

Great Peop

It was the social highlight of the year with the eyes of the nation glued to the TV to meet the nation's great achievers of 2004. It did not disappoint...

On the face of it, this was a group of people that could hardly be more diverse.

There was a County Wicklow schoolgirl, a former businessman from Kildare and a group of lawyers whose actions have given the lie to the fat cat image of their profession.

There was a Cavan teenager and two clergymen from opposite ends, not just of the religious divide, but of the same road in Belfast. And, of course, there was Sonia.

In fact, there's just a single common bond between them: They are this year's People of the Year.

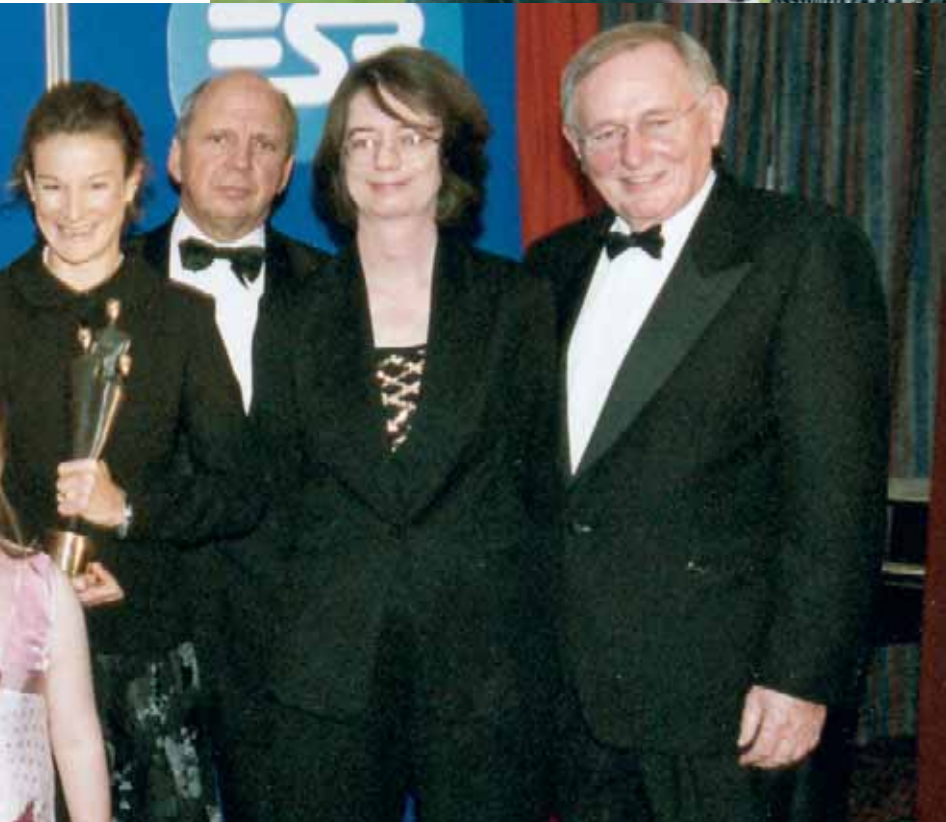
Ironically, the Awards got more media attention than ever for the winner who wasn't there – Olympic show jumping

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Young Irish Person of the Year, Emma Synnott pictured with Fr Kieran Creagh, the ESB/Rehab International Person of the Year.



The 2004 People of the Year Award winners pictured with President Mary McAleese, Rehab Group chairman, Joe Treacy and ESB chairman, Tadhg O'Donoghue.



Siobhan Phelan, Peter Ward and Iseult O'Malley, joint recipients of a People of the Year Award for their work with Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC).

President Mary McAleese pictured with the Young Irish Person of the Year, Emma Synnott and winner of the Greatest Living Irish Sports Person award, Sonia O'Sullivan.



Founder of the Jack and Jill Foundation, Jonathan Irwin pictured with Fr Kieran Creagh, International Person of the Year.



Above: Rev. Roy Magee who won a People of the Year Award in recognition of his contribution towards peace in Northern Ireland.

