff, and not have any redundancies.

My staff have been very loyal to me down the years, and it was very important I could look after them.

Where were you born and raised?

I was born in Mungret, and I lived there until I was married at 28. Now, I live in the next village, Ballybrown. I dearly love both places, but there is a big rivalry between the two parishes.

I am definitely a Mungret

man though! I am married to Kathryn, who is a teacher. I have four teenage children, Meabh, 19, Donall, 17, Eadaoin, 13 and Orlaith, 10.

My wife, my four children and my late parents, Donie and Nelly have been a big support to me over the last 25 years. They were very strong at the start of the business, they drove me on and gave me the courage to keep going.

How did you get to where you are today?

I attended Sexton Street CBS for both my primary and secondary education. I had been working part-time with Joe Walsh menswear from the age of 14 until I did my leaving certificate, so then I went to work with him full time. I was with him for six years before opening my own business at the age of 25.

What made you want to go into business on your own?

I think at the time, there was a change of management in Joe Walsh's.

But it is a natural instinct to want to drive on.

What are your goals for the next 12 months?

I want to keep all my staff and myself employed, as well as continuing to keep a good business going.

What are your views on the current problems Limerick City Centre is having?

I still feel there is a lot of business being done in our city.

We should be proud of it,

and the people should support Limerick City.

I would be very passionate about the city centre. I feel our councillors neglected our city. The County Councillors were watching their own patch in the county, the city councillors were doing likewise, and this has created a big doughnut, when we should have been working as one.

What would you put your own success down to?

It would be because both myself and my staff are looking after our customers. My staff have played a very important role in the 25 years.

Away from work, what are your pastimes and hobbies?

Hurling is my big passion. But I also have a small farm in Mungret, which belonged to my late parents, so I do a small bit of farming.

In business and life, who do you look up to?

JP McManus would be one person. I admire him for what he has done.

He seems to be a very humble man, who puts a lot back into our community.

I think he is an amazing man for people who are underprivileged. He is also proud of our city, and gives something back.

Are you guided by any particular motto?

'Honesty'. If you're honest with people, they will trust you and come back to you.

This is a quality which has been missing from Ireland during the boom years.



Mungret man Mike O'Connell, at his clothes shop in Catherine Street

Picture: Adrian Butler



Cook Medical, above, has been nominated for the 2011 Medical Technology of the Year Award

Two Limerick firms in line for medical technology prizes

TWO Limerick companies have been nominated for prestigious medical technology awards.

Cook Medical, Plassey and Stryker, in the Raheen Business Park have both been nominated for the 2011 Medical Technology Company of the Year Award.

Cook Medical, which designs and manufactures specialist medical devices for minimally invasive surgery by radiologists, surgeons, urologists and endoscopists, opened in Limerick in 1996, and is a major employer in the region with 600 people on its books.

Stryker manufactures a diverse array of innovative medical technologies, including reconstructive, medical and surgical, and neurotechnology and spine products to help people lead more active lives. It employs more than 500 people here.

They join four other companies on the shortlist, with the overall winner set to be announced in Limerick on December 8.

The organisers of the Medical Technology Company of the Year award will seek companies

which demonstrate long term vision with regard to building and financing sustainable business growth.

In addition to the overall award, the 2011 excellence awards will also include the IMDA Medical Technology Outstanding Contribution Award, which will recognise an individual who had made a significant contribution to the development, growth and success of the medical technology sector in Ireland.

Meanwhile, there was further good news for Cook Medical this week after Limerick County Council gave the green light to its plans to expand its base in Plassey.

The company is seeking to construct new offices on the first floor over its existing warehouse on the north east side of its facility.

The plans also provide for a new car park outside, and a replacement water feature at the main entrance. The council gave the development permission with a number of conditions, including work must not take place Saturdays.