

## **Secretary's Report on the Activities of Eastern Harps GAA Club for the year 2023**

A Cathaoirleach agus a dhaoine uaisle, tá fáilte romhaibh go léir chuig ár gCruinniú Ginearálta Bliantúil don bhliain 2023. Is mór an onóir dom an tuairisc sin a chur i láthair daoibh, inár gcaogadú bhliain mar chlub.

Chairperson, ladies and gentlemen, I welcome you to Eastern Harps GAA Club's AGM for the year 2023. It's a great honour for me to bring this report to you, in this our 50<sup>th</sup> year as a club.

Starting with events on the pitch, and after some disappointments for our senior team in the last few years, 2023 can be seen as a year of progress. A great league campaign saw us gain promotion back to Division 1 for next year as Division 2 winners. This, added to winning the two warm-up trophies on offer in the East Division Spring League and the Benson Cup earlier in the year, meant we went into the Intermediate Championship with real momentum. Unfortunately, our championship campaign was to end at the semi-final stage, losing to eventual winners Easkey by the smallest of margins.

In what proved to be an enthralling game, a blistering start from Easkey meant we were always chasing the lead. However, it was a game that ebbed and flowed, and one which undoubtedly would have been great entertainment for any neutrals. From four points down with time running out, our team simply refused to accept defeat, and a stoppage-time penalty cut Easkey's lead to a single point. With possession secured from the resultant kick-out, a game-equalling mark opportunity was set up from just inside the 45-metre line. However, with virtually the last kick of the game, the ball agonisingly hit the upright and dropped into an Easkey defender's hands, ending a great semi-final and, with it, our senior team's playing year.

So often games of football can be decided by very fine margins, and unfortunately on the day we just came out on the wrong side. But looking at the year as a whole, there are many reasons to be positive, and there is no doubt that the curve of this team is heading in the right direction.

Our senior men's first competitive game for the year was on Thursday, the 20<sup>th</sup> of April, in a re-arranged game with St. Michael's in the East Division Senior Spring League. We got off to a winning start with a six-point win on a nice evening in Ballintogher. A loss to Ballymote followed this, but three further wins saw us finish top of the table and qualify for the final against St. Michael's. Again played in Ballintogher, this game concluded with the novelty of penalty shoot-out. I'm not sure if it was our penalty-takers or goalkeeper who deserved the most credit, but it was a save by manager and stand-in keeper for the day, Ross Donovan, that decided matters to give us a sudden-death win!

With the winners of the East and West Division Spring Leagues competing for the Benson Cup this year, our next game was against St. Farnan's in Bunninadden a week later. A good performance on the day saw us win by four points and add the Benson Cup to the East Spring League title secured a week earlier.

For the Division 2 campaign, although we came out on the right side of a number of tight games, there was a growing level of assuredness in many of this team's performances, and as the league progressed, our destiny always remained in our own hands. With a home draw to Coolaney/Mullinabreena and an away loss to Easkey on a rain-soaked night in West Sligo the only two occasions when points were dropped in the campaign, we finished the league in second place, tied with Coolaney who finished ahead of us by virtue of their better score difference. With promotion secured we had the reward of a league final in Markievicz Park in early August. In a game where we had the lead for most of the game, we won in the end on a score line of 2-09 to 0-08 to capture the Division 2 title.

There was little time to celebrate this triumph, however, as the championship was just around the corner, and our first round game against Geevagh saw us return to Markievicz Park the following Sunday. Here, we needed a last-minute free kick to draw the game on a score line of ten points apiece. This meant there was a degree of pressure on our next game, against neighbours Bunninadden the following week, in order to keep our hopes of progressing in our control. After a tight first half, a strong second half saw us win in the end by four points in Kilcoyne Park. This was followed by good wins in our final two group games, against St. John's and St. Pat's, ensuring that we finished Group 2 as leaders, setting up the aforementioned semi-final against Easkey.

