

## Secretary's Report on the Events of Eastern Harps GAA Club for 2021

A Cathaoirleach agus a dhaoine uaisle, tá fáilte romhaibh go léir chuig ár gCruinniú Ginearálta Bliantúil don bhliain 2021.

Chairperson, ladies and gentlemen, I welcome you to Eastern Harps GAA Club's AGM for the year 2021. While not as disruptive as last year, this year still didn't follow the timeline and pattern of a GAA playing year that we have come accustomed to. With the country still grappling the Covid-19 pandemic – particularly in the first few months of the year where Level 5 restrictions meant that all organised sport, apart from professional and elite sport, was closed from resuming – collective training and games couldn't take place until May. However, as the year moved on, and with the emergence of the vaccination programme providing a level of protection against Covid-19 to many and in particular the most vulnerable groups, sport, like many other activities, was given the green light to continue. Also, as the country began to open up more fully, spectators were allowed to return to games more easily. This provided a great boost to our games and was a welcome return to a more natural atmosphere at matches.

On the playing pitch, it was another disappointing year for our senior men's team. After suffering relegation to the intermediate grade last year's championship, this team had to endure another relegation in 2021, with this year seeing them relegated to the second tier of the Senior League. A relegation battle was our fate in this year's championship also. Having not secured the requisite points in our group, we were paired against Castleconnor in the Intermediate Championship relegation semi-final. Thankfully, we managed to come through this game. A good overall performance proved to be enough to see off the challenge of Castleconnor by a four-point margin, despite a fine individual display from Sean Carrabine keeping the West Sligo team in the contest throughout, to see us regain our intermediate status for next year.

With last year's manager, James Mitchell, unable to commit to taking this team for another year due to work commitments, the club was tasked with looking for a new senior manager at the turn of the year. A committee of Kevin Cryan, Brendan McHugh and Club Chairperson, Seamus Hannon, was set up to oversee the appointment process and bring a recommendation to the club's Executive Committee for ratification. The name that was brought forward after this process was the club's 2008 Senior Championship-winning captain, Ross Donovan, with Paul McGovern, Ray Hannon and Mikey O'Grady as selectors. As one of the club's most decorated players, I think it's fair to say that the appointment of Ross as manager created a bit of excitement amongst the team's players and supporters. The management team got to work straight away, but with the aforementioned Covid restrictions in place, they would have to wait a while before any collective training could take place.

This team got their season off to a competitive start on Saturday, the 12<sup>th</sup> of June, against St. Mary's in a Kiernan Cup quarter-final in Kent Park. In a competitive game, St. Mary's eventually came out on top on a score line of 0-11 to 0-08. Unfortunately, this game was the only competitive appearance of the year for one of our senior players, Jonny East, who sustained an ankle injury in this game's early stages. It was quite an unfortunate year in general for this team, with a number of players sustaining injuries throughout the year, many of which on the more serious end of the spectrum. Injuries are part of the game, unfortunately, but this was a particularly challenging year in this regard. I would like to take this opportunity to wish the best to Jonny as he continues his recovery and also to Sean Bruen on his recovery from his recent knee operation. Knowing the character of these lads, there's no doubt that they will both come back stronger and have many more better days in the white and green of Eastern Harps.

This team's fortunes in the Senior League (that was pared back due to the late start of the playing year) were mixed. After a very good start, recording an excellent win over Shamrock Gaels in an entertaining encounter on a rainy Sunday afternoon in Keash, defeats to Coolera/Strandhill and Tourlestrane followed, leaving this team with a must-win game against Tubbercurry in order to avoid a relegation final. Despite a spirited

second-half comeback in this game from being well down at half-time, Tubbercurry eventually went on to edge out a two-point win. This left us to face Carly/St. Joseph's in the relegation final, a game which we went on to lose on a score line of 0-18 to 3-05 in Scarden.

For the Intermediate Championship, we were drawn in Group 1 with St. Farnan's and St. Molaise Gaels – the eventual competition winners and runners up respectively – as well as Enniscrone/Kilgalss and Tourlestrane's second team. Getting off to a good start is always important in order to be in the best possible position to progress to the latter stages of a competition such as this. Unfortunately we were unable to get this, with the opening round loss to Enniscrone/Kilgalss in Cloonacool proving to be one of the more disappointing days of the year our senior team. While we started the game well and missed some chances throughout, the victors were the more clinical team on the day and ultimately deserved their win. This result meant that there was very little margin for error in the remaining fixtures. A comfortable victory over Tourlestrane's second team in Bunninadden followed, before a trip to Connolly Park to face St. Farnan's. The West Sligo side were having a good year, and they came into the championship on the back of winning Division 2 of the Senior League, so it was always set to be a tough test. Like a few of our matches this year, an improved second-half display ensured that this game was in the balance heading into the final quarter, but ultimately St. Farnan's did enough to run out two-point winners. With this, nothing less than a victory over St. Molaise Gaels was needed in order to have any chance of avoiding a relegation semi-final. On a wet September Saturday in Markievicz Park, it was a competitive game throughout, and again, this game was in the balance entering into the final quarter. However, St. Molaise Gaels managed to get the all-important scores to end up winning on a score line of 0-12 to 0-08. For what proved to be this team's last game of the year, it was back to Cloonacool for the aforementioned intermediate relegation semi-final.

