

# PERSON OF THE YEAR 2003

## Oliver Haslette

*Oliver Haslette, Manorhamilton, is Leitrim Guardian Person of the Year. Oliver is Managing Director of Merenda which specialises in the manufacture and distribution of Processed Wood veneers at its factory in Park Road, Manorhamilton. Its unique range of products has outlets all over the world including the Middle Eastern countries. Oliver travels very far afield in the course of his work which gives him an international ranking.*

As a former builder in Leitrim, Oliver was very much involved with the Construction Industry Federation. He served as National President in 1990/91 and at that time played a major role in lobbying for the development of the national road network and the creation of the National Roads Authority. He is Chairman of the Construction Federation Operatives Pension Scheme and a Trustee of their Executive Pension Scheme. He also serves on the Operational Committee of the Border Regional Authority.

Oliver has just recently retired from Leitrim County Development Board and from the County Enterprise Board on which he had served for eight years. He is also current President of the North West Region of IBEC.



*Oliver & Joan Haslette*

Within his own local community Oliver has long association with progress in Manorhamilton during his lifetime. He was a founder member of Manorhamilton Development Company which achieved so much for the town from 1968 onwards. He has been to the fore in most voluntary organisations in the town. He has been ever vigilant in making the case for better infrastructure and his campaign for the improvement of the R280 - the spine road through the County - has been tireless. He

sees this road as one of the main contributing factors to disadvantage in North Leitrim.

Oliver was absent from Manorhamilton for the duration of his post-primary and third level education. When he graduated with BA Degree from St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, he focused again on his native town with the steadfast view that he would make things happen there. The conventional wisdom of all his respected councillors was that he should not stay but move out if he were to find scope for his talents and

ambitions. This advice had the effect of making him more adamant that he should explore all possibilities at home. He married Joan Moran from Limerick in 1968 and they became partners in every sense of the word from there on. They have five children, John, Siobhán, Paul, Marianne and Ronan.

Oliver took over the family building business in 1972 from his father and developed it into a significant construction company in the North West and went on to establish other successful ventures such as Hardware, Builders Providers and Petrol retailing. The restoration of the Market House in the town centre is a permanent monument to the enterprise and entrepreneurial spirit shared by Joan and Oliver. No detail was neglected in the painstaking refurbishment which has preserved a prestigious part of the heritage of Manorhamilton.

Oliver points to the fact that the first half of his business life was centred within a fifty mile radius of Manorhamilton but the success of Merenda Ltd has made the whole world his marketplace. He travels regularly to the Middle East, North America and many European countries to source raw materials and to maintain contact with his valued customers and to explore new possibilities which thankfully continue to arise. This is the result from identifying a niche in



*Oliver receives the DHL Export Award in 1999 from Pat Rutherford*

a promising market for quality processed veneers and meeting the needs with quality products. Before the setting up of Merenda Ltd many of the UK companies with whom he deals had to look eastwards to Germany, Italy, Spain for their products.

He takes pride in the fact that they can now find products which are convenient, competitive and good quality by looking westwards to Manorhamilton. His new factory on the Park Road Industrial Estate is state of the art and employs about 45 people.

Oliver is an example to would-be

entrepreneurs with his basic belief that there is always an answer and it can be made positive by not accepting no for an answer. His achievements speak so loudly that he is obviously an excellent choice of person to join the list of notable people who have been proclaimed Leitrim Guardian people of the year for the past thirty five years.

***We congratulate Oliver and his wife Joan, on this most recent recognition. The honour also reflects on their children - John, Siobhán, Paul, Marianne and Ronan.***