While this didn't go our way, it doesn't take away from what was a very positive year for this team. With continued work, I am very confident this team will only keep on developing. Again, from being involved with this group's management team, I saw first-hand the level of commitment that this group of players put in, and once again it was a pleasure to be involved with them. It was also a pleasure for me to work with Ross and the rest of the management team of Mikey O'Grady, Gary Ward and Errol Flynn, and I wish to sincerely thank them all for their efforts during the year.

Our senior ladies had a somewhat challenging year with injuries to some key players. Despite this, however, they battled well in the four competitions they competed in, and some promising performances at different times throughout the year indicate that there are surely better days ahead for this group of players.

Our senior ladies' playing season got off to a competitive start on Sunday, the 26<sup>th</sup> of March, with a trip to Curry in the All Club League, a competition which is played without clubs' county players. This proved to be a very entertaining contest with the sides deadlocked at the end of play on 3-09 apiece. Our senior ladies' All Club League and Division 1 campaigns ran concurrently, so for the next few months, the ladies interchanged between both competitions until the conclusion of the Division 1 league in mid-May. The Division 1 campaign opened on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April with a home loss against St. Mary's. Defeat to Tourlestrane followed this, but in a much-improved performance in their next game against eventual competition winners St. Nathy's, our ladies' were unlucky to come out the wrong side of a two-point game. The league campaign was concluded with a well-deserved win away to Drumcliffe/Rosses Point. Interspersed among these matches were three games in the All Club League: a satisfying home win against Geevagh, a narrow one-point loss away to St. Mary's, despite a valiant second-half comeback, and another loss away to Eoghan Rua. However, the league campaign ended on a positive note with the win over Drumcliffe, and this was followed up by two more good wins in the All Club League in Rounds 5 and 6: a great home win against St. Nathy's on a fine Friday evening in Keash followed by a convincing away in over St. John's. This meant our girls were in a good position to qualify for the knockout stages of this competition, and at its conclusion, they had indeed done enough to make a semi-final. With a walkover being granted to our ladies in this game, the final against Eoghan Rua beckoned. However, this game has yet to be played.

Attentions then turned to the Intermediate and Senior Championships for our ladies. Again, the two competitions were ran off concurrently, and while wins in both proved hard to come by, there were again some promising performances in both competitions, as Paul alluded to in his report.

With continued work, and perhaps with a touch of good fortune along the way, there is no doubt that many of these good performances can translate into more victories both next year and into the future. We thank the players and management team of Stephen Powell, Paul Judge, Kevin Gallagher and Deirdre Gillen for all their efforts throughout the year.

A big positive from the ladies' side of the club this year, though, was having the playing numbers in order to be able to enter a second team, who competed in the Division 4 League and Junior "C"

Championship. It is an excellent indicator of increased participation that we are in a position to field two teams at ladies' level, and this only bodes well for the future. I would like to commend all on the ladies' side who worked hard to ensure this was the case, and hopefully we will be able to continue field two teams into the future. On the pitch, it was a positive year this group, also, with some commendable performances in the league securing them a shield final place against St. John's. Played in Ballisodare in mid-July, our girls emerged convincing winners on the day to win the Division 4 League Shield.

For the championship, despite losing some players to the senior team, this team continued to compete well and put in some more commendable performances. Well done to this team and their management of Dawn McGowan and Mathona Conheady for their efforts throughout the year.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Suzie Johnson who is stepping down as Ladies' Secretary/LGFA Liaison Officer at this year's AGM. I saw first-hand from working alongside Suzie as Secretary for the men's side of the club the huge work and commitment she put into this role, on top of the Ladies' PRO role she has also carried out in the last few years. There is no doubt Suzie has left the role in a great place, and hopefully as a club, we will be able to fill the void in the very near future. I think I speak for everyone when I say that I hope Suzie will continue her PRO work, and hopefully she will continue to play a very active role in the ladies' side of the club into the future also.

After winning Division 4A and the Junior "B" Championship last season, the target at the start of the season was always going to be consolidation in both for our junior men's team. The fact that they were able to achieve this, and head into their last game of the championship against Cloonacool with a live chance of making the Junior "A" knockout stages proves that it was overall a successful year for this team.

