



*Pictured left:*  
An Tánaiste Mary Coughlan TD pictured with People of the Year Award winners (*left to right*) Darren Sutherland, Kenny Egan and Paddy Barnes.

# Best-ever People of the Year Awards

## Celebrate Ireland's Finest



## T WAS A NIGHT OF

celebration that certainly provided a reason to smile and an occasion to applaud Ireland's heroes.

The Awards ceremony, which was organised by Rehab, sponsored by QUINN-healthcare and televised live on RTÉ One, provided a unique opportunity for the Irish public to honour the remarkable achievements made by individuals and organisations to life in Ireland. Now in their 34th year and firmly established as the Irish people's national Awards, the People of the Year Awards were presented for the second year running by RTÉ's Gráinne Seoige.

But the star of *Seoige* wasn't the only household name at the Citywest Hotel, Co. Dublin on Saturday, 13th September last. Guest of honour at the glittering event was An Tánaiste Mary Coughlan TD, who was joined by a legion of celebrities that included Andrea Corr, Daniel O'Donnell, Ray D'Arcy, Sean Óg Ó hAilpín, Diarmuid Gavin, Barry McGuigan, Marian Finucane, Dickie Rock and George Hook. A host of other household names from the world of television and music were among the nearly 1,000-strong audience that filled the venue.

But despite the attendance of Ireland's great and good, it was the less familiar names, who got the biggest cheer of the night. Among them was seven-year-old **Ronan Hayes** from Castlemartyr in Co. Cork, who was a joint recipient of a Young Person of the Year Award for his courage in saving the life of his little sister Emily after she accidentally fell into a septic tank. With the help of a stick, Ronan was able to keep his sister above the waterline, while talking to her and



*Pictured above:* Joint recipient of this year's Young Person of the Year Award, Orla Tinsley (*left*), and singing sensation, Andrea Corr, who presented Orla with her Award on the night.



*Pictured above:* Some of the winners of this year's People of the Year Awards.



*Pictured above left:* People of the Year Award winner, Keith Duffy (*centre*) with this year's Joint Young Person of the Year Award recipient, Ronan Hayes (*right*) and his sister, Emily.

*Pictured above right:* People of the Year Award recipient, Nuala O'Loan (*left*), with Rehab's Chief Executive, Angela Kerins.

urging her to hold on as she became increasingly tired and traumatised. When help finally arrived, Ronan's hands were bleeding heavily from where the stick had cut into them, but Emily was now safe. He emerged from the ordeal a true hero. And, as Seán Óg Ó hAilpín remarked when presenting Ronan with his Award, Cork hurling could certainly do with a few heroes just like Ronan!

Twenty-one-year-old **Orla Tinsley** received her Joint Young Person of the Year Award from the lead singer of The Corrs, Andrea Corr, while film star Colin Farrell sent a video message of congratulations. Both declared themselves to being bowled over by Orla's passionate and articulate campaign for better services for people with cystic fibrosis. Orla's moving testimony and the resulting developments

that have taken place will, without doubt, have a significant and positive impact on the life expectancy and quality of life of people with cystic fibrosis throughout Ireland.

**Fr Shay Cullen** received the honour of being named International Person of the Year and was presented with his Award by RTÉ's Marian Finucane for his relentless courage and commitment to protecting vulnerable children from abuse, cruelty and exploitation, and for giving them the opportunity to rebuild their lives with dignity. For almost four decades, Fr Shay has waged an extraordinary campaign that has given thousands of victims of the Philippines' sex industry, jailed street children and exploited young workers their lives back.

Boyzone's **Keith Duffy** received his People of the Year Award from Rehab Chief Executive, Angela Kerins, not for his worldwide music



*Pictured above:* Ben Dolan pictured with the presenter of this year's People of the Year Awards, RTÉ's Gráinne Seoige. Ben accepted an Award in honour of the outstanding contribution made to the Irish music scene by his late brother, Joe Dolan.

success or for his acting career, but for his passionate commitment to the cause of children with autism. Keith's daughter, Mia, was diagnosed with autism almost seven years ago. Since then, not only has Keith raised funds and awareness for support programmes, but as the Patron of Irish Autism Action, he has become an articulate and persuasive advocate for the cause of early diagnosis and specific education supports of children with autism.