While this wasn't how this team had intended the year to go, there were some positives to take from the year. A number of young players, some straight out of the U17 grade, got their first taste of senior football at varying stages of the year, and they gave a very good account of themselves with their performances on the pitch. This bodes well for the future, and if this team can continue to work hard and develop as a group, hopefully the results will follow. Having fulfilled the role of Covid Officer for this team this year, I saw first-hand the efforts and commitment that was put in by the players and management. Many thanks to Ross, Paul, Ray and Mikey who left no stone unturned in their preparations. It was a pleasure to be involved with this group for the year, and I look forward to seeing this team's progression in the years to come.

On the ladies' side, it was an excellent year for our senior ladies' team, with this year seeing them crowned Division 2 League and Intermediate Championship winners. This team's hard work over the last number of years was rewarded, and they will now compete at senior level in the championship and Division 1 of the league next year. At the time of writing, this team's playing year is still ongoing, as winning the Sligo Intermediate Championship has seen them progress to the Connacht Junior Championship. After a five week break since winning the Sligo title, our senior ladies welcomed St. Barry's, the Roscommon Junior champions, to Keash for a home Connacht quarter-final on a crisp mid-November Saturday. Despite St. Barry's racing into a six-point lead after two early first-half goals, our ladies kept chipping away at this before eventually edging in front in the second half and holding on to record an excellent two-point win on a score line of 1-13 to 3-05. This team now looks forward to another home match for the semi-final against Dromahair next week, the result of which we will know by the time of our AGM. I want to wish this team and their management the very best for this game, and here's hoping there may yet be more silverware to add before the year is out. It was also a great occasion to host a match of the magnitude of a Connacht quarter-final in Keash, and as a club, we look forward in anticipation to hosting a Connacht semi-final next week. Credit goes to all the volunteers who help out on the days of matches such as these as well as in the days in advance to get the pitch and grounds ready. There will be more on our pitch and the events we held this year later on in the report.

After reaching the intermediate final last year, and with a feeling of having unfinished business to complete, last year's management team continued on with our senior ladies for this year. Before I discuss this team's year in a little more detail, however, I would like to extend my thanks to this team's manager, Gary Ward, who stood down as Ladies' Chairperson at last year's AGM. As was echoed by a number of participants at the meeting, Gary did a lot of very hard work in developing the ladies' side of the club in his time in this role. It's clear from looking at the fortunes of our ladies' senior and underage teams this year, that this side of our club is in quite a healthy place. This is testament to everyone involved in the Ladies' Committee over the last number of years as well as the hard work and commitment of our coaches working across all levels in our club.

On the topic of the Ladies' Committee, our club made the decision at January's executive meeting to formally adopt the GAA's "One Club" method of club governance. This formally merged the men's and ladies' sides of the club with the overall governance of the club being handled by a single Executive Committee. The overwhelming feeling as reported at this meeting was that this seemed to be an obvious step for our club to take. Nationally, it has been great to see the ladies' game getting greater media coverage over the last number of years. No doubt there is still work to do in order to bring greater parity between the men's and ladies' games, but events of recent years have shown that this is getting closer to becoming a reality which can only be a good thing for the GAA moving forward.

On this note, I would like to thank my counterpart as Secretary of the ladies' side of the club, Catherine Cryan, for all her work this year. I would also like to thank Suzie Johnson who took on the role of Ladies' PRO this year. From fixture announcements to score updates, match reports and photos, Suzie ensured that all aspects of the ladies' side of the club, both senior and underage, had a great presence on our club's social media pages. I would also like to thank Aisling Stephenson who once again took photos at many games and club events this year. This year also saw us adding another string to our social media bow in taking the step to join Instagram. I would like to thank Eimear Henry and Brendan McHugh for their work in running this page as well our club PRO, Kevin Cryan, for all his work in maintaining our club's overall online presence and communications with the local papers.