A promising start to the Division 3 campaign saw this team record a good away win against St. Mary's in round two, coming between two narrow losses to St. John's and Cloonacool in rounds 1 and 3 respectively. Despite some more good performances, our fortunes in the division came down to our last game against Tourlestrane. With both teams needing a win to stay up, this was effectively a relegation playoff, and an enthralling game followed. Needing to score as the game came down the stretch, a last-gasp rocket of a goal meant we managed to just get over the line and retain our Division 3 status for next year.

In the Junior "A" Championship, an excellent win over St. Michael's' in round 1 set this team up well in the group. A draw with St. Molaise Gaels in the next game meant that this team's place in the competition for next year was secure, and the last game against Cloonacool could be looked forward to with the chance of progressing to play for. Cloonacool were deserving winners on the day in Achonry, though, ending this team's year. As Ross pointed out in his report, a number of players made their debuts in senior adult football this season, and they acquitted themselves very well. There is sure to be a large influx of players coming through from the minor ranks in the coming years, so it is important that our second team remains very competitive and playing at the highest levels available to it. Thanks to this team's management of Shane Gallagher, Morgan McCormack, Patrick "Goose" Gallagher and Des Horan. Thanks again to Des for continuing his much-valued first aid role for both our senior and junior teams this year, also.

At the time of writing, our U20 men's team are currently in the midst of their U20 "A" championship campaign. A battling draw against Carly/St. Joseph's in round 1 in late October, despite a depleted playing squad on the day, gave our lads a foundation in this competition. After receiving a walkover in round 2, progression to the final will come down to our final group game against St. Mary's next

Saturday. In what is effectively a semi-final, we will know the result by the time our AGM takes place. I wish this group of players and their management team of Keith Carty, Ross Donovan, Ronan Higgins, Shaun Dorrian and Sean Bruen all the best for this game.

This year's U19 championship was run off during the summer months. Played on a straight knockout basis this year, we received a bye to the "A" semi-final where Drumcliffe/Rosses Points were our opponents in Keash. The North Sligo team proved to be more clinical on the day, though, and emerged as one-point winners. Thanks to the minor management of Keith Carty, Ronan Higgins, Shaun Dorrian and Sean Bruen for also taking this team.

### **Underage football**

With U17 county players not available for league competitions, the league competition for this age group was run at the traditional U18 level this year. Sligo GAA continued to run their competitions at the "odds" levels for the boys this year. What will happen next year and into the future remains to be seen and this is an ongoing debate around the country. However, all we can do is go along with the decisions made to the best of our ability. In this competition our fortunes were mixed. We were largely competitive throughout but could only manage to record two wins out of five, against St. Mary's and Enniscrone/Kilglass, bookending the campaign.

For the championship, the competition reverted to U17. This group of U17 players have been very successful right the way up through the ranks, and they came through the round-robin stage of the "A" championship with a minimum of fuss, going on to win all their games. The lads went on to win the championship, also, defeating Drumcliffe/Rosses Point in the semi-final and St. Mary's in the final. When one looks at the score lines of these games, they may point to this having been a very one-sided competition. However, as they saying goes, you can only beat what's in front of you, and the manner that our lads went about their business, and the style with which they played, can only be commended. Winning the Minor "A" Championship is a great achievement always, and it was great to see such a big Eastern Harps crowd present in Markievicz Park to support these lads for the final.

There was an added bonus of qualifying for a Connacht Championship for winning the county title for this group also. The lads were drawn against Allen Gaels/Fenagh in the semi-final which took place in the Connacht GAA Centre of Excellence during the Halloween school holidays in early November. On what was a shocking evening for football weather-wise, our lads had to dig deep to fend off a tough Leitrim side. The final took place a few days later, on the Friday evening before our dinner dance. It really would have been the icing on the cake for this group to add a Connacht title to the club's roll of honour, but unfortunately Castlebar Mitchels just edged it on the day, going on to win in the end by five points. This winning margin doesn't quite tell the story of the game, though, and our lads can rightfully feel they were the better team at times. Two early goals not helping our cause, the lads did excellently to drag themselves back into the game. However, they could never just quite get their noses in front with the Mayo side just doing enough to see it out – a late goal adding to their final winning tally as our lads pushed forward to chase the game.

