



# Galway groups prove community spirit and volunteerism are alive and thriving



The Ballinrobe Arch Club were recipients of a Make it Happen Award. Pictured were, from left: Irene Langan, Ballinrobe Arch Club, Dave O'Connell, Group Editor, Connacht Tribune Newspaper Group, Mae Langan, Ballinrobe Arch Club, John P. Hughes, Phyllis Langan, Ballinrobe Arch Club, Minister Eamon Ó Cuív, and Mary Teresa Langan, Ballinrobe Arch Club.

The spirit of volunteerism is alive and well and thriving in all corners of the county - so said Minister Eamon Ó Cuív after 35 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 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 community 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.

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 celebration 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 give 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 those in 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!

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.



Pictured during the presentation of a Make it Happen Award to The Meadow Cross Cultural Association were Dave O'Connell, Zelia Corcoran, Meadow Cross, John P. Hughes, Magdalena Garcarek and Siobhan Byrne, Meadow Cross, and Minister Eamon Ó Cuív.



Pictured during the presentation of a Make it Happen Award to the Multiple Sclerosis Tuam Branch were, from left: Dave O'Connell, Teresa Lydon, Tuam Multiple Sclerosis, John P. Hughes, Violet Powell and Kathleen O'Neill of Tuam Multiple Sclerosis, and Minister Eamon Ó Cuív.



Pictured during the presentation of a Make it Happen Award to Console were Dave O'Connell, Margaret Tierney-Smith, Console, John P. Hughes, Mary Daly, Friends of Console, Minister Eamon Ó Cuív and Mary King, Friends of Console.



Martina Cunningham, representing the Fairgreen Hostel, pictured with Dave O'Connell, Group Editor, Connacht Tribune Newspaper Group, John P. Hughes, General Manager, Combined Insurance, Ireland, and Deputy Eamon Ó Cuív, Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, after receiving a Make it Happen award.



John P. Hughes, General Manager, Combined Insurance, Ireland (fourth from left) presenting Jim Ahern of the Ala Adult Community Theatre and Education with their award at the Make it Happen Awards. Included in the photograph are, from left: Dave O'Connell, Group Editor, Connacht Tribune Newspaper Group, Ger Fallon and Marie Ahern of Ala, and Deputy Eamon Ó Cuív, Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.



Maura Murphy and Jack Hanley and his wife Rosemary at the Make it Happen awards presentation. Maura and Rosemary were the recipients of an award on behalf of the Maam Women's Group.



Ann Deeley, Ann Quinn and Carmelita Lee of the Dunmore Carers Group, Make it Happen award winners, with Dave O'Connell, John P. Hughes, and Minister Eamon Ó Cuív.



At the Make it Happen Awards presentation at the Courtyard By Marriott Hotel were, from left: Dave O'Connell, Joan Treacy and Margaret McDonald of the Ballinasloe Active Retirement Association (award winner), John P. Hughes, Douglas Rafter, Ballinasloe ARA, and Minister Eamon Ó Cuív.



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 the Leitrím Kilcooley PTAA at the Courtyard By Marriott Hotel were, from left: Dave O'Connell, Fr. Declan Kelly, Leitrím Kilcooley PTAA, John P. Hughes, Michael Flynn and Stephen Leahy, Leitrím Kilcooley PTAA, and Minister Eamon Ó Cuív.



Asumpta Gallagher and Niamh Browne of CD's Helping Hands, a winner of a Make it Happen Award, with John P. Hughes, General Manager, Combined Insurance, Ireland, at the presentation ceremony.



Keiran Brennan, Alan Naughton and Tom Cawley, all of Combined Insurance, at the Make it Happen Awards presentation at the Courtyard By Marriott Hotel.



Frank and Tina Walsh receiving a Make it Happen Award on behalf of the Fusion Youth Club from Dave O'Connell, (left), John P. Hughes and Minister Eamon Ó Cuív.



The Sign Out Youth Cafe, Portumna, Na Calai CDP, were the winners of a Make it Happen Award. Pictured are, from left: Audrey Hogan, Sign Out Youth Cafe, Dave O'Connell, Stephanie Blake, Sign Out Cafe, John P. Hughes, Mairead Felle and Susan Royston, Sign Out Cafe, Minister Eamon Ó Cuív, and Helena Kelly, Sign Out Cafe.



Helena Kelly (left) and Susan Royston of the Sign Out Cafe (award winner) with Colin Foran, Regional Manager, Combined Insurance, at the Make it Happen Awards.



The Sunflower Chernobyl Charity was the recipient of a Make it Happen Award. Pictured during the presentation were: Dave O'Connell, Thomas Gilchreest and Eileen Glynn of the Sunflower Chernobyl Charity, John P. Hughes, Brendan Fallon and Pat Dillon, Sunflower Chernobyl Charity, and Minister Eamon Ó Cuív.



Dave O'Connell, Group Editor, Connacht Tribune Newspaper Group, Deputy Eamon Ó Cuív, Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, and T.J. O'Dea, Vice-President and Divisional Manager, Combined Insurance, at the Make it Happen Awards presentation at the Courtyard By Marriott Hotel.



Mary Duggan receiving the award for the Abalta Special School from John P. Hughes at the Make it Happen awards presentation ceremony. Included in the photograph are Dave O'Connell, and Minister Eamon Ó Cuív.



John P. Hughes, General Manager, Combined Insurance, Ireland, presenting Bridget Ann Nee with her award at the Make it Happen Awards. Included in the photograph are Dave O'Connell, and Minister Eamon Ó Cuív.



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