

LIGHT UP LEITRIM'S FIRST ST PATRICK'S NIGHT PARADE

Bláithín Gallagher

THIS YEAR Drumkeeran village hosted a St Patrick's Weekend festival with funding support from the Rural Development Program (2007-2013) LEADER—*Measure 313 Encouragement of Tourism Activities*.

While St Patrick's days has been celebrated for many years in Ireland as a Roman Catholic feast and holy day, over the last twenty years it has grown to represent the pluralism of Ireland, encompassing and integrating the many facets of Irish society that now co-exist. This year for the first time, the holiday was celebrated as an all weekend event in Drumkeeran, with something for everyone to enjoy. Like many other parts of Leitrim and Ireland, Drumkeeran and the surrounding areas have been particularly badly affected by the recession with the local population devastated by unemployment and the resulting emigration. Motivated by the desire to bring visitors to the village and in turn give the local economy a boost the Drumkeeran youth club leaders put together a festival plan, and successfully sourced part funding to host the event. Local sponsorship also helped.

The festivities commenced on Friday night, the eve of St Patrick's day, with a well attended ceilí in the community centre. Many of the great local musicians led the ceilí, and fun, friendship, and craic was enjoyed by all who attended. On Saturday evening Drumkeeran the first ever St Patrick's night parade in Leitrim, "Light Up" lived up to its name and lit up Drumkeeran as floats, participants and bands from near and far, marched through the streets of Drumkeeran. Afterwards Drumkeeran's fine hostelries were packed to capacity as the festival goers enjoyed the convivial spirit on offer after the parade. Prizes were awarded to a variety of participants to mark their effort in preparing their floats for the parade.

On Sunday afternoon there were a multitude of activities for the youth of the area to enjoy including Toons and Balloons which included a Rodeo Bull, Laser Quest & inflatable fun for all the family. The mobile cinema screened *The Muppets* followed by *Jack & Jill* at 6pm. The weekend

culminated with a spectacular fireworks show put on by Rocket Pyrotechnics which enthralled the audience of all ages.

Drumkeeran Youth Club, the hosts of the St Patrick' weekend activities, are most grateful to all of the volunteers, funders and sponsors who made this weekend festival possible. We hope that such support will continue and allow Drumkeeran Youth Club to be in a position to provide such memorable activities for the community, events which raise spirits, cement friendships and overall enhance community relations, for many years to come.