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2025 Project At Irish Center Gets Green Light

by Seán Canniffe

THE \$60 MILLION redevelopment of the United Irish Cultural Center is on track to move into the next stage of the redevelopment process. The UICC Board of Directors has met its initial target of \$5 million raised in financial and pledged work towards the cost of the new building, and will soon formally submit the new building plans to the City and County of San Francisco

Planning Department. Board President Liam Reidy said: "It is great to see the community rally around the redevelopment project and surpass the first fundraising goal of \$5 million that we set ourselves back in May. In fact we have raised \$10,955,492 towards the cost of the new building to date. Many of the pledges and financial commitments have come voluntarily

from the Irish American community. For that we are truly thankful." Reidy continued to say: "A special thank you to District 4 Supervisor Gordon Mar who has agreed to sponsor the Special Use District legislation of the current plans when the time comes at the Board of Supervisors." *For more on this story please see page 18 inside.*

Republic Of Ireland To Re-open Fully By The End Of The Year

STEPHEN DONNELLY, the Health Minister for the Republic of Ireland, committed in late August to lifting all remaining Covid restrictions in the country by Christmas. However, he said the timing of such easing may depend on the advice from the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE). Donnelly said: "Obviously specific dates are something that we would be looking to NPHE for and we'll be discussing that at Cabinet, but yes, certainly the view would be that we would be open this calendar year." He added there may be "basic" public health advice that will remain "for some time," such as guidance around wearing masks in some environments. The minister said the government wants to "provide real certainty for people." He said the government want to lift the restrictions as quickly as possible—and want to ensure that when everything is open it remains open. Minister for Foreign Affairs Simon Coveney said that clarity on the reopening of the live entertainment industry will be given "within days." Coveney said the govern-

ment will follow through with its commitments to provide a comprehensive plan for this sector. Comparisons have been made between the large crowds at recent sporting events and the regularity of live performances in the north of Ireland. 40,000 people attended Croke Park on Sunday, August 21, for the All-Ireland hurling final. Coveney said there was a "big difference" between this final and live entertainment events. He said the match was outside, structured, in a large stadium and with social distancing measures in place. Coveney said that "the government had worked with sports organizations to facilitate larger crowds in very large stadia where people in the stadiums can be separated from each other, wear masks and try to create as controlled an environment as possible." "That said, of course it's a risk to have that many people in one stadium and, more importantly, meeting before and after an All-Ireland final. Of course that's a risk and it's a calculated risk," the minister said. **Continued on page 3**

Remembering The Heroes And Victims Of 9/11, Twenty Years On

TWENTY YEARS AGO THIS month, on September 11, 2001, the world changed forever. At 8:46 a.m. on that clear Tuesday morning a American Airlines Boeing 767, loaded with 20,000 gallons of jet fuel, crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City. It was the first of four aircraft, hijacked by al Qaeda Islamic militants, to be used in suicide attacks that day, resulting in the loss of 2,988 lives. Most died when the World Trade Center's North and South Towers collapsed, others perished when a third plane was flown into the side of the Pentagon. The rest died when the fourth plane, headed towards Washington DC, was brought down in a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania when brave passengers overcame the terrorists on board. 343 of the victims in New York were firefighters serving



The body of Father Mychal Judge being carried from the wreckage of the Twin Towers

with the Fire Department of New York. 71 New York Police Department officers also perished that day. These first responders, the majority of whom

were Irish American, lost their lives trying to save the lives of others. In all they managed to evacuate almost 25,000 people before the towers fell.

The very first certified fatality was Father Mychal Judge—an Irish American Catholic priest. The son of Irish immigrants from County

Leitrim, Judge was a chaplain to the New York City fire Department. After hearing that a plane had struck the World Trade Center, Judge rushed to the site along with several fire fighters. There he was met by New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, who asked him to pray for the victims and for those still stuck in the burning towers. Judge entered the lobby of the North Tower, where he continually prayed for the rescuers, the injured and the dead. When the South Tower collapsed at 9:59am, debris went flying through the lobby of the North Tower, killing almost everyone inside, including Judge. Shortly after the collapse, his body was found and pulled from the rubble and dust, and a photo was taken of five servicemen lifting the body away from Ground Zero. It became one of the most famous images of that tragic day.



• UNITED IRISH CULTURAL CENTER •

“Tús Maith Leath Na Hoibre” A Good Start Is Half The Work

by Liam Reidy, President, United Irish Cultural Center, (lreidy@irishcentersf.org)

AFTER AN INCREDIBLY BUSY month of August preparing for the launch of the 2025 Project at the Irish Center, I reflected on how far our initial redevelopment concept has come since its inception last spring. Over the past four months, there have been numerous briefings and meetings with the rebuilding group (spearheaded by Redmond Lyons, Leo Cassidy, and Michael Coleman), architects Dane Burton and Nastaran Mousavi (Studio BANAA), and the community at large to discuss how to deliver the best possible building to the membership and the public.

Seeing the 2025 Project rebuilding package come together so expeditiously and well developed in its approach, I was reminded of my grandfather Micheal O'Connor (RIP), who often used the old proverb “A good start is half the battle.”