It goes without saying that getting to a Connacht final is a massive achievement, though. Playing on this stage was no more than this group deserved, and there's no doubt there is a lot more to come from these lads in the future. Well done on the year and thanks again to their management of Keith Carty, Ronan Higgins, Shaun Dorrian and Sean Bruen.

It was a more positive year for our minor girls with there being more games for them to compete in this year – a welcome development. The girls had a very strong All Club League campaign, winning all

their games and qualifying for a shield final. Unfortunately, they were beaten on the day by Coolera/Strandhill. These performances saw the girls deservedly take their place in the Minor "A" Championship. While this proved a step-up for this team, playing a higher level of football can only be good for their development and will surely stand this group in good stead for the future. The girls' performances in the competition saw them reach another shield final, after beating Tourlestrane in the semi-final. Despite a valiant effort, Drumcliffe/Rosses Point proved to be the better team on the day. Well done to the players and their management of Dawn McGowan and Mathona Conheady for their efforts.

Our U16 girls had a good year which culminated in them lifting the U16 "C" Championship trophy in late October. The girls competed in Division 3 for their league campaign where their record of two wins from five saw them eventually qualify for a shield final after defeating Calry/St. Joseph's in the semi-final. A two point loss to St. Farnan's in the final was a tough defeat for this group, but they put it behind them when they managed to beat the same opponents in the first round of the championship. This team went on to remain unbeaten for the rest of the year, eventually defeating St. Molaise Gales to win the "C" title. Well done to the players and management team of Colm Gallagher, Katie McCoy, Dylan Walsh and Patricia McDonagh.

Our U15 boys had good year which also ended on a high note with them claiming the U15 "A" Shield in Ballymote at the start of October. For the league, the lads were competitive in the "A" division throughout, and an eventual fourth-place finish meant a shield final beckoned. In a cracking game, this team overcame a big half time deficit to come right back into the game, only for their opponents Coolera to eventually find the resolve to win out in the end. Before this game, this team played in Féile na Peil in Scarden where they again acquitted themselves well, losing out to eventual winners St. Molaise Gaels. The championship proved a similar story as their league campaign. A number of competitive performances saw them finish fifth and head for another shield final, again against Coolera/Strandhill. This time, the result was different, though, with our lads running out decisive winners on the day. Well done to this group and thanks to their management of Fintan McGowan, Adrian Cooke, Paul McGovern, Francis Candon, Peter Mitchell, and Damien Carty.

The U14 girls had a great year, the highlight of which was winning the U14 "A" League in Ballisodare in late July. After a very solid campaign, they overcame a good Shamrock Gaels in a tight final between two well-matched teams. These two teams proved to be great rivals this year, as it was a repeat pairing in the "A" Championship final later on in the year. This time it was Shamrock Gaels who came out on top, though. This didn't take away from what was a great year of development for this group, however. Thanks to Linda Donovan and Katie Hannon for coaching this team for the year, and well done to the girls on their achievements.

The U12 girls also had an enjoyable and successful year which culminated in them lifting the U12 Silver Cup, defeating Drumcliffe/Rosses Point in Curry in mid-September. This was a fitting end to the girls' efforts for the year, especially after they so narrowly lost out in a "B" league plate final after extra time earlier on in the year. However, this big squad of over thirty girls had a fantastic year and improved their skills, developing new friendships along the way – something undoubtedly worth more than any silverware won. Well done girls, and thanks to their management of Michael Doddy and Monica Beirne.