Getting back to events on the pitch, our senior ladies got their playing year off to a winning start on Sunday, the 13<sup>th</sup> of June, with a six point home win over St. Michael's in the first round of the league. This team started as they meant to go on for the year, as they would go on to finish their league and championship campaigns unbeaten. They then went on to record wins over Owenmore Gaels, Eoghan Rua, St. Farnan's and Shamrock Gaels before facing St. Michael's in the competition semi-final. Played in Ballintogher, this game proved to be one of our senior team's tightest games of the year to that point. However, goals proved to be the difference, and the Harps ladies emerged four-point winners on a score line of 2-11 to 0-13. For the final in Markievicz Park, it was once again Eoghan Rua who were this team's opponents. After an even first half, it was our ladies who pushed on in the second half to see them winning quite comfortably in the end to secure their first piece of silverware for the year.

For the Intermediate Championship, we were drawn in a group with St. Farnan's, Drumcliffe/Rosses Point, Shamrock Gaels, Owenmore Gaels and St. Michael's. At the conclusion of the group phase games, which were played on weekends from the end of August to the beginning of October, our senior team's unblemished record qualified them for the championship decider against Drumcliffe/Rosses Point. This game was played in Curry, and Eastern Harps' comfortable win crowned an excellent campaign, adding the Intermediate Championship to their list of honours. Great credit goes to this team's management of Gary Ward, Stephen Powell, Benny Connolly and Deirdre Gillen for all their work this year.

From a personal point of view, regrettably, I didn't get to attend as many of this team's games this year as I would have liked. This is something I hope to put right in the coming years, where this team will look forward to Division 1 and Senior Championship football again. With the age profile of this team and the gains they

have made in the last few years, hopefully they can go on to give a very good account of themselves in these competitions next year and indeed in the years to come.

Our junior men's team competed in Division 4A of the Senior League and at Junior B level in the championship. The year saw this team qualify for the finals of both competitions but it was a disappointment for our lads that they were unable to get over the line in either. There's no doubt having a competitive second team is vital to the success of our first team, and for our club to progress, getting out of the bottom tiers in both the league and championship would be a big stepping stone. I have no doubt that this is something we will keep striving for as a club in the coming years.

Under the stewardship of John Lynch, with George Garvey, Shane Gallagher and Des Horan as selectors, this team's season started at Ransboro Park on a sunny Sunday morning in June where a competitive game against Coolera/Strandhill saw us eventually emerge as five-point winners. A home win over Coolaney/Mulinabreena and a win away to Curry followed, before a heavy defeat to St. Molaise Gaels on a very warm Friday evening in Keash. It was another North Sligo team who were up next for this team, with Drumcliffe/Rosses Point our junior team's round six opponents the following week. On another warm July evening, both teams served up a very entertaining game in Oxfield Park with the game eventually ending in a draw on a score line of 2-14 to 3-11. Heading into the final round of fixtures against St. Farnan's, our juniors were very much in contention to qualify for the league final. However, St. Farnan's were unable to field a team for this fixture, and with the possibility of having the game rescheduled limited due to time constraints, we received a walkover. All this meant that at the conclusion of the league, St. Molaise Gaels had topped the table with Drumcliffe/Rosses Point second, ahead of us by virtue of their superior points difference. However, as the chance to rectify this points difference on the pitch in the final round of games wasn't afforded to our team, the CCC decided that the fairest way to decide who would qualify to face St. Molaise Gaels in the final would be to hold a playoff. This game was played in Keash (as decided by a coin toss) and, again, these two teams played out a very entertaining contest. In the end, it was Eastern Harps that came away with a hard-fought one-point win to see us qualify for the league final two weeks' later. As already mentioned, this game unfortunately didn't go the way of our team. After a tight game in the Sligo GAA Centre of Excellence, St. Molaise Gaels eventually went on to win by two points after extra time.

For the Junior B Championship, this team was drawn in Group 1 alongside Ballymote, St. Farnan's and St. Michael's. A comfortable win over Ballymote in Keash was followed by a one-point win over St. Farnan's in Templeboy. With St. Michael's pulling out of the competition, these results saw this team progress to the knockout stages as group winners, ensuring home advantage for the quarter-final. Owenmore Gaels were the opposition for this game which was played on a fine Saturday evening in September, and it was a game our lads went on to win comfortably to progress to the semi-final against Coolera/Strandhill. It was Sligo GAA's version of "Friday Night Lights" for this game, taking place at a floodlit Tourlestrane GAA Park. In another competitive match, we went on to win relatively comfortably in the end on score line of 0-16 to 1-06 to book our place in the Junior B final. Maybe our lads didn't hit the heights they had at times during the year in this game, but Curry were deserved winners on the day in Kilcoyne Park on a score line of 0-15 to 0-08.

As was the case with the seniors, this team had consistent good performances from some of our youngest adult players throughout the year, and overall the team had a good mix of youth and experience. I hope this team can build on this year's performances and have another good crack at these competitions next year. Many thanks to John and his backroom team for all their work, and again, it was a pleasure to work with this team for the year in my role as Covid Officer. Also, a special word of thanks to Des Horan who, as well as being a selector for this team, continued in his much-valued first aid role with both the junior and senior men's teams.

