



Arrest . . . Beale

Torso in a freezer find amid cop hunt

By BARRY MORAN

OFFICIALS investigating the disappearance of a woman found a headless human torso in a freezer inside an old bus parked beside a home.

A man who lived at the house in New Orleans, US, was arrested on an obstruction charge after the remains were found, but no charges were filed over the death. Officers, who were investigating the whereabouts of a woman last seen in November, found dismembered remains in a freezer inside the bus. Neither the identity of the person nor the cause of death were immediately determined.

Benjamin Beale, 34, was arrested on multiple charges, including obstruction of justice of a death investigation. Beale was also charged with offences including operating a drug laboratory and distributing methamphetamine.



Horror . . . apartments

Boy, just 2, victim of blaze in Bronx

By CRAIG FARRELL

A TWO-year-old boy was among 17 people killed in a high-rise apartment building fire in the US.

New York City police released the names and ages of the final three victims identified after Sunday's deadly blaze in the Bronx area.

They were Isatou Jabie, 31 and husband Hagi Jawara, 47, and Ousmane Konteh, two, who is the youngest victim.

Many of the victims are immigrants from the same area of Gambia and several families suffered multiple deaths.

Five members of one family died while trying to escape through the smoke from a high floor. Fire officials say a malfunctioning electric space heater started the blaze.

The fire broke out in a third-floor apartment and only spread as far as one adjacent hallway, but suffocating smoke spread throughout the building due to a broken fire door.

HOW HERO FORMER NURSE HELPS PEOPLE WHO SURVIVE ON THE STREETS



STRUGGLE . . . Pat is homeless for 11 years

EXCLUSIVE by STEPHEN BREEN Crime Editor

PAT Austin is one of hundreds of people across Ireland who spent the festive season on the streets.

Although homeless for around 11 years, the 51-year-old remains hopeful that his dreams of having his own home will finally come true in 2022.

And Pat revealed how he has the Alice Leahy Trust to thank for giving him back his "dignity and respect" as he continues his fight for the right to live with a roof over his head.

The drop-in centre - which was established by former nurse Alice Leahy in 1975 - offers a wide range of services to people who sleep on the streets in the capital and have nowhere to go during the day.

These include showers, washing facilities, clothing, footwear, food, toiletries, advice on interactions with various State agencies, filling out forms and medical assistance for minor ailments.

The centre also provides advice on medication, referrals to specialist services, foot care, contacting families and healthcare professionals, as well as working with hospitals and community gardai.

Those using the vital service come from all age groups and from all walks of life and include men and women who are battling drug, alcohol or gambling addictions.

And as Pat and others continue to use the facility, which is funded by donations from the public, he paid tribute to Co Tipperary-born Alice and her team for the role they have played in helping homeless people for almost five decades.

Pat has been coming to the centre in Bride Street, south inner city Dublin, for the last six years.

He provided us with a rare insight into life on the streets.

He told the Irish Sun: "If it wasn't for Alice Leahy and the staff I wouldn't be here today.

"Alice is an angel who has helped thousands of lives over the years, while her staff are all extraordinary people who bring compassion and kindness to the people they meet.

"When I am on the streets I am invisible - it's as if I don't exist. When I am down on all fours it's the men and women of the Alice Leahy Trust who lift me up.

"But when I come to the centre all the negative thoughts that I have leave me, and my dignity and respect are restored.

"If I was to win the Lotto I would give it to them because they are wonderful people doing a fantastic job for the most vulnerable in our society."



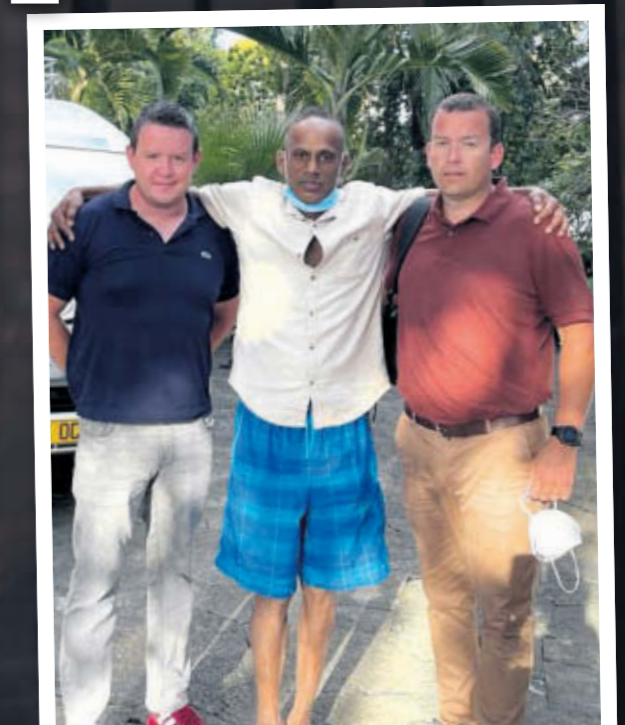
When I'm on the streets I'm invisible, as if I don't exist. When I'm down on all fours it's the men and women of the Alice Leahy Trust who lift me up

CHARITY . . . Alice devotes life to helping people in need

Angel Alice gave me back my dignity and self-respect



SAFE HAVEN . . . Alice with clothing donations at the Dublin inner-city drop-in centre



MISSION . . . Romi, middle, with gardai Alan and Damien

ROMI'S HOME HELP



AIRPORT . . . Romi & Alice

By STEPHEN BREEN

ROMI Ramtohol has just had his best ever Christmas - thanks to the Alice Leahy Trust and the Gardai.