Our U13 boys had two teams competing for the year in both league and championship. It is fantastic to have two teams, as it ensures the maximum amount of football for all and gives all players as many opportunities as possible to develop their skills. The "C" team, made up of the younger cohort of these players, ended their season with a loss in a "C" championship shield semi-final by the narrowest of margins at the hands of Drumcliffe/Rosses Point. However, the year was to end on a

high for this group overall. After re-grouping from the disappointment of losing the “B” league final to Curry in mid-May, the older cohort of our U13 lads went on to win the U13 “A” Championship in Markievicz Park in late September. In a real game of two halves, our lads overcame a sizeable half-time deficit to eventually run out convincing winners after a few goals turned the tide. While it’s nice to win, as stated earlier, the most important aspect is seeing all these young players develop. Well done lads, and thanks to all their mentors: Nigel Clancy, Marcus Jackson, Joe Tighe, George Garvey, Pdraig Phillips, Pdraig O’Gara and Pat Conheady.

Last but certainly not least, our underage academy comprising of our teams from U5 to U11 also had another fine year. With many new registrations continuing right throughout the year for these groups, numbers were very high which is a very positive thing for the club. Linda has discussed the progress of these groups in great detail in her report for the AGM booklet, so I don’t intend to cover them in quite as much detail in these pages. I would, however, like to thank all the coaches involved with these various age groups for all your efforts in fostering these young footballers.

This year, the club took the decision to employ a Club Development Officer in conjunction with Connacht GAA. Ross Donovan took on this role for the club, primarily involving coaching sessions in all primary schools in the club’s catchment as well as other roles such as organising Easter and summer camps, as well as a schools’ blitz – all of which were organised to great success for our club this year. This is a very positive role for the club, and I know how much the schools appreciated having Ross on hand to do this great work. The club has once again invested in this role for the upcoming year. Considering the role's impact on the development of our young players and the promotion of our club, it undoubtedly represents an invaluable investment. Thanks to Ross for all his work in this role throughout the year. Thanks also to our coaching officer, Linda Donovan, for her tireless work in overseeing and coordinating all the club’s underage coaching.

## **50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

Off the pitch, 2023 was always going to be a big year for the club, as it marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its formation in 1973. In order to mark this milestone, a number of events were organised during the year. With plans having been well underway at the turn of the year, a launch night was held in February which began the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations in earnest. As well as launching our plans for the year, in what was the culmination on a number of year’s work spearheaded by our Development Sub-Committee Chairperson Seán Scott, the club’s five-year Strategic Plan was also launched. This important document for the club outlines aims across various areas, providing the executive committee with a framework for continual development, as emphasized by Seán in his thorough presentation on the night. It was great to have representation from County Board Chairperson, Seán Carroll, and Sligo LGFA Chairperson, Raymond Carden, on the night. Their presence was greatly appreciated, and both spoke very eloquently. I would like to also thank to Austin O’Callaghan from Ocean FM, who produced an excellent radio piece and podcast featuring interviews with numerous members of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary committee, as well as other club members present on the night. Austin chose the name for this podcast, 'We’ve come because we heard about the Harps,' as a tribute to the famous club banner. This slogan was etched as a watermark on our limited edition commemorative jersey, which was released in collaboration with O’Neill’s to commemorate the year, alongside a symbolic nod to the joining of the blue of Keash and the red of Gurteen. There was no doubt that it was a fitting theme for the night and the year ahead.

The weekend the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of June was to be the main celebration in our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, and it got underway on the Friday evening with an Ecumenical Service in the clubhouse. This service gave the many members of our club an opportunity to reflect on and celebrate the journey the club has taken in the last fifty years. As Fr. Gabriel Murphy poignantly outlined in his homily, the countless

hours of volunteerism and the vision and perseverance of so many, in good and bad times, being the cornerstone which has brought the club to where it is today. I would like to sincerely thank Fr. Gabriel Murphy for leading this beautiful service, as well as Fr. Joe Caulfield and Canon Andrew Ison who assisted him with its planning and celebration. Thanks also to all who led the readings and Prayers of Intercession, whose contribution greatly enhanced the service. Also adding significantly to the evening was the excellent musical arrangements, led by Maureen O'Dowd. A huge thanks to Maureen, the choir, and all the accompanying musicians for all their work in preparation for this event and for the beautiful music on the night.