## **Underage Football**

With the county board making the decision at the beginning of the year to move the boys' age groups to the odd years (U11, U13, U15 and U17), this was a new departure from the norm which has been even years age groups up to U18 level. For the girls' side, the even age groups remained in place.

The unluckiest group due to this change was the group of lads turning eighteen this year. As the minor championship moved to U17, it meant that these players had to go straight into the adult ranks without an U18 competition in which to continue their development against players their own age. However, the county board did organise an U20 competition later on in the year. Playing in the B Championship, our U20 team got their campaign off to a good start, beating Drumcliffe/Rosses Point by the minimum in a high-scoring and very entertaining game in Keash on the October Bank Holiday Monday. This team followed this up with another good win, again by the smallest of margins, away to Coolera/Strandhill. At the time of writing, this competition is still ongoing. I wish these lads all the best for the remainder of this championship, and I hope to see all of the lads at this level continuing to develop as players in the coming years. Thanks again to Ross Donovan, ably assisted by Linda Donovan and Mikey O'Grady, for their ongoing work with this team.

Our minor girls' team had another successful year which culminated in them winning the Minor B Championship for the third consecutive year. With no league competition to play, this team had to be content with just training until their first championship game in August. However, many of these girls played with the senior ladies during their league campaign, something which would prove to be excellent preparation for the championship. With Owenmore Gaels and Shamrock Gaels pulling out of the competition, and with this team's first championship game against Coolera/Strandhill being called off at short notice, the Harps girls qualified for the final after two home wins to St. Nathy's and St. Mary's respectively. They then got their opportunity to play Coolera/Strandhill, as they were their opponents for the final, a game our minor girls went on to win by eight points to see them bringing the cup back to Keash yet again. Many thanks to this team's management of Stephen Powell, Benny Connolly and Covid Officer, Lisa Powell.

The U17 boys played in two competitions this year: a long ten-team league competition as well as a championship that was played on a straight knockout basis towards the end of the year. Playing in Division B of the league, this team finished with a winning record, going on to win six out of their nine matches. Pat has listed this team's results in his report for the accompanying AGM booklet so I don't intend on listing them again here. However, at the league's conclusion, the Eastern Harps lads had earned a second-place finish to progress to a semi-final. This game was played in Keash on a fine Sunday evening, and in a very entertaining and hard-fought contest, it was the West Sligo team, and eventual winners of the competition, that eventually came out on top to win by three points. Indeed it was Castleconnor that proved to be this team's nemesis this year, as it was the same opposition that awaited this team for the opening round of the "B" Championship the following week – this time Castleconnor prevailing by five points. Due to limited numbers of U17 players and some injuries, this team were bolstered by members of our U15 team, and the two teams trained together throughout the year. Many thanks to this team's management of Pat Conheady, Errol Flynn, Colin McGill and Conor Higgins for their work during the year.

Our U16 girls had a very good year, completing the league and championship double. With a small squad, although ably assisted with some of the U14s when called upon, this team navigated all of their league games successfully to qualify for the league final against St. Mary's. Played on a very warm Saturday evening in Scarden, the girls defeated their Sligo Town opponents by three points after a competitive game to win the Division 2 League and complete the first stage of their impressive campaign. Moving up to the A2 Championship, they were drawn in a group with St. Pats/St. Farnan's, St. Molaise Gaels and St. Mary's. Again, they came through all these group games unbeaten to qualify for their second final of the year, where they renewed acquaintances with St. Mary's. In another close game, it was the Eastern Harps team who

again had the upper hand in going on to claim the A2 Championship. Well done to this team and their management, Eimear Henry, Dawn McGowan and Katie McGowan, on their year.

Our U15 boys had another very successful year, winning three finals in total. Their year began with last year's postponed U14 final, which was won in good style by our lads to complete a competition that they didn't get the chance to last year. This team then went on to win their four games in Division A of the U15 league, albeit their last game by the minimum in a hard-fought game against Enniscrone/Kilglass, to qualify for the final where Drumcliffe/Rosses Point were again their opposition. However, the result was the same as their previous encounter, and the Harps lads took the cup back to Keash. A highlight of this team's year was getting to compete in the Féile, an opportunity that wasn't afforded to them last year on account of the pandemic. Played in a one-day blitz format, this talented group of players defeated Enniscrone/Kilglass in the final of this competition to add it to their list of honours also. In a straight knockout championship that comprised of eight teams, the path to the final was a relatively short one for this team. After coming through the quarter- and semi-finals, for the third time in the space of four months, our U15s would face Drumcliffe/Rosses Point in Markievicz Park for a final. Although by not as wide a margin of victory as their previous games, it was again the Eastern Harps lads who prevailed to claim the "A" Championship, capping off an excellent year. I commend this team and their mentors, Ronan Higgins, Shaun Dorrian, Keith Carty and Ross Donovan, on their achievements this year.