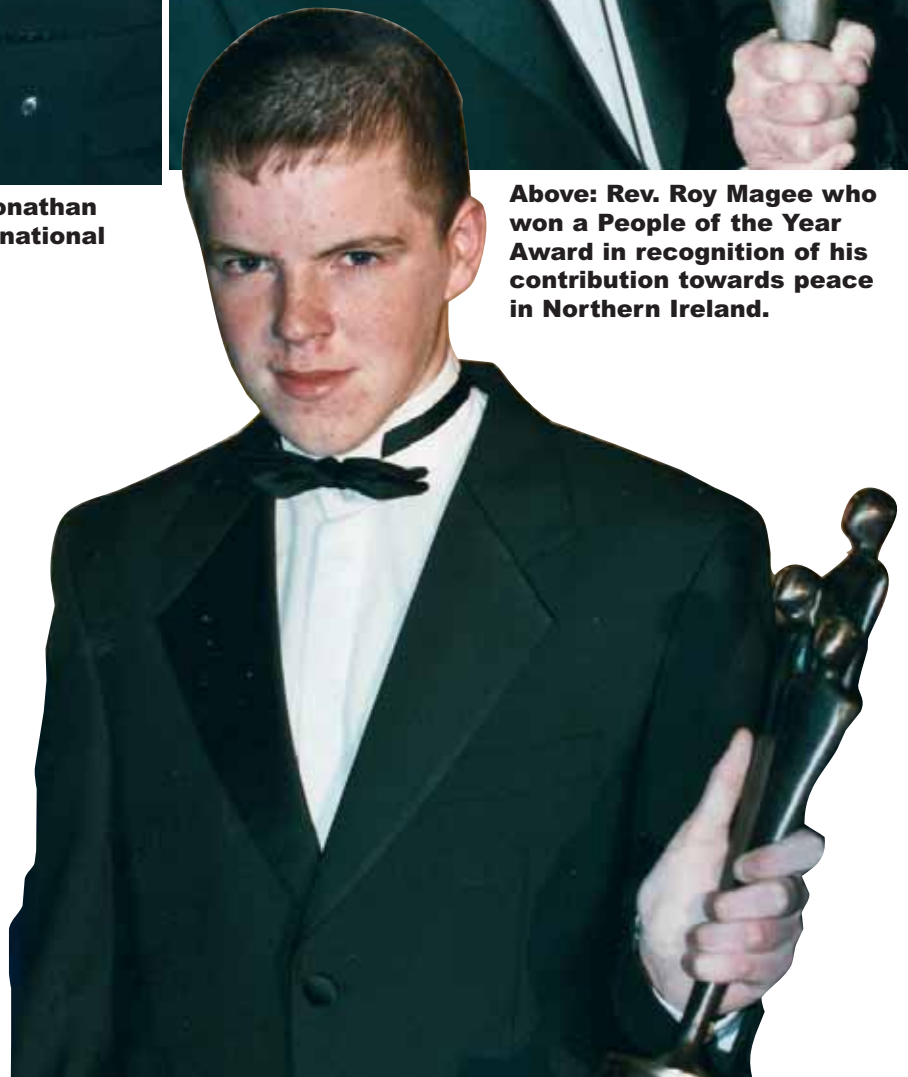
gold medallist Cian O'Connor who decided not to accept his Award as Irish Person of the Year following the dramatic revelation on the eve of the event that his horse had failed a dope test.

But Cian's unfortunate absence was more than made up for by the impressive assembly of high achievers who were there in City West Hotel, along with guest of honour, President Mary McAleese and the host of the live RTE broadcast of the Awards, Mary Kennedy.

The winners were: Fr Kieran Creagh, International Person of the Year; Emma Synnott, Young Irish Person of the Year; Jonathan Irwin; the Reverend Roy Magee; Patrick McAweeney; joint recipients Iseult O'Malley, Siobhan Phelan and Peter Ward and Sonia O'Sullivan who picked up a special award as Ireland's Greatest Living Sportsman to mark the 30th anniversary of the event.

Sonia, who received her award from President McAleese, was chosen by a panel of the country's best known sports pundits comprising Jimmy Magee, Eamon Dunphy, Micheal Ó Muirecheartaigh, George Hook, Bill O'Herlihy, Tracey Piggott and panel chairman, John Treacy. She came out on

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Patrick McAweeney who won a People of the Year Award in recognition of his bravery in saving his friend from drowning.

top from a shortlist of six Irish sports stars – also including Roy Keane, DJ Carey, Ronnie Delany, Sean Kelly and Jack O'Shea, decided by a vote among the Irish public.

Meanwhile Fr Kieran Creagh was named the International Person of the Year for his extraordinary work in fighting HIV/AIDS in South Africa. The Belfast-born priest's courage in allowing himself to be the first person to be injected with a trial vaccine for the virus was highlighted in his award citation.

