

27 May 2005

Wanderer's rest in the heart of town*by Peter O Connell*

The building that is taking shape between Vaughan's pub and the Church in Kilfenora is located on a spot that has hosted leisurely tennis matches and hectic sheep sales down the years.

When the building is completed by Ennis builder Pat Carmody in August, Kilfenora village will have a nine room, 43 bed tourist hostel nestled in the

heart of the main street.

Orla Vaughan, who has availed of hostel accommodation on her travels throughout Europe, Australia, Africa and Asia, will oversee the running of The Kilfenora Hostel.

"Even when I was in secondary school my parents were always talking about building a hostel in the village", Orla pointed out.

"Then back in '99 they applied for planning permission and it was granted in 2000. None of us were at home at the time. Myself, my brother and sister were travelling. My parents were going to do it but they decided that it was more of a young person's sort of thing. They were at me to give it a go and eventually I said that I'd take it as far as I could. So I decided I'd apply to Leader for a grant. But they said that they couldn't give me grant aid for accommodation alone. They said I'd have to do something with it. So I was looking at reasons why people would come to Kilfenora and the Burren during the off season. I found that a lot of groups that come to study the flora in the Burren are from university's and school's, so I took out one of the downstairs bedrooms and put in a classroom facility. Then when I went back to Leader with the classroom facility tied into the business plan, they loved it. So I got the grant and it should be through by the end of October", Orla explained.

While those who will stay in the hostel won't be aware of it, the location was once central to commerce in North Clare. Well central if you happened to be a sheep farmer in the area.

"Originally", Orla says, "it used to be a garden. Apparently my grandmother, Nellie Vaughan, had a lawn tennis court there. She also kept greyhounds and rose bushes out there. Then my grandfather got this bright idea, he decided he'd sell sheep there. Much to my grandmother's dismay he covered the whole place in concrete! Then when my Dad got the pub he took over the sheep selling and it only finished up in 1998".

Orla wanted to call her new venture The Shepherd's Rest but a marketing course with the Clare Enterprise Board helped her decide to incorporate her home village into the hostel's name.

"I'm going to call it Kilfenora Hostel. Teresa Mulvihill who is giving the course said to me that Coca Cola and other companies spend millions building a name. She said that we had a name that's already world famous. When you get into a taxi in Dublin and say you're from Kilfenora they say 'oh, the Kilfenora Céili Band'. If you do a search engine on Kilfenora they'll find you, whereas if you do one on The Shepherd's Rest, anything could pop up!"

The renowned design skills of Ann-Louise Roswald will help to create a unique hue in the village hostel. Orla was more than happy to accept the designer's offer to help out.

"Ann-Louise and her husband have renovated a house outside Kilfenora and they have offered to design the interior of the hostel for me. Vogue have done covers of their apartment in London so I was delighted when she offered to get involved in the design process", Orla confirmed.

The Kilfenora Hostel proprietor will be even more content with life when the hostel opens up for business this coming autumn.