

Awards 'make it happen' for unsung heroes of Galway

Thirty deserving charities and community groups honoured at Tribune/Combined Insurance event

The spirit of volunteerism is alive and well and thriving in all corners of the county – so said Minister Eamon Ó Cuív after 30 groups and organisations had shared out the €20,000 prize fund in the inaugural Connacht Tribune/Combined Insurance Make It Happen Awards.

And the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs was right – because all of the winners represented the most positive characteristics of the county as well as making a real difference to the lives of so many others.

The Marriot Hotel on Galway's Headford Road was packed to capacity as winners from such diverse backgrounds all gathered to be honoured by the Galway City Tribune/Connacht Tribune and Combined Insurance for their commitment to the community.

They each received a specially engraved crystal plaque, a commemorative certificate – and most importantly a cheque for between €500 and €1,000.

Minister Ó Cuív was the special guest of honour and as a man steeped in community activism, he heaped praise on all of the recipients afterwards.

"A night like this is a wonderful celebration, and also very humbling to see the commitment of so many people.

"There's a buzz word now in some sectors that volunteerism is dying, that people are too busy – well, I can tell you that is simply not true.

"Because as I was listening to the award recipients tonight, one thing struck me – how many of these organisations were in existence twenty years ago?"

"Not too many – so where were all these volunteers and community workers then that we've lost along the way. I know it through my department, the spirit of communi-



ty and volunteerism is alive and well and this is evidence of it throughout Galway," he said.

The diversity of winners contributed to the success of the evening – from those organisations catering for victims of homelessness or domestic violence, those helping children with autism or cancer; to those providing social outlets for the elderly or working towards cultural integration.

And then there were those exceptionally courageous people like Bridget Ann Nee from Rosmuc, who has spent all of her life with Cystic Fibrosis and whose dream of visiting the home of Elvis in Graceland is now a step closer to reality.

'The spirit of community and volunteerism is alive and well and this is evidence of it throughout Galway'

Or Pat Dillon and his team from the Sunflowers Chernobyl charity, who flew in on the day from Belarus where they were doing what they have done for so many years – making life more comfortable for the victims of that nuclear fall-out.

It was a night of celebra-

tion for all of the award recipients, and yet the biggest cheer of all was reserved for two who weren't winners on the night – but were the biggest winners of all on the previous Sunday in Croke Park.

Goal hero Damien Reddington and wing back Tomas Fahy were accorded a standing ovation when they paraded the Tommy Markham Cup through the room.

And they were at home in a room full of winners – from charities with household names to small local groups, all of whom shared the common aim of making life better for others.

That was echoed by Connacht Tribune editor Dave O'Connell, who paid tribute to the work they had all done and the success they had all achieved for the greater good.

"An evening like this gives us a sense of perspective, because we have more than 30 diverse bodies, individuals and organisations, all of whom share one common trait – they have given so much of their time and energy to make others lives better," he said.

And while the overall prize fund of €20,000 was so substantial, he said the other remarkable thing about the awards and the groups was how little money on an individual basis it took to make things happen.

"Many of our recipients only needed the seed capital to make something happen – and the money will reap benefits many, many times over in caring for sick children, saving lives, working with teenagers, helping disadvantaged children, involving young people in drama and theatre, part-funding a youth cafe, helping in cultural integration – which may well be the biggest task that lies ahead for all of us over the next decade or two," he said.

Combined Insurance, a specialist insurance company protecting customers against the financial consequences of accidental injury and illness, have been an integral part of the Irish market for 30 years and they have half a million customers across this country and the UK.

The company's senior Vice-President and General Manager John P Hughes joined Minister Ó Cuív and Dave O'Connell in presenting the awards and as an added bonus for his attendance, Mr Hughes proved that – in the unlikely event of his chosen career coming undone – he has an alternative as an MC and comedian just waiting to be exploited!

Combined Insurance Regional Managers Colin Foran and PJ Harrington read a citation for each of the winners, and many of the recipients were interviewed by Mr Hughes on stage.

Among those in attendance, representing the Connacht Tribune, were the company's chief executive David Hickey, advertising manager Sabina Sheppard and marketing manager Cormac Ryan, who was one of the prime organisers of the event.

Other Combined Insurance senior management personnel present on the night included TJ O'Dea, Linda Joyce, and John J Hughes.



Cope's Waterside House was the recipient of a Make it Happen award at a presentation ceremony at the Courtyard By Marriott Hotel. Pictured during the presentation of the award were, from left: Dave O'Connell, Group Editor, Connacht Tribune Newspaper Group, Ciara Tyrrell, Waterside House, John P. Hughes, General Manager, Combined Insurance, Ireland, Emer McDonagh and Bridget O'Hara, Waterside House, and Deputy Eamon Ó Cuív, Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.



Sara Murphy, Sales and Marketing Executive, Combined Insurance, Natacha Diaz, Graphic Designer, Combined Insurance, and Linda Joyce, Regional Manager, Combined Insurance, at the Make it Happen Awards presentation at the Courtyard By Marriott Hotel.



Tom Beary, Sean Connolly, Margaret Frost and Gary Boyd, all of Combined Insurance, at the Make it Happen Awards presentation at the Courtyard By Marriott Hotel.



Pictured during the presentation of a Make it Happen Award to GRÁ at the Courtyard By Marriott Hotel were Dave O'Connell, Group Editor, Connacht Tribune Newspaper Group, Sheila Ryan, GRÁ, John P. Hughes, General Manager, Combined Insurance, Ireland, Ann Murphy and Jackie Davy of GRÁ and Deputy Eamon Ó Cuív, Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

The inaugural Make It Happen Awards roll of honour

Six winners of last week's Make It Happen Awards, sponsored by the Galway City Tribune and Combined Insurance, received €1,000 each towards their work in the community.

