

## The Last Word Person of the Year 2016 Joe & Rosie Dolan

WHEN ROSIE AND I got the call informing us of our nomination for the 2016 *Leitrim Guardian Person of the Year Awards* we had mixed and confused sentiments. A wind up? Why us? And so on...but slowly the reality sunk in and then dawned. To be acknowledged within and by your community is indeed special. To be the recipients of this award continues to be personally overwhelming and for which we remain proud and honoured and we will forever cherish.

We consider this award to be our lifetime achievement and dedicate it to our sons Andrew (RIP), Jack and Gavin who have been our inspiration.

We were aware of the long list of previous and indeed more worthy and wonderful recipients in our community and county who truly have given willingly and voluntarily to enhance the lives of others unlike us where our community involvement enhances our business enterprise. These recipients contributed more than we could ever hope to achieve in a lifetime but nonetheless we graciously accepted the award not just on our behalf but for those close to us who have inspired us.

We recall with great affection the night in Kiltyclogher when the magazine was launched and we received the award. Following Andrew's death in 2012 we have commented in the media in relation to broader social issues such as organ donation, public order and respect, but declined to share our personal emotion. Our acceptance speech was thus a milestone for us as it was the first time we spoke of our personal loss which in itself was healing.



■ Joe & Rosie with below H E Kevin Vicars, Canadian Ambassador to Ireland



We again salute and congratulate the *Leitrim Guardian* and the various people who have maintained the momentum since its inception in 1968 and in particular the current committee of 2017. In our acceptance speech that night we recounted that it was our intention to emigrate after marrying in the late eighties; no one our age stayed in those days. We were fortunate to have had the choice whether to stay or emigrate unlike many

of our colleagues and friends who did not. We have no regrets. We were reminiscing this morning whilst reading the newspaper and seeing the various and appalling atrocities, poverties, injustices, and abuses internationally, that we feel nothing but privileged and fortunate to live in the healthy, safe and beautiful environment of Leitrim and its surroundings but particularly our people. Leitrim may be relatively smaller, poorer



■ Joe & Rosie with their sons at the launch of last year's *Leitrim Guardian*.

and economically disadvantaged than other counties but we more than compensate with our people, our resilience, warmth, camaraderie, love and respect for each other and indeed so much more.

The choice of Kiltyclogher as the location and venue for the launch and awards ceremony was indeed appropriate in the context of Leitrim, the year 2016 and the many special associated events in Leitrim and beyond which we were privileged to attend. We were honoured to be guests at the Leitrim London Association Dinner in February in the wonderful company of fellow guests Cathaoirleach John McCartin and up and coming fashion designer and blogger Jennifer Wrynn in the Clayton Crown Hotel in Cricklewood. We were embarrassed with the warm welcome but more particularly struck by the unique, warm and genuine community, friendship, camaraderie the Leitrim diaspora obviously brought with them to London.

Back home we are experiencing recovery in our County's economy all be it modest, incremental and non spectacular—but growth nonetheless. Employment levels are improving and there is a renewed but not complacent sense of confidence. The recent announcement of €5.9m funding to assist job creation, sustaining and enhancing towns and

villages and supporting recreational and tourism initiatives is indeed welcome news. At the recent Upper Shannon Erne Future Economy (USEFE) forum, Invest4Success, in Croke Park the business community of Leitrim were strongly represented and punching well above weight and clearly

evident was a tangible sense of renewed business confidence: Leitrim has never been a more attractive proposition for investment, and as a destination to live, work, rest and play.

In the context of tourism, Leitrim remains well up there and well ahead and respected thanks to the many highly dedicated, resourceful and innovative tourism providers particularly more recently in North Leitrim. Tourism is probably the most efficient engine for economic growth in Leitrim. But we must continually manage this growth responsibly. Tourism development must be economically, environmentally and socially sustainable. Leitrim people have been at the forefront in finally achieving no fracking in our county and country. The new and further proposed cycling and walking routes, blue and green ways and the world class rowing facility at Lough Rinn are paying dividends along with the developments at Glencar to mention but a few. With these and further tourism product renewals and enhancements touristically the future for Leitrim is indeed positive.

Carrick continues to improve but there is an unhealthy overdependence on the night time economy which is incompatible with many other tourism sectors and markets and negatively impacts and occasionally can often be

offensive to the local community. Whilst there is undoubtable strong short term monetary gain there also arises serious social and public order issues. In this context and in Andrew's name we have endorsed and supported a national Garda PR campaign promoting responsible behaviour.

A particularly emotive event for us was our attendance last September at the Leitrim Associations of People with Disabilities receipt of the PQASSO award. This award recognises best practice and excellence in delivery of services which support independent living for people in Leitrim under the very competent stewardship of Rosaleen Kielty and her Board of Directors. We were privileged to be invited to this night of celebration and recognition of the dedication and hard work in obtaining this award.

We are pleased to confirm renewal of our sponsorship of Leitrim GAA for 2017 and 2018. The GAA in Leitrim epitomises all that is great in our county, we look forward to the away championships fixtures of London in 2017 and New York in 2018. We were privileged to attend once again the Leitrim Supporters Club in Dublin (the envy of many Counties) although we didn't make 'Coppers this year!

We congratulate the 2017 winner of the *Leitrim Guardian Award*—Hubert McHugh. Hubert epitomises all that is great in Leitrim people and is a truly worthy recipient. If he has half as rewarding a year as we have had then he will not be disappointed. *Congratulations Hubert!*

*It just remains to again thank the Committee Bláithín, Rosaleen, Fr John and the many others for bestowing us such prestige. We also thank the public for their many messages of good will and kind sentiments.*