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Roma Downey donates \$1 million to Irish Arts Center in New York

James O'Shea July 26, 2015

Irish actress and TV and movie producer Roma Downey has pledged \$1 million to the Irish Arts Center new complex being built in New York.

The donation is being made through the American Ireland Fund and was announced at their summer reception on Nantucket Island.

The massive private gift is one of the largest ever made to an Irish non profit and will go towards the \$60 million redevelopment plan for the Irish Arts Center on Manhattan's West Side.

The Irish Arts Center is currently raising the final funds to construct a massive new facility which will have new a 199-seat theatre, an 85-seat intimate café venue; studio spaces for classes, rehearsals and the development of new work; technology capability to project Irish Arts Center on the digital platform and a social environment for meetings, collaboration and conversation.

The City of New York has already pledged major funding as has the Irish government and funding commitments are now over \$45 million. Major figures such as Liam Neeson and Gabriel Byrne are also firmly on board.

Downey made the announcement of the gift through the American Ireland Fund at their annual summer reception on Nantucket Island in Massachusetts on Saturday. The event was held at the home of Ambassador Elizabeth Frawley Bagley.

Speaking at the event, Roma Downey shared the significance of her gift.

“When I first immigrated to America, it was to New York City I moved. In those early years as a homesick artist, I personally sought out the Irish Arts Center and found solace from the work they were doing there, and strength from the people that gathered there. So I am incredibly grateful that all these years later I am personally able to support helping The Irish Arts Center expand with this incredible new building and the exciting new programs, and I applaud The American Ireland Fund for its important support of this vibrant program.”

American Ireland Fund CEO Kieran McLoughlin in welcoming the \$1 million pledge to the Irish Arts Center said, “It is marvelous that such a celebrated artist as Roma is doing so much to promote and preserve Irish culture in her adopted home. Her generosity is a tribute to the power of, and necessity for, philanthropy.”

Downey and her husband, reality series pioneer Mark Burnett who created ‘Survivor,’ have established a huge niche in Hollywood with their Christian programming, which has included a retelling of the bible which drew 100 million viewers to the History Channel with a remake of the movie “Ben Hur” coming up next year.

Downey is also host of the New TLC Series 'Answered Prayers' on miraculous stories of divine interventions.

Downey, a native of the Bogside area of Derry, shot to fame with her starring role in “Touched by an Angel,” which ran from 1994 to 2003 and has parlayed her success in that series to a huge Hollywood presence.