The Young Irish Person of the Year is eight year old County Wicklow girl Emma Synnott. She was honoured for her outstanding bravery and determination in battling back against life threatening illness after developing a severe form of epilepsy. Having collapsed without warning at a family wedding, Emma was so seriously ill at one point during 2003 that she could only communicate with her family by a squeeze of her hand.

However, after undergoing life-saving treatment in London from which she was given just a 50-50 chance of surviving, she is gradually regaining her speech and has recently returned to school.

Jonathan Irwin received his award for his work with the Jack and Jill Foundation, which he set up with his wife, Mary Ann O'Brien after the tragic life and death of their own baby son. The organisation helps disabled babies and their families by providing early intervention and home-based respite care, as well as advocating on their behalf.

Jack Irwin suffered a near-miss cot death at 36 hours and as a result had no sight, no hearing and no swallowing ability. He had to be fed through nasal tubes.

Jack suffered cerebral distress as well as epilepsy and cried all day every day. He lived for 22 months - a fairly desperate and painful life. A mix of drugs, physio, postural drainage, seizures, reflux operations, gastrostomy and suctioning. The only saving grace was that he was cosy and warm and nursed around the clock by a dedicated band of five housewives from his neighbourhood.

Jack's short life proved to his parents that it was possible for little children like him to be nursed at home. It also demonstrated that there is no entitlement to funding for a child under two years of age to buy in the extra help that is vital. The Jack and Jill Foundation was set up out of the tragedy that was Jack's life. It now provides services for some 200 families, with



Ken O'Brien, who retired in 2004 as Group personnel manager and head of human resources for NTDI, pictured with Dara Duffy, Communications Department, Rehab Group.

Kathleen Watkins, Gay Byrne and Christine Eldon.



an average of 10 new babies joining each month.

The Reverend Roy Magee, who grew up at the opposite end of Belfast's Crumlin Road to Fr Kieran Creagh, but never met him until the awards presentation, was honoured for his key contribution to the cause of peace in Ireland – most crucially in helping to broker the Combined Loyalist Military Council ceasefire ten years ago.

A senior research fellow at the University of Ulster working on conflict resolution, the retired Presbyterian Minister has remained heavily involved in efforts to secure a lasting settlement since, continually encouraging paramilitaries to abandon the use of violence and to develop their capabilities in using democratic means to achieve their ends.

His ideas were incorporated in the 1993 Downing Street Declaration and the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, while he is also a member of the Parades Commission.



Fifteen year old Patrick McAweeney received his award for the heroic rescue of his friend, Eugene Blaney during a holiday in south Donegal.



Maol Muire Tynan, ESB; RTE broadcaster, Joe Duffy; Senator Mary O'Rourke and Brid Tunney, ESB.

Miss World, Rosanna Davison pictured enjoying the night. Rosanna presented the award to brave life-saver, Patrick McAweeney, in her capacity as Patron of Irish Water Safety.

Patrick helped his friend to stay above water for another hour before they were swept onto rocks by the current. Eugene was then dragged down into a whirlpool twice, with Patrick pulling him back above the water both times. The teenager managed to drag Eugene onto some rocks near a cliff, before giving mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and clambering up the cliff for help.

Iseult O'Malley, Siobhan Phelan and Peter Ward of the Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC) were jointly awarded for their dedication to the cause of equal access to justice for all in Ireland.

It is now 35 years since the Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC) was established with the goal of achieving equal access to justice for every person in the State.

Since then many thousands of people from the legal profession have worked in a voluntary capacity for the principle of justice for all. Indeed, FLAC currently has 400 barristers and solicitors giving free legal advice at 55 centres around the country. The contributions of three - Iseult O'Malley, Siobhan Phelan and Peter Ward - stand out however. Each has campaigned tirelessly for the introduction of a comprehensive system of free legal aid for people who are socially and economically disadvantaged.

Each of the award winners was chosen by an adjudicating committee which includes editors from national newspapers, provincial press and broadcast media from nominations made by the public.



Left: Rehab Group chief executive, Frank Flannery with Jacinta and Tom Kitt TD and chairperson of the Sports Adjudicating committee, John Treacy.



Sports Adjudication Committee member, Jimmy Magee, with Paula O'Connell.

After two hours clinging to a body board when the boys were swept out to sea by strong tides whilst swimming, Eugene was overcome by exhaustion and hypothermia and could no longer stay afloat.