Our U14 girls also had a good year, and it culminated in them winning the Division 2 Shield in September. For the league competition, this team won two out of their three round robin games (beating Calry and Eoghan Rua with their sole loss coming to Geevagh) to see them qualify for a semi-final. This game was played in Keash, and the Harps girls went on to beat Ballisodare to qualify for the final. This was to end in disappointment for this team, however, as CT Gaels prevailed on this occasion. Moving up to Division 2 for the championship, this team were grouped with Coolera/Strandhill, Owenmore Gaels and Drumcliffe/Rosses Point. Winning one out of the three games, this team headed for the Shield final where CT Gaels were once again their opponents. The progress that this team made throughout the year, as Mathona highlighted in her report for the AGM booklet, was in evidence as they overcame a team that had defeated them by a wide margin only a few weeks previously to claim this title. Thank you to this team's coaches, Patricia McDonagh, Jacinta O'Gara, Katie McCoy, Amy McGovern and Mathona Conheady, for their work this year.

With numbers allowing for it, two U13 boys' teams were entered into the league competition: the older group competing in the "A" competition and the younger group entered into the "C" competition. After two losses in semi-finals carried over from last year for both teams at the start of the year, all attentions turned to the this year's league campaign. Placed in a very competitive division, the older team had some tough games to contend with. They finished the league winning one out of their six games – a high scoring game versus Drumcliffe/Rosses Point in Round 5. However, the experience gained in these games would stand well to this team as they progressed through the year. In the "C" competition, the younger U13 group went on to win three out of their five games to see them qualify for the Division C Shield final. This game, played on a wet evening in Scarden, went the way of the Eastern Harps lads as they overcame their opponents, Coolera/Strandhill, by six points. For the championship, one team was entered. This was a combination of the two teams entered for the league. It proved to be a successful campaign, as this team went on to win the A Championship Shield, defeating Coolera/Strandhill in a competitive game in Keash in the semi-final and Geevagh/St. Michael's in Markievicz Park for the final. Many thanks to this group's coaches, Fintan McGowan, Adrian Cooke, Peter Mitchell, Damien Carty, Francis Candon, Seamus Hannon, Marcus Jackson and Pdraig O'Gara, for their work throughout the year.

The U12 girls had a good year. Playing five competitive games in the round robin stage of their "A" league, these girls went on to win all five to see them qualify for the semi-final. Although the girls lost this game to a strong St. Mary's team, their league campaign was very good preparation for their championship. Here, their record was again impressive, as they went on to win three out of their five games in the group stage which

would see them qualifying for the final of the Shield competition. Played in Keash, the girls lost out to Eoghan Rua by the narrowest of margins in this game. However, as Linda put it so eloquently in her report on this team's year for the AGM booklet, the experience the girls gained from the year was far more important than the winning of any trophy. No doubt this will stand this team in good stead as they continue their development as footballers. Many thanks to this team's management of Linda Donovan and Megan McCormack.

The U5, U7, U9 and U11 age groups, becoming collectively known as the club's "underage academy", had another very good and busy year. Training continued on Saturday mornings for these groups from the end of April until the beginning of October, with the U11 boys and girls having some extra training sessions during the week as well as some extra games. This year saw a lot of new registrations at these age groups also, and numbers were good with around a hundred children at each Saturday session. There were games aplenty for the U9 and U11 boys, and they played various different teams throughout the year. As well as this, the U11 girls played eight games where they tested their skills against different teams from around the county. The U7 teams played in an end-of-year blitz where they too got the opportunity to put the skills they had been honing into practice. With the volume of people involved in running sessions for these age groups, conducting them safely in the current times was in no doubt challenging, I'm sure. Therefore, a huge debt of gratitude goes to all the coaches involved in mentoring these very important age groups for our club. There are too many coaches to list here, but Linda has them all listed in her report for the AGM booklet. However, please take this as a collective thank you to you all for your work throughout the year.

## **Development**

This year saw the conclusion of many years of work, as the final few pieces were put into place to bring the work on our clubhouse to its completion. The fantastic facility we have today is the culmination of countless hours of voluntary work put in by a lot of people over many years. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the club's Development Committee, chaired by Seán Scott, for their meticulous work in overseeing all aspects of this project during each phase of its progression. I'd also like to congratulate Seán on his recent nomination by the club's Executive Committee for the 2021 Volunteers in Sport Awards for his work over the years, and this is well deserved. This committee are always looking for new areas to target in terms of future development, and with their proven track-record, there's no doubt that they will see more projects through to their completion in the years to come.