As the second oldest of eight kids I was often farmed out to my grandparents in nearby Ashford, County Limerick to relieve the “pressure” in my own home in Broadford. It was a spartan experience at Nana and Grandad’s cottage—they had three milking cows, raised a couple of pigs, a few acres of ground, including a haggard (small house garden), hay barn, and a few out houses for the cattle and sheds for the turf and wood stored for heating. I got a weekly “bath” on top of the kitchen table as a full service bathroom was not yet installed when I first sojourned there.

It was in Ashford I learned how to milk the cows (using a milking machine unless the electricity was out and then you had to do it by hand!), clean out the cow houses, feed the pigs, plant vegetables (turnips, carrots, onions, potatoes and cabbage mostly), cut the hedges and paint the house with “whitewash”!

This was rural Ireland in the early 1980s and coincidentally the same time that the final chapter for many small farmers was being written all over the countryside. Few of them knew that the end of their small enterprises was imminent. All the local co-operatives were being swallowed up by large corporate entities, and the small farming operations were only in the way of the powerful industrial agricultural complex. The days of the small farmer were numbered, but I was fortunate to experience the tail end of “auld Ireland.”

I spent the summer holidays with my grandparents, and many a long day was spent in the bog saving turf (peat) in parts of the Mullaghareirk Mountains—not really mountains on the scale of the Sierra or the Himalayas but a range of hills on the borders of County Cork, County Kerry and County Limerick.

Upon arrival at the bog, we would rediscover all the implements hidden out of sight in the furze and heather from an earlier visit close to the area of ground being leased from the Forestry Department for the year. Prior to



the start of the workday a survey of the surrounding bog would reveal who was also in the bog harvesting.

Denis Ahern and family from Farrihy, in my home village of Broadford, always seemed to be in the bog when we showed up for some reason. Just before we started there would be a word of encouragement from my grandfather to say that if we worked hard in the morning, the afternoon work would be easier. Then he would shout “A good start is half the battle Liam.” It was then head down until lunchtime.

Later on in National School I learned the Irish proverb (seanfhocal) for the term “Tús maith leath na hoibre.” My grandfather cut the turf with the sléan (cutting device) and fired it athletically onto the bank without breaking form in one full swinging effort. My job was to “foot” (stack the turf) on end with 5 to 6 pieces each, clustered together.

For some reason, all those memories from my youth came

flooding back this month as I reflected on how much the board, building group, Studio BANAA and the Irish American community had achieved in short a short space of time on the 2025 Project.

It has been a solid start to our rebuilding efforts and there is a movement building now in the community that we could deliver this “dream” in only a few short years. Sure there is plenty to do still on the fundraising side of things, but we are now prepared to submit our plans to the City & County of San Francisco Planning Department. We are recruiting and building out our Capital Campaign committee, finalizing our feasibility and sustainability plan, and we are also starting to develop plans for each floor of the building. There are many experts in the community in the specific fields of cultural programming, nonprofit operations, sports gyms, aquatic facilities, building construction and management, catering and hospitality, sound and light, audiovisual, digital technologies, and gallery and museum presentations, that we would love to hear from to help us start to prepare for the new building. All that work starts relatively soon, so please reach out to get involved. Email: campaign@irishcentersf.org

The launch party on Aug 28th was a huge success. All the floor plans, renderings, drawings, and even a video animation of

the new building is now available for review at www.irishcenter2025.org. Many thanks to my fellow Board members, and our selfless volunteers who helped to host a wonderful party to launch the 2025 Project. A special thank you to Jeanne Taggart Boes, GM of the San Francisco Flower Mart who donated all the flower for the occasion.

Thanks also to all the local politicians and dignitaries who came out to support the project, especially the speakers on the night who offered strong support to rebuild the Center: San Francisco Mayor London Breed, former San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown, State Assemblyman David Chiu, Consul General of Ireland Robert O'Driscoll, District 4 Supervisor Gordon Mar, and Project Coordinator Redmond Lyons. A special thanks to Suzy Loftus who acted as MC for the evening.

I am delighted to report that the financial commitments and pledged work for the excavation, dig out and shoring for the new building is currently at close to \$11 million (\$10,955,492) which we revealed at the conclusion of the launch party.

Many thanks to all those who have stepped up to help so far, and we are going to need more support down the road. So if you have Time, Talent or Treasure to contribute please reach out to us.

Go raibh míle agaibh go léir! Thank you all very much!

A capacity crowd attended the 2025 Project launch party at the United Irish Cultural Center on Saturday August 28. Here are some pictures from the event. Photography courtesy of Emily Trin and Kevin Kelleher.



District 4 Supervisor Gordon Mar.



Former Mayor Willie Brown addresses the audience.

www.irishcenter2025.org



Consul General Robert O'Driscoll, Liam Reidy, and Suzy Loftus.



Norene Sheehan, Diarmuid Philpott and Kathleen Manning.



Peggy O'Sullivan, Liam and Stephanie Reidy.



Patrick Musni, Mark Burke, Dawn Golden-Roth.



Kathleen McKeon with State Assemblyman David Chiu.



Molly Burke, Máire Galvin, Maggie Overbay, Kathleen Kraus, Suzy Loftus and Maureen Aoife Loftus.