

Sports Award For Co Limerick Rowing Coach

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A rowing coach has been named as the first winner of the 'Contribution to Sports Award' at a ceremony in Limerick County Hall, Dooradoyle, this evening.

The award scheme, which honours the memory of the late mountaineer Gerard McDonnell from Kilcornan, recognises contributions and achievements in sport by volunteers, participants and administrators throughout County Limerick. The initiative has been developed by the County Limerick Local Sports Partnership (LSP), in conjunction with the Irish Sports Council and Limerick County Development Board.

Mr. Joe Cunningham, who has been coaching at Castleconnell Boat Club for eight years, was selected ahead of nominees from a range of sporting clubs and organisations throughout County Limerick. Joe is credited with introducing Adaptive Rowing to the Boat Club and has trained rowers to win medals at European and World Indoor Rowing Championships. Club members also won Bronze at the World Cup in 2009 and are now in training to qualify for the Paralympics in 2012.

Former Munster and Ireland rugby star Anthony Foley presented the County Limerick man with a special commemorative award in recognition of his contribution to sport. He also received overnight accommodation together with spa treatment, sponsored by Woodlands House Hotel and Spa in Adare.

Other award nominees included DJ O'Sullivan of Feenagh/Kilmeedy Bord na nÓg – winner of the 'Administrator' award; Ursula Fahy, Springfield Basketball Club – winner of the 'Coach/Administrator' award; Corona Ryan, Garryspillane GAA Club; Mick Macro, Askeaton Swimming Club; Tom O'Connell, Pallaskenry GAA Club; Michael O'Donoghue, Limerick Primary Schools GAA; Sean Cagney, Granagh/Ballingarry Camogie Club; Geraldine McMahon, Pallaskenry GAA Club; Gerard O'Dowd, Pallaskenry GAA Club; Agnes O'Dowd, Kildimo/Pallaskenry Community Games; Michael Shiels, Limerick County Cycling Club; Ann Fitzgibbon, Feenagh/Kilmeedy Community Games; Joe Chawke, West Limerick Athletic Club; and Mike Murphy, Kilmallock Camogie Club.

Councillor David Naughton, Cathaoirleach of Limerick County Council congratulated the Boat Club coach on being named the first winner of the 'Contribution to Sports Award'. He added: "Members of the LSP Forum selected Joe as overall winner for his dedication to Castleconnell Boat Club and the local community over a long number of years. Joe's determination to keep Castleconnell's proud association with boating alive together with promoting volunteerism in the community sets a wonderful example for others to follow. Furthermore, this award success will serve as a major boost to Castleconnell Boat Club, which was damaged during the recent serious flooding along the Lower River Shannon".

Councillor Naughton continued: “I wish to congratulate the other competition nominees who continue to provide invaluable assistance to GAA, Cycling, Basketball, Athletics, Soccer, Swimming, Community Games and Camogie organisations across County Limerick”.

LSP Coordinator Phelim Macken said that the aim of the competition was to award a County Limerick-based local volunteer / participant / administrator, who in their outstanding efforts and persistence had made an excellent contribution to sport at a local level. “Among the factors that were considered by the Selection Committee was the nominee’s length of service as a volunteer / participant / administrator, along with their versatility, impact on the club or group, impact on the sport, personal contribution, overall merit and other qualities”, Mr. Macken explained.

Commenting on Gerard McDonnell’s association with the award, Mr. Macken stated: “Gerard was a proud Limerick man who pushed the boundaries of human endurance to the limits. His appetite for life was an inspiration to anyone who came into contact with him. I wish to sincerely thank Gerard’s family and friends for approving his association with the award. I also wish to thank the many people from across Limerick who nominated representatives from their local clubs and organisations.”.

Gerard McDonnell was entered into the history books when he reached the summit of the world’s second highest mountain in August 2008. The native of Kilcornan was tragically killed while descending the Himalayan peak just hours after achieving his lifetime ambition. The 37-year-old was part of an expedition team comprising seven climbers from Ireland, Holland and Australia. Lying on the Pakistan-China border, K2 is regarded as one of the most all-round difficult mountains in the world with only around 189 climbers having reached the summit. In the year since his tragic death, Ger has been hailed as a hero and awarded the Best of Explorers Web 2008 Award by the mountaineers’ websites, Explorers Web. Limerick County Council held a Civic Reception in his honour last March.