

## LEADER BRIEFS

## Autumn art 'Bridge sale

THE Auctions Rooms in Sixmilecross will hold its "Autumn Art, Rugs and Piano Sale" this Sunday. The sale of 320 lots includes over 250 paintings from artists including Gerard Dillon, Markey Robinson, Arthur K. Maderson, Elizabeth Brophy, Declan O'Connor, Kenneth Webb, Mounsey Atkinson, Dave Cassidy, Geraldine Dennehy, Vincent Killowry, Anna Marie Rossi-Zen, JP Rooney, Lorna Millar and Gladys Macabe. Portraits of Bono and Richard Harris by local artist Dave Cassidy will also be for sale. The auction starts at 3pm.

## Adare Manor is top hotel

ADARE Manor has been named Ireland's top hotel in the prestigious World Travel Awards Europe. The manor finished first in a section that included the top names at the luxury end of Irish hospitality, including Dromoland Castle, the Four Seasons, the Ritz-Carlton, Powerscourt, the Shelbourne Hotel, Castlemartyr Resort, the Marrión and the Clarence.

## City jobless number falls by 1,000

THE number of people unemployed in Limerick has dropped by more than 1,000 in the last month. Figures from the Central Statistics Office show there are 22,236 people out of work across the county, down from 23,415 this time last month. In the city, there are 16,023 people out of work, a drop from 16,778 this time last month.

## Castletroy College head to retire

THE principal of Castletroy College, Martin Wallace, has announced that he is to retire after 11 years. Mr Wallace was appointed before work began on the construction of the school, which currently caters for 1,080 students and has a staff of 80 teachers.

## House prices decline in Limerick

HOUSE prices in Limerick City have fallen by 67,000 from their peak in 2007 to an average of 205,000 in the third quarter of 2010, according to the latest survey by daft.ie. The report showed that prices remained static in Limerick city over the summer, while there was a decline of 3.7 per cent nationally.

# Golden memories of All-Ireland glory

■ Kileely man recounts his unique achievement in handball history

By MIKE DWANE

HAD Mick O'Brien held on to all the silverware he won as a handball champion, there would be medals from wall-to-wall at his home in Kileely.

Mick confesses he gave away most of his county medals over the years – he can't remember how many he won – but he still treasures the two All-Ireland medals he won on consecutive weekends exactly 50 years ago. He won the junior singles on August 9, 1960, and the doubles, along with neighbour Sonny Welsh, seven days later. This is believed to be a unique achievement for a Limerick man.

Born on Crosbie Row, Mick played as a lad with St Munchin's club, a nursery that produced as many top handball players as parts of Rio do soccer players. Sonny Welsh and Tom and Pat McGarry were all All-Ireland champions "and nearly all of us were from the same street", Mick recalled this week.

"It was hard to win the county championship in those days because you had very good players from Hospital, Broadford, Cappagh and from Ballingarry. But some of the best came from St Munchin's and the county fellas used to say that if you could beat St Munchin's, you could go on and win an All-Ireland," said Mick.

On three consecutive years during that era, St Munchin's won all 12 county titles up for grabs.

Jobs were scarce in Limerick at the start of the 60s and Mick was on the dole with plenty of time to practice when he did the double. Not that handball wasn't hard work.

"You had softball and hardball. Playing hardball was like



Mick O'Brien, Kileely, proudly shows off his All-Ireland medals that he won on consecutive weekends 50 years ago

hitting a dead golfball. Your hand would swell up so bad that you wouldn't be able to sweep the floor the following day," he said.

Striking the ball with a closed fist to lob it over an opponent meant your fingernails would dig into your palms hard enough to draw blood.

On his way to All-Ireland singles victory in 1960, Mick beat Ballingarry's Pa Hogan in the county final, Corkman Robert McGrath to take the Munster title and Sligo's Dessie Walsh in the All-Ireland Final in Kilkenny. In the doubles, Mick and Sonny Welsh beat the Kilkenny pairing of Burke and

Hanlon in Taghmon, County Wexford.

Not long after, Mick O'Brien was heralded in the Evening Press as their sports star of the week, which was to have unseen consequences for his handball career. Mick had his photo printed in the paper for scoring a famous hat-trick for Ballynanty against Tipperary in the FAI Junior Cup. These were the days of the ban and Mick played soccer under his "official name" of Gerard O'Brien.

"I had to play under two names and when I would finish playing handball at 11 in the morning, Balla would have a

car waiting for me to go and play for them."

"It wasn't long after my picture was in the paper that I got a letter in the door from the GAA banning me from Gaelic Games for 12 months," he recalled.

Mick wouldn't have been around to defend his title in 1961 in any case as he had emigrated to London to find work on the building sites.

He returned to Limerick in 1963 and ended up running the family shop in Kileely for many years with his wife Patricia.

As a 51-year-old in 1986, Mick won the All-Ireland Golden

Masters doubles, a competition for the over-50s, with former garda Con Duggan.

It's been a long time since Mick played and he spends much of his time in retirement writing poetry. In any case, the ball alley in Kileely was dismantled 10 years ago.

"They knocked down three of them in Prospect as well and there used to be six of them down at the fathers (Redemptorists) at one time. I heard they built one up by the Pike but it's a shame there aren't more today. We had great times and they might keep young lads out of trouble," he said.

## UL students share architecture prize

By ANNE SHERIDAN

ARCHITECTURE students at the University of Limerick were celebrating at the weekend after they were awarded joint first prize at an international design workshop.

The final-year students competed in Hamburg against entrants from Barcelona, Istanbul, Oxford, Sheffield, Stockholm, Okinawa and Hamburg.

Merritt Bucholz, director of the school of architecture at UL, said they were all thrilled to win such a prestigious prize – especially at a time when architects in Ireland faced such difficult times.

The prize at the Hafen City University International Design Workshop in Hamburg was the result of a week-long "Art and City" workshop to generate ideas to connect Hamburg's docklands area to the city centre.

All of the participating teams had the opportunity to present their ideas to the people of Hamburg during the workshop.

It is intended that their designs will be published in a catalogue for Hafen City towards the end of this year.

The prizes were announced by a five-member jury, including the city of Hamburg's chief architect and city planner.

The jury commended the Limerick team for the way



UL architectural students examine their proposals to the Hamburg competition which earn them a joint first prize in the international design workshop

in which they developed the project, the inventive models, and the inspiring ideas about how to use the water's edge. The school of architecture at Sheffield University was also awarded first prize.

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