After the conclusion of the Ecumenical Service, an event named "Through the Decades with Des" took centre stage. This saw very well-known club member Des Horan present a series of panel-type interviews with fourteen club members in total who have been involved with the club from its earliest foundations right up to the present day. This proved to be a very entertaining and, at times, reflective discussion. The diverse group of club members interviewed ensured that everyone in attendance surely gained some new insights into the many teams and achievements of the club over the years, both on and off the pitch. I'd like to sincerely thank Des for all his work in preparing for these interviews, his effortless rapport with the wide range of people being interviewed ensuring he was the perfect fit to host what was a unique event for our club. Thanks also to all who took part in the interviews and shared their memories and stories from their many experiences with the club down through the years.

The following morning, a walk from the pitch in Gurteen to the clubhouse in Keash, symbolising the joining of the two neighbouring clubs fifty year previously, took place. The walk culminated with refreshments in the clubhouse and the prize-giving ceremony for this year's Kerry McKeon competition. After a welcome visit from the ice-cream van, many of the next generation of Eastern Harps players took part in blitzes as part of their Saturday morning training sessions. The development of these age groups is such an important aspect of our club, so it was fitting that the weekend of celebration and reflection was to end on this note, with a look of optimism to the future. I would like to thank everyone who contributed to the facilitation and smooth running of this walk, in particular Kieran McGill and John Judge who drove safety vehicles ahead of the walk and to all who did stewarding. I'd like to recognise the unique achievement, also, of Kevin Gallagher who took on the task of making the journey while solo-running with a football, ahead of the walk – maith an fear, a Caoimhín! Finally, a sincere thanks to Christy Gallagher who spoke in Gurteen before the walk began.

As part of this weekend of celebration and reflection, it was very important that all the members of the club who have sadly passed away be commemorated also. Therefore, on Saturday evening, Mass was offered for the deceased members of Eastern Harps GAA club on St Kevin's Church in Keash. I would like to thank those who said Prayers of the Faithful at this Mass as well as to Fr. Gabriel for celebrating it. Again, thanks to Maureen and the choir who provided the music for this Mass also.

Our formal 50<sup>th</sup> celebrations came to a conclusion a few weeks' ago with a dinner dance in the Landmark Hotel on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November. This was another memorable occasion that gave, again, a very wide selection of members of our club an opportunity to come together and celebrate the first fifty years of the club. Thanks to Seán Carroll and Raymond Carden who were again present, as well as to Fr. Gabriel Murphy, for his presence and for saying Grace before Meals.

Finally, I would like to thank the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary sub-committee for all their work throughout the year in organising these events. To Seamus Hannon, Padraig Henry, Kate O'Neill, Kevin Cryan, Seán Scott, Carmel Taheny, as well as to PJ McKeon and Suzie Johnson for their contributions, a sincere thanks. Thanks also to Brendan McHugh who worked closely with Kate O'Neill and the rest of the

committee in liaising with O'Neill's on the organisation and design of our commemorative gear. Also, a special word of thanks to Kate for her skilful hosting of the various events throughout the year as MC.

## **Development**

The main development of our club's facilities this year was the installation of fully match-standard floodlights at our pitch in Keash. With works on the project getting underway at the turn of the year, they were all but completed in February, coinciding with the launch night for our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary plans. Being one of only a few venues in the county that can host matches under lights is a significant advantage to our club, and we hosted a number of games under lights at our pitch towards the end of this year, the first of which was Cloonacool's and St. Molaise Gaels' first round Junior "A" Championship tie in late August. However, as well as this, having lights available again for all our teams to be able to train at all times during the year will no doubt repay the investment in spades in the years to come.