The main work that was done on our clubhouse this year was the installation of a lift. To have this in place in our clubhouse is of massive benefit to our club. It opens up many possibilities in terms of the events that can take place in our clubhouse, which is not only to the betterment of our club but also to the community that it serves. As well as this, we were approved in late last year for funding of approximately €25,000 by the Sligo Local Community Development Committee under the Rural Development Programme. The club is grateful for this funding, and credit goes to Seán and the committee for the excellent grant application that was submitted. Thanks also to Joe Hannon and Green Isle Foods, Gurteen, who contributed €2,500 towards the club's contribution to this grant. The funding received went towards the purchasing of conferencing and hot-desking equipment for our clubhouse as well as putting in place high-speed broadband under the National Broadband Plan. This creates opportunities for our clubhouse to be used in lots of different ways in the future. Having these facilities available in our clubhouse is a great benefit to our club and community, and I have no doubts that our clubhouse will have a lasting positive legacy, for our club and beyond, for many years to come.

With traditional fundraisers being difficult to organise in recent times, the club has had to think of new methods of generating income to go towards funding the development of our club. This has given rise to the setting up of what has been a very successful weekly 50/50 draw. Starting in mid-January, the draw has happened every Monday evening since. With the jackpot averaging at around €570 for the year so far, our

winners to date have been handsomely rewarded for their support. At various stages during the year, extra prizes such as vouchers and hampers have been on offer also, which has given entrants more chances to win. Thanks goes to Brendan McHugh as well as his fellow Finance Committee members, Mikey O'Grady, Paul Judge and our club Treasurer, Thomas Cryan, as well as Ronan Higgins and Seamus Hannon for their work in running this draw each week. Also, a massive thanks to everyone who has supported the draw so far, and I hope that this draw will continue to receive your support into the future. Hopefully the jackpot on offer will continue to be spread out among our club's supporters from near and far, and with the option to play online, it means that one doesn't have to be in the vicinity to purchase a physical ticket to have their name in the draw drum each week. All the necessary details for how to enter this draw can be found on all our club's social media channels.

Another important funding stream for our club is Gurteen Bingo which takes place each Friday evening in partnership with the Gurteen Hall Committee. It was highlighted in last year's report how Gurteen Bingo was reinvented as a drive-in event in order to comply with Covid restrictions. With the country operating under these conditions for the most part from October of last year until April of this year, bingo regrettably had to be postponed save for a few bingos around the Christmas period when the lifting of restrictions allowed. Since the reopening in April, however, bingo has continued every week. Initially this was solely on a drive-in basis until in the last few weeks, when the further lifting of restrictions have allowed for a blended approach of indoor and drive-in bingo to be provided.

Having joined this committee's roster of volunteers this year, I have seen first-hand some of the hard work and commitment that goes into running this event each week. With the attention to detail given to each aspect of how bingo is run, it's clear to see the dedication of this committee. Bingo, along with providing the chance to win a few euro, provides a great social opportunity to many members of our community, both young and old. For this reason, it has been heartening in recent weeks to see the doors of the hall reopen, albeit with a slightly smaller capacity, to welcome people inside again for indoor bingo. Let's hope that once open, the doors will not have to close again. One thing is for sure though, this committee will continue working hard to run a safe and enjoyable bingo. Thank you to everyone for supporting bingo and contributing towards its continued success, and thank you to the Eastern Harps Bingo Committee for all your work.

Our annual Club Members' Draw, which contributes towards the costs associated with the day-to-day running of our club, also continued this year. The draw took place behind closed doors due to the pandemic in July, and €22,000 in prize money was given out. Congratulations to all our winners, and thank you to all our draw members for your much-valued support. Thanks also to Eamon Scanlon who was our independent observer on the day. If anyone would like to buy a ticket for next year's draw, please get in touch with any committee member.

### **Healthy Club**

The club's active Healthy Club Committee continued this year in their efforts to provide initiatives which seek to enhance the health and wellbeing of members of the club and the wider community, and they have had another busy year. The events that they have run have ranged from online table quizzes to fill a few hours on quiet lockdown weekends to "Couch to 3k" and Pilates classes when the lifting of restrictions allowed later on in the year. As the year progressed, it has also seen a return to a Healthy Club favourite: fun weekend walks with a friendly cup of tea afterwards in different locations around the community. Padraig has provided a very comprehensive review of all the activities this committee have run throughout the year in his report for our AGM booklet, so I don't intend on listing them all again here. However, for the rest of my report on this committee's year, I would like to look back to the beginning of the year when, not for the first time, this committee really came through for its community, at a time when it was needed most.

