



Manchester United manager, Sir Alex Ferguson; Gay Byrne; Dave Fanning, and Dustin and Sockie Quinn and John Hume, in congratulating the 2003 People of the Year. As well as Mary Davis, other winners on the star-studded night included the late Niamh Ní Dhoibhlin and Ciara MacMahon, who were jointly awarded the Young Irish Person of the Year Award; Dr. Mike Meegan, International Person of the Year; Peter Canavan; Dermot Weld; Niall Mellon and the late Ita Bourke were all recognised for their achievements.

Nominations are now being sought from members of the public for this year's awards. As in previous years, an adjudicating committee comprising editors and representatives of the national print and broadcast media from both sides of the border will have the difficult task of reviewing all the nominations

Last year's winners Mary Davis and Ciara MacMahon. Nominations are now being sought from members of the public for this year's awards.

and selecting winners in categories that include the Irish Person of the Year, Young Irish Person of the Year and the International Person of the Year Award. An additional four winners will be chosen from areas such as community service, arts and culture, peace and reconciliation, business, science and technology, sport and medicine.

Nominations are invited from members of the public either using the nomination forms available from ESB shops nationwide or on-line at www.peopleoftheyear.com. Nominations will also be received via email poy@rehab.ie

Rehab News winners who submit a nomination will be entered into a special draw with a prize of tickets to the awards ceremony and gala dinner, with overnight accommodation in the City West Hotel, Saggart.

To ensure entry in the draw, please remember to write 'Rehab News' after your name on the nomination form.

POYA

The search is **on!**

It seems like only yesterday that Special Olympics supremo Mary Davis received the ESB/Rehab Irish Person of the Year Award from special guest An Tanaiste, Mary Harney, TD, at a glittering awards ceremony televised live by RTE last November, and yet the search is about to begin to find the People of the Year for 2004.

Sinead Gillespie talks to National RehabCare Advocacy Council chairman Bernie McDermott, who has big plans to develop the role of the organisation

Bernie's Battle



NRAC National Committee member, Ciara Garvey from RehabCare Dun Laoghaire.

"I would like to see NRAC become a public organisation representing people with disabilities from all areas," says Bernie

nrac

Bernie McDermott is a man on a mission. He has recently taken over the role of chairperson of the National RehabCare Advocacy Council (NRAC) and would like to see the group become one of the most influential and widespread in Ireland. "I would like to see NRAC become a public organisation representing people with disabilities from all areas," says Bernie.

NRAC was set up in 1998 and consists of 40 local committees and a national committee. It aims to promote the self-development and autonomy of its members, and provides a forum for RehabCare service users to voice their opinions and highlight concerns as well as lobbying on issues such as housing, education and access.

It is unique in its approach in that the organisation is manned and run by service users of RehabCare themselves. An outside facilitator sits in on committee meetings to ensure that members receive any assistance needed, thus enabling them to identify and deal with any matters which arise. Bernie began his work with NRAC as chairperson of a

local committee and was elected to the National Committee in 2001. Following the AGM last November, he took on the role of national chairperson and is now looking forward to continuing the good work which has been carried out in recent years.

Teamwork is the key to the work of NRAC, both on a local and a national level and according to Bernie, membership brings with it the





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reward of new friendships and the great satisfaction of seeing important issues highlighted.

Among the achievements of the past year has been the drawing up of a charter of rights for members. The charter takes the form of a storyboard in picture format and is seen as a positive step towards ensuring accessibility of information for all members. NRAC also submitted its own pre-Budget submission to the Government last year and developed important links with other disability organisations, such as the Brothers of Charity and UK-based group First Steps.

A leadership and presentation course designed by the National Committee has been delivered in many RehabCare centres around the country and is an important tool in building confidence and assertiveness among members. The course focuses not only on the skills required for chairing meetings, but also on interview skills which enables members to take a seat on interview panels in the centres.

Michelle Joyce is the full time development officer for NRAC and has a seat on the Rehab Council Board of Directors, ensuring that NRAC issues are heard at the highest levels within the Rehab Group. Currently being recruited is a project facilitator who will be involved in policy making at national level.

The position has been financed through external funding by the Department for Community Rural and Gaelteacht Affairs, a clear indication of the high regard in which the organisation is held and recognition of the valuable resource that NRAC has become.