The 48-year-old, who first came to the drop-in centre in 2014, enjoyed the festive season at home in Mauritius, 15 years after his arrival in Ireland.

Romi, who had no papers, no PPS number and no passport, used the centre after becoming homeless. In 2016, he also suffered a vicious assault and two years later a brain clot.

And in 2019, he attended the centre telling staff how "he wanted to go home".

From that moment, the trust enlisted the help of guards Damien McCarthy and Alan O'Dowd from Pearse Street Garda Station.

They then met with the International Organisation for Migration and over the next two years numerous meetings took place to help Romi.

He finally got the go-ahead to return to his homeland last July after a doctor ruled that he was fit to travel.

Romi travelled home with the two guards after the cost was covered by the trust and was reunited with his family.

Garda McCarthy said: "When we first met him you could see that he needed help. He had been through a lot in Ireland and just wanted to get home.

"It was the first time in 15 years that he had been home with his family and he's simply delighted.

"It makes everyone's efforts all worthwhile."

Retired Garda Supt Joe Gannon said: "When this gentleman arrived at Alice's door he was warmly welcomed. Garda Damien McCarthy and Garda Alan O'Dowd gave their own time and effort to assist the trust carrying out this humanitarian mission."

Pat added: "If I had found the trust sooner then I might not be in the position I find myself today. When I'm on the streets I can't wait to get back to the centre because it gives me my confidence back.

"There are times when I haven't showered for three days and I'm afraid to go into a shop because I'm worried what people will say about me. But I am a human being and nobody is meant to be homeless and nor should they be.

"If I was to mark the trust out of ten for the service it provides I would give it 20."

Pat also urged the Government to do more to tackle the dire problem of homelessness in this country.

He said: "On the Thursday before Christmas they looked after me again and I was just so overcome with

emotion because they treat you as a person - to say they are fantastic is an understatement.

"I can't believe the centre doesn't get any Government funding and I will never forget the work the trust does for me and so many others.

"If our politicians are serious about addressing the issue and causes of homelessness they should be speaking to people like Alice, Jeanette and Mark at the centre, because these are the people on the front line."

He continued: "These are the people who know what it's like to deal with this problem."

At present and because of the Covid-19 pandemic, anyone entering the centre has to have their temperature taken and only four people are allowed in at the one time.

In the reception area of the facility,

seats are also placed so that anyone visiting it can relax in a socially distanced manner.

Before the pandemic, the trust had 26 different nationalities calling in every month.

But in recent times, and with many people returning to their homeland due to the pandemic, the centre now helps people from 12 different countries each month.

Also during the pandemic, the centre has seen the return of people who previously used it between eight and ten years ago.

In an exclusive interview with the Irish Sun, the trust's founder told how the homeless situation in Ireland had worsened over the years.

Alice said: "After working in the field of homelessness for almost half a century now, I would have hoped

we reached a better outcome than the one so graphically evident on our streets.

"Unfortunately we have not done so and, in spite of the efforts of many and the spending of immeasurable resources, the overall situation has, if anything, worsened.

"We are a non-judgmental, befriending, social and health service for people who are homeless. We are trying to give a voice and a helping hand to the marginalised in our society.

"The philosophy of the Alice Leahy Trust is based on the recognition of every individual's right to be treated as an autonomous and unique human being."

She continued: "I would like to thank the many people who contribute to make our work possible

while recognizing that in an ideal world there should be no need for our service. We receive tremendous support all year round."

The tireless campaigner also urged the Government to recognise how "complex" the problem of homelessness is in Ireland.

She explained: "No one agency has a monopoly of caring, compassion or expertise and there are no easy answers.

"Not acknowledging the complexities of homelessness will lead to failure for generations to come.

"We must ensure that wider discussions take place with other relevant disciplines to ensure the next generation can be hopefully redirected from life on the streets.

"It is quite clear that working hands-on with people with complex

needs takes time, commitment and a belief that anything is possible.

"However, that is much harder than ticking boxes and the comfort of bureaucracy.

"It is necessary if we are ever to make a real difference."

Former Garda Supt Joe Gannon, who sits on the trust's board of directors, paid tribute to Alice and her team at the centre.

The retired officer said: "Alice Leahy is a remarkable lady and a national treasure.

"Along with her team of dedicated and committed staff, they have provided welfare in various forms of much needed support to thousands of people over the years."

increased drug use in society. She said: "People become homeless because of their drug and alcohol problem and the challenging behaviour associated with it.

"We have a very serious drug problem in our city and in our country. Wider society needs to be aware of its responsibility and culpability when it comes to the use of recreational drugs."

Alice added: "People who use recreational drugs must recognise the reality that they are supporting a vicious industry."

And the campaigner also told of her pain at seeing homeless people dying on our streets and called for the authorities to realise there are many causes behind it.

She insisted: "Tragically, we see people who are homeless dying on

our streets. We help sometimes and in spite of our best efforts, it is not always possible to save each and every one."

She added: "We must support and comfort, give all we can in terms of compassion.

"The people we meet who present as homeless have a myriad of social problems related to the complexity of their own personal and unique human condition."

And broadcaster Pat Kenny also has high praise for Leahy and her team at the centre.

The Newstalk host said: "Alice has become a tireless advocate and agitator for those who literally have no homes to go to.

"She says unpalatable and sometimes un-PC things that rattle the cages of the policy makers and the powerful."

@SteBreen