With group gatherings not being able to take place, a virtual initiative, "Get Up Get Moving", was born. This involved the event's participants being put into teams, communicating through WhatsApp, with points on



offer for any form of exercise. Each team's progress throughout the week was logged by their team leader and collated at the end of the week to keep a scoreboard going throughout the initiative, adding a little friendly competition to proceedings. This served to be a great motivator for participants to get active during the long winter evenings at the turn of the year which weren't made any easier with the country under Level 5 restrictions. As well as having points on offer for walking, running, cycling and other forms of physical exercise, the committee added in bonus daily activities each week also in order to give participants ample ways to contribute to their teams' points totals. These involved core exercises (including the dreaded wall-sit popularised by Ireland's Fittest Family), squats, lunges and everything in between. When teams were in need of a break, the committee introduced some tasks that, while less physically demanding, sought to get participants' creative juices flowing. These ranged from poetry writing to Valentine's Day place setting, pancake-flipping and even impromptu snowman making when the elements allowed for it to name but a small few. Needless to say, there were no shortage of tasks to keep participants active and busy during the initial six weeks and the second four-week "Spring League" iteration of the event that ran until mid-March. There were also weekly collaborations via Zoom with Anne Wynne for Pilates classes, Eileen Kirrane from "Eileen's Kitchen Table" for family cookery classes (run in conjunction with Sligo County Council), HIIT classes with Joe Quinn and The Movement Gyms as well as one-off contributions from others, such as Alan Williams who recorded a video with health and wellbeing tips. Thanks to these and all the various collaborators for your huge contribution to this event.

Such was the success of this initiative, it wasn't long until it started to make waves outside of our club community, and on a Saturday in mid-February, reporter Eileen Magnier and the RTÉ cameras paid a visit to a snow-covered Fr. Kevin Breheny Park to record a report which aired on the Six One News that evening, showcasing some of the activities that had been taking place. Many thanks to Eimear Henry as well as the Garvey and Gallagher families for speaking so well for this report.

Sincere gratitude to Edward and Avril East of East Brothers who sponsored t-shirts for all the participants of this initiative as well as Paul and Mary Frances Dwyer from Ardcarne Garden Centre for sponsoring trees for each team leader and every child participating to mark the end of the event. Also, a huge thanks to all the participants (over 300 in total) and all the team leaders, whom without this initiative would not have been possible. And last but certainly not least, a big thank you to the enthusiastic Healthy Club Committee of Padraig and Eimear Henry, Catherine Cryan, Carmel and Tommy Taheny, Elaine and Zara Stafford, Edward East and Monica Henry, whose positivity and can-do attitude brought this initiative from a simple idea to the success story it became. The hard work that went in behind the scenes compiling scores, setting weekly activities, organising classes, thinking of novel ways to keep participants motivated and engaged as well as a multitude of other tasks was no doubt made worthwhile in the knowledge of the immeasurably positive impact this initiative had on its participants in what were often difficult times. This is surely the essence of what the Healthy Club Project aims to achieve.

### **Kerry McKeon Literary Competition**

The Kerry McKeon Literary Competition continued again this year. As well as having plenty of talented footballers, there are plenty of budding writers among our underage ranks also. There were prizes on offer for the most creative essay for U6, U8, U10 and U12 age groups with an overall prize winner chosen from these as well. Mikey has all the winners listed in his report for the AGM booklet. The prize-giving ceremony was held in conjunction with our underage academy training on a beautiful Saturday morning in July, slightly adapted on the day to feature a fun hour of obstacle courses and a much-needed visit from the ice-cream van! Thank you to the McKeon family for their continued support of this great competition. Well done to everyone who submitted an essay this year, and a special mention for all this year's winners. Thanks also to Mikey O'Grady for his work on this competition.

## **Pitch**

It has been a very busy year for our pitch. As well as catering for all our own teams, our club grounds hosted five championship games on the men's side and three on the ladies' side. The men's games we hosted were Tourlestrane vs Shamrock Gaels (Senior Championship Round 1), Owenmore Gaels vs Coolaney/Mullinabreena (Junior A Championship Round 1), Geevagh vs Coolaney/Mullinabreena (Senior Championship Round 3), St. Michael's vs St. Molaise Gaels (Junior A Championship Round 3) and the Intermediate relegation semi-final between Ballymote and Tourlestrane. On the ladies' side, we were privileged to host three championship finals. In the Senior A decider, we welcomed St. Nathy's and Geevagh to Fr. Kevin Breheny Park. Played in difficult weather conditions, St. Nathy's went on to win this game by a point. Our club then hosted the Junior B and Junior A finals as a double header two weeks' later, which saw St. Nathy's overcoming St. Mary's to win the Junior B and CT Gaels emerging victorious over Calry/St. Joseph's in the Junior A. Most recently, and as mentioned at the beginning of this report, we also hosted our senior ladies' Connacht Junior Championship quarter-final against St. Barry's and we will also host the semi-final of this competition when our ladies' team face Dromahair next week.

