

Mervue hero Billy is named top volunteer in annual Mayor's Awards

BY DECLAN VARLEY

VETERAN footballer and coach and fundraiser extraordinaire Billy Carr of Mervue was named as the Galway city Volunteer of the Year at the annual Mayor's Awards which were presented on Tuesday night.

The ceremony held annually to honour the city's top volunteers and voluntary organisations attracted more than 400 guests to the Black Box Theatre where Mayor Declan McDonnell presented certificates and awards to almost 70 groups and individuals.

However the biggest cheer of the night was reserved for Billy Carr who was named as the overall winner. Speaking afterwards, he said that his love of sport had brought him one great reward — the friendship of so many.

In his address, Mayor McDonnell said that people choose to volunteer for a wide variety of reasons; to get something done that otherwise would not get done; for the sense of belonging to a community that it brings. Some people choose to volunteer for unselfish reasons; because they believe in doing good.

"For some people, however, volunteering is not a choice. It is not a choice because they believe the work that they do as volunteers must be done, has to be done and they take the responsibility to undertake that work, as volunteers.



Mayor's Awards winners: Fiona Lawless, Steven Gilligan, Michael Duffy, Michael Grealish, Ruth Fagan, Billy Carr, Mayor Declan McDonnell, Deirdre Dooley and Frank Downes.

"It is a tremendous honour for me to be Mayor of Galway. A significant part of that pleasure and that honour comes from having met people every day since I became Mayor who give of themselves to others as volunteers and to see the work that they carry out. I see it in small ways and large ways - in small kindnesses and in large gestures that people, on their own or as part of

groups, clubs and associations, make to improve the lives of those around them.

"There is a spirit of volunteerism that fills the life of this great city of ours. That spirit encompasses, for example, people looking out for their neighbours, training a team, encouraging a young person to make something of themselves, being part of making a

city-wide celebration happen - all of these capture a spirit, a spirit which adds to the quality of life of individuals, of communities, of our city.

Our society as a whole benefits as well from the spirit of giving which volunteers contribute to our sense of community. It benefits everyone that we live in a city where we look out for each other and look after each other

when it is needed," he said.

The Mayor went on to thank the adjudication panel which comprised Cllr Donal Lyons; Stan Sjothun from Galway City Community Forum; Noel McGuire of St Anthony's & Claddagh Credit Union representing Galway City Credit Unions; Margaret Ó Riada, Chairperson of Galway City Partnership; Tom Connell, Director of Services, Galway City Council and Declan Varley, group editor of the Galway Advertiser representing the local media.

Speaking on behalf of the sponsors, the Galway Credit Unions, Tom Fahy of St Anthony's and Claddagh Credit Union said that they rely on volunteers to provide good governance in running their business.

"In the current financial crisis we see the high street banks unable to support borrowers for personal and business needs. The Credit Union is doing all it can to help its members to deal with their situations, and we are always willing to be flexible when members experience difficulties.

"In a time of recession, when other financial institutions are cutting back on sponsorship, the credit unions have given a commitment to sponsor the awards for the next couple of years."

In his citation Billy Carr was described as a great volunteer and neighbour.

"Every year, he raises between 30 and 40 thousand euro for his organisation. He has done this every week of every year for the last 15 years, going door to door in his local area collecting the for his club's lotto. In total, he must have raised over half a million euro which has gone back into his club in his area to provide top-class facilities to be used by the young people of this city. Because of this work, between 3,500 and 4,000 people, young people and adults, get to use these facilities every week.

"He has been involved in soccer for over 55 years. Uniquely, he and three of his brothers were all members of a team which won the Connacht Junior Cup. He has coached his club for more than 30 years and is still coaching at the age of 70. In his time he has encouraged youth players to participate and to enjoy a rewarding quality of life and health.

"The recipient of this award is a good neighbour. A mechanic by trade, if a neighbour was ever in trouble, he'd never see anyone stuck - even if they weren't a customer - and would get you back on the road again," said Mayor McDonnell.

The recipients in each of the categories were: St Anthony's & Claddagh Credit Union Arts, Culture, Heritage & Cursai Gaeilge Award - Ala Community Theatre

Group, in recognition of its contribution to community-based activity in the arts;

St Columba's Credit Union Residents' & Local Areas Award - Renmore Residents Association for its ongoing work over 50 years;

Naomh Pádraig Credit Union Social & Community Support Award - The Galway Volvo Ocean Race Volunteers for their contribution to making the stopover the success it was;

Naomh Pádraig Credit Union Social & Community Support Award - Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind, Galway Branch for its continuing support and assistance to blind people in Galway;

Sports Volunteer of the Year Award - Michael Grealish in recognition of his service to rugby with Our Lady's Boys Club and with the Connacht Branch of the IRFU;

Children and Youth Award - The Volunteers of Big Brother Big Sister Galway for their mentoring, support, and friendship to young people in the city;

Young Volunteers of the Year - Foundation Nepal/transition year students of Coláiste Iognáid for their work in raising funds and increasing awareness of disadvantaged communities in Nepal;



Mother and Daughter: Fiona Lawless with her daughter Naomi pictured at the Mayor's awards. Fiona accepted the Naomh Pádraig Credit Union Social & Community Support Award on behalf of The Galway Volvo Ocean Race Volunteers for their contribution to making the stopover the success it was and her daughter Naomi was part of the group which won Young Volunteers of the Year, Foundation Nepal/transition year students of Coláiste Iognáid for their work in raising funds and increasing awareness of disadvantaged communities in Nepal.