Boxers **Kenny Egan, Darren Sutherland** and **Paddy Barnes** were each awarded a People of the Year Award by Donal Clancy, General Manager, QUINN-healthcare and boxing legend and previous People of the Year Award recipient, Barry McGuigan, for their character, courage, determination and sheer

hard work over many years culminating in their success at the Beijing Olympic Games. The boxers gave Ireland one of its biggest medal hauls in the 112-year history of the Games, claiming a silver and two bronze medals.

Radio and television star, Ray D'Arcy, was on hand to present **Rose Uí Shúilleabháin** with a Special Award as Ireland's Teacher of the Year for her extraordinary courage and coolness in saving the life of one of her pupils and for her ability to inspire her students to maximise their individual talents and for her dedication to giving them the best possible start in life. Thanks to her quick thinking, and the presence of a defibrillator provided by first-aider Robert Bailey, Rose was able to administer CPR to one of her pupils,



*Pictured above:* RTÉ presenter, Caroline Morahan, walks the red carpet at this year's glittering People of the Year Awards.



*Pictured above:* People of the Year Award recipient, Robert McLoughlin of Jomac Productions, and Joint Young Person of the Year Award winner, Ronan Hayes, compare their Awards.



*Pictured above:* Joint Young Person of the Year Award recipient, Ronan Hayes (left) with GAA hurling star, Seán Óg Ó hAilpín.

Daniel Ross, when he collapsed due to cardiac arrest at a cross-country championship. Now fit and healthy, Daniel and his family were on hand in Citywest to help Rose celebrate her well-deserved Award.

And there were celebrations too at the table of **Robert McLoughlin**, when he was recognised with a People of the Year Award for his boundless enthusiasm, energy and selfless dedication to providing a light in the lives of so many people through Jomac Productions. Showband star Dickie Rock presented the Award to Robert who, since 1952, has entertained hospital patients, senior citizens, people with mental health difficulties, homeless men and

women, children living in institutional care and anyone else he thought could do with a dose of the power of laughter. Indeed, fellow Award recipient, Orla Tinsley, remembered being entertained by Robert and the Jomac crew as a young child in hospital and how their arrival brought smiles and laughter to the ward.

In the year that she announced her retirement as Northern Ireland's first Police Ombudsman, **Nuala O'Loan** was honoured with a People of the Year Award for her personal integrity and courage, and for her fearless commitment to the highest standards of policing for everyone in Northern Ireland. During more than seven years,

Nuala O'Loan displayed almost limitless reserves of courage and resilience as she faced up, without fear or favour, to some of the most controversial issues emanating from the Troubles. She received her Award from An Tánaiste Mary Coughlan TD.

Also celebrating on the night was **Scouting Ireland** which was presented with a People of the Year Award by radio presenter, sports pundit and former Scout, George Hook. The organisation received its Award in recognition of 100 years of activity in Ireland and for its unique contribution to the development of young people in achieving their full physical, intellectual and social potential.



*Pictured above:* Chief Scout, Martin Burbridge, with radio broadcaster and former Scout, George Hook.



*Pictured above:* International Person of the Year, Fr Shay Cullen, shares a “high five” with the presenter of this year’s People of the Year Awards, RTÉ’s Gráinne Seoige.



*Pictured left:* Betty McCarthy from National Learning Network in Hollyhill meets People of the Year Award winner and Boyzone star, Keith Duffy, at this year’s People of the Year Awards in Citywest, Co. Dublin.



*Pictured above:* Recipient of the Special Award for Teacher of the Year, Rose Uí Shúilleabháin with Daniel Ross, the schoolboy whose life she saved when he collapsed at a cross-country championship race.

The Awards ceremony finished with a posthumous Award to one of Ireland’s greatest-ever entertainers. Ben Dolan received a People of the Year Award from Daniel O’Donnell in recognition of the outstanding contribution made by Ben’s late brother **Joe Dolan** to the development of Ireland’s music scene. From his humble beginnings on the showband circuit, Joe became a legendary

figure of Irish musical entertainment and a true cultural icon. In the process, he brought joy to millions of people both at home and abroad.

It was a fitting tribute, therefore, that the Awards ended with all the winners and presenters congregating on stage to the happy sound of Joe Dolan’s “Good Looking Woman”. As *The Irish Times* put it, “Roll on next year!” ■