The Cope Waterside House Child Care Unit offers an invaluable service to children during difficult times. Their service caters for children whose mothers are escaping domestic violence and who need accommodation or support. Last year they service helped 357 children.

The Cope Fairgreen Hostel wanted to use their €1,000 to purchase a computer for their residents to use.

The Sonas Day Care Centre cares for older people in Mervue. They offer advocacy, laundry facilities, meal delivery, social activities and other services. They hope to create a secure and comfortable atmosphere for older people which will ease their anxieties and offer peace of mind.

GRA helps children with autism and their families. They

are a group of parents who have come together to advocate on behalf of their children and raise awareness of autism and autism related issues. They are in the process of raising funds to purchase a Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy unit which will help with the treatment of their children.

Osterley Lodge provides crisis accommodation for homeless women. They are hoping to purchase a computer with internet access and they would use this to provide training for the women and help them to develop computer literacy. In turn this will provide greater training and employment opportunities to these women.

CD's Helping Hands was formed in October 2006 with a view to helping the families of children suffering from cancer. Services provided include helping with cleaning, errand running, cooking and other day to day activities that allow the family to function as they cope with treating their child's illness.

Consile were awarded €500

towards their work in providing support, counselling service and a helpline for people bereaved by suicide.

Abalta Special School in Knocknacarra caters for 18 children with autism, but many of them have outgrown their current chairs and tables. The €500 they received will help them replace these items of furniture so that the children can enjoy a safe, comfortable learning environment.

Community Catering, formerly known as Meals on Wheels, received €500 to help them continue their work, preparing and delivering hot, nutritious meals to people who are old, sick or live alone throughout Galway.

Pauline Henry and Annette Masterson ran the Chicago Half Marathon recently to raise funds that will go towards the provision of two respite units in Salthill for those with intellectual disabilities, and the €500 they received will add to their final total.

The Galway Red Cross needs no introduction, but after 60 years

of service to the city they are trying to secure themselves a new base - and the €500 they received will go into that fundraising effort.

Galway Carers Support Group do as the name suggests and the €500 they received will help them to assist carers, offering them support, advice and even just short periods of respite.

The Galway Head Injury Support Group received €500 to help in their efforts to make life better for those who have suffered such dreadful and life threatening injuries.

St Patrick's Scout Group was awarded €500 towards the cost of new equipment for their activities for more than 100 young members, including camping and hiking to cook-outs.

Ala Community Theatre and Education Project in Ballybane received €500 towards their ongoing efforts to cater for young and old alike with the various workshops and projects they run.

There were many award winners based outside the city too:

Pat Dillon and his Sunflowers Chernobyl Charity received €500 towards their continuing efforts to make life better for children with cancer in that part of the world, as they have done for ten years already.

The Gort Youth Project received €500 to help fund Nitrogen 07, a talent show with all of the profits going to local charities.

The Ballinasloe Active Retirement Group received €500 to go towards a new club night for their 195 members.

Dunmore Macra na Feirme received €500 to help them in their continuing efforts to provide a cultural and social outlet for rural youth.

Monica Gannon from Lettermore was awarded €500 towards her fundraising for and work with street children in the city of Kiev, where she helped provide them with food, shelter and emergency aid.

The Glenamaddy Community Development Group was given €500 to help in their to provide an outlet for vulnerable members

of the community who may have become isolated and help to generate extra opportunities for local employment.

Bridget Ann Nee suffers from cystic fibrosis and has spent a large part of her 23 years in hospital, but with the €500 she was awarded, she has taken a giant step closer to fulfilling her dream and visit the home of Elvis Presley in Graceland.

The Cortoon/Lavally Golden Age Group is 30 years old and the €500 they received with help them to continue to provide this vital outlet for the elderly people in their club.

Caring for Carers in Tuam received €500 to help in their vital work.

And the Dunmore Carers Group, who look after between 30 and 40 carers, also received €500 to help them.

The Hope House Addiction Centre based in Foxford, Co. Mayo, received €500 to help in retraining for those who are making the difficult journey back to

sobriety.

Ballinrobe Arch Club were awarded €500 to help them in their work, continuing to provide a social outlet for young adults with special needs - all on a voluntary basis.

Maam Women's Group received €500 to help them continue to provide women from disadvantaged rural areas with the opportunity to have an input in local community development.

Leitrim/Kilcooley PTAA were awarded €500 to help towards the cost of purchasing a defibrillator for their local parish.

Study Buddies at Na Calaf in Portumna assist children - often from disadvantaged backgrounds - with their homework and their self-confidence and to develop relationships with their peers and other adults and they were also awarded €500.

The Signout Youth Cafe, which is also run by Na Calaf, received €500 towards their goal of developing a purpose built youth cafe for local teens between 15 and 18 to meet and interact.

The Gort Parent and Toddler Group is only in its infancy, and they will use the €500 to secure a room for their meetings as they establish a support group for parents with young children in their area.

The Fusion Youth Club in Aughrim received €500 to help them continue their work with young people from the Aughrim/Ballinasloe area, which began six years ago and provides a mix of activities and discussion forums for members.

The Tuam branch of Multiple Sclerosis also received €500 towards their work, providing support to its members as well as offering advice the group also helps to pay for treatments such as visits to the physiotherapist or receiving acupuncture.

The Meadow Cross-Cultural Association in Ballinasloe received €500 towards their work integrating new arrivals into their local community, and helping many of the new immigrants to our country to settle into Irish society.