Getting to host these games is a great honour for our club. This is testament to all the work our Facilities Committee does in looking after and managing our club grounds and pitch so well. Many thanks to this committee of Ronan Higgins, Padraig Henry, Paul Dwyer, John Cryan and Colm Duffy. Also, a big thanks to everyone who volunteered to help to tidy up the clubhouse and grounds in preparation for these games as well as everyone who helped out on the days of the matches themselves. Many thanks also to Sarah Snee who provided beautiful singing of Amhrán na bhFiann at a number of the games we hosted this year.

## **Referees**

Gavin Gardiner and Orla Dorrian represented our club as active referees this year. I wish to commend Gavin and Orla for undertaking this often thankless but very necessary role. There's no doubt being a referee can be rewarding also, especially if sufficient respect is shown to all officials from everyone involved in our games. If anyone else from our club would like to become a referee, courses are always being run. Also, thanks to Orla who, again, wrote some match reports for some of our teams' games his year.

## **County Commitments**

Our club was well represented on county teams again this year. Alan Davey was part of the Sligo senior men's team, and Megan McCormack was part of the ladies' senior team. At underage boys' level, we had a number of representatives on the U15 development squad, and Barry Cryan was part of the Sligo U16 squad for their recent Manning Cup game vs Laois. Dylan Walsh and James Kiernan were part of last year's Sligo U17 team who, after recording a great win over Mayo in the Connacht U17 semi-final, were unlucky to lose to Roscommon in the final in what were terrible weather conditions for football last St. Stephen's Day. On the ladies' side, Riona Hannon and Emma Hannon were part of the Sligo minor squad while Aoife Lyons, Hazel Redican and Alisha O'Dowd represented Sligo LGFA at U16 level.

A big highlight of Sligo GAA's year was the U17 team winning the county's first Connacht Minor Championship since 1968. Despite being our senior men's manager, a coach with our U15 boys and lending a helping hand to our U5s and U7s, Ross Donovan also managed to find the time to be a part of this team's coaching set-up. I would like to congratulate Ross as well as the rest of this team's management and the players on this achievement. One of our club's U13 coaches, Fintan McGowan, also was part of the Sligo U13 Development Squad's coaching team.

At committee level, our club was represented by Damien McGovern who was a member of Coiste na nÓg and Padraig Henry who was on the Competitions Control Committee. Our representative at County Committee meetings this year was our County Board Delegate, Ciarán McGovern.

## **Sponsors**

Thank you to our premium sponsors for your unwavering support again this year. It has been a difficult time for many businesses and organisations, so viewed in this light your continued support is magnified even

further. If any other organisations or individuals would like to become a sponsor, please contact any member of our committee.

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I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone on the club's Executive Committee for their work this year. To have so many people committed to seeing the club develop and prosper is of vital importance to our club. In particular, I would like to thank the club's Assistant Secretary, Paul Judge, for all his help throughout the year. Go raibh a maith agat, a Phóil. Thanks also to Carmel Taheny for all her work in compiling this year's AGM booklet. This is much appreciated. I would also like to take this opportunity wish one of our club's Vice Chairpersons, Tom Murray, all the best as he continues his recovery from his recent surgery. Tom was part of a sub-committee, with Seán Scott and Shaun Dorrian, assigned earlier this year to look at our Club Constitution and Executive Committee structures. The results of this committee's work is a proposed new Club Constitution which, after being ratified by our Executive Committee in October's meeting, is proposed as a motion at this year's AGM. Thanks to Tom, Seán and Shaun for their work on this.

As well as having thanked all of our club's coaches, a word of thanks also to all the parents of all our underage players for their support in bringing players to games and trainings and providing great support to our teams during the year.

On behalf of the club, I offer congratulations to all who got married, engaged and those who had new additions to the family in 2021. I would also like to offer sincere condolences to all those who suffered bereavements during the year.

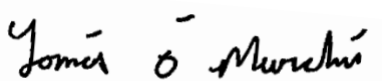
Before the end of this report, I would like to take a short moment to remember Michael Hannon who sadly passed away last December. I was privileged, like many other generations of Eastern Harps players, to have had Michael as a coach at different stages along the way from U12 up to minor and into adult grade. Michael's humility and gentleness shone through at all times, and he always coached for the game to be played the correct way. One of my abiding memories is of Michael, before matches, encouraging his teams to go out and express themselves on the pitch. While I'm not sure how many times I was able to do this, I certainly always tried my best, as with Michael as a coach, one couldn't but do any less. Michael was not only a great coach but also a great role model for the young people in his care, and this ensured he always got the best out of his teams in return. Through his family, there is no doubt his memory and monumental legacy will live on in our club.  
Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.

While this report has ended up being longer than I had planned it to be, I sincerely apologise if there are any errors of omissions.

In what are still uncertain times, I hope for next year to be another enjoyable and safe year for our club.

This report is submitted for ratification at this year's AGM.

Is mise le meas,



Rúnaí