The other big project our Development Sub-Committee undertook this year was the installation of photovoltaic cells at our clubhouse. As well as reducing the energy costs for the club, these cells also make our clubhouse more sustainable and energy efficient. More recently, this committee have turned their attentions to new projects, chiefly the building of a new stand and dugouts, for which planning permission has been granted. Knowing the determination and vision of this committee, under the stewardship of Seán Scott, there is no doubt that these and many more projects will be carried out to the highest standards. Thanks to Seán and the rest of the Development Sub-Committee for their ongoing efforts.

In order for the club to be in a position to continually develop its facilities, however, fundraising is always needed. This year, as well as the continuing running of our 50/50 draw each week, we held a one-off 'auction night' fundraiser in O'Dowd's Lakeview Lounge and Bar in Monasteraden on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March. To all the businesspeople and service providers who kindly donated items to auction, which ensured the hammer was put down on over a hundred lots on the night, a sincere thanks. Also a huge thanks to everyone who came out on the night to ensure everything was bought and making this night such a success. Thanks also to Keith Mullaney whose excellent auctioneering meant for a very smooth night, and also a very entertaining one! Having this auction online ensured it reached a much wider audience, so thanks to all at Ballymote Mart for making this possible. Finally, to Mikey O'Grady and the rest of the Finance Sub-Committee for their efforts in organising this as well as their other work throughout the year.

As mentioned previously, our 50/50 draw – which contributes towards the continued development of our club's facilities – continues every Monday. The club gave away its record jackpot in the last few weeks in this draw, when a jackpot of €1123 was given out to one lucky winner. Coinciding with our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary dinner dance, this was the first time that the draw has been over a thousand euro, but hopefully not the last. Thanks to everyone for your continued support of this draw and thanks again to the Finance Sub-Committee, Ronan Higgins and Chairperson Seamus Hannon for their continued efforts in running the draw each week.

Gurteen Bingo also continues each Friday in Gurteen Hall. Run in conjunction with Gurteen Hall Committee, it remains a much-valued fundraiser for the club. I am delighted to be able to report that this bingo continues to grow from strength to strength, in this its 16<sup>th</sup> year. This is testament to the remarkable committee who leave no stone unturned in constantly striving to put on the best possible product for their patrons, something which I have witnessed first-hand again this year from being on their roster of volunteers. Bingo is a vital social avenue for so many members of our community and



beyond, and its presence on a Friday night is worth far more than the monies raised. However, I would like to thank everyone for your ongoing support of this initiative, and I would urge anyone who hasn't been to bingo to come and give it a go some Friday night! A sincere thanks to the Bingo Committee, chaired by Deirdre Gillen, for their ongoing work.

Our Annual Members' Draw also continued this year and it remains a very constant funding stream which helps towards the day-to-day costs associated with the running of our club. This year, it took place in Mac's on Sunday, the 18<sup>th</sup> of June, where again a grand total of €22,000 was given away in prize money. Congratulations to all our winners, and thanks again to all our draw members for your much-valued support. Thanks also to John Murphy 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**

In what's hopefully now going to become an annual event for our club, the "Castle To Cave Camino" returned this year, taking place on Saturday, the 15<sup>th</sup> of April. Once again, walkers and runners filled the roads of the Keash/Ballinafad area from first light. As a steward on the morning, I was struck by the buzz and sense of camaraderie and community of this event, as both participants and volunteers alike came together. Such has been the success of the event, it is small wonder why the club's Healthy Club Committee had talked about organising it for so long, but the monumental effort that goes into planning it simply cannot be underestimated. But, as I mentioned in last year's report, it seems to come almost effortlessly to the effervescent Healthy Club Committee, again led by their chairperson, Pdraig Henry. Thanks to the committee for their ongoing work.

The work of this committee didn't stop with the Camino though, and their winter fitness classes have started back in recent weeks in the clubhouse. As well as this, the committee organised a heart screening last month. This very worthwhile initiative, which was run by "Healthy Hearts, Healthy Lives" saw over eighty members of the community have their heart screened. From a personal point of view, I know how important it is for everyone to have their heart screened regularly. The last time the club organised a heart screening in 2014, an abnormality in my heart was picked up, which ultimately led to me being diagnosed with a slight condition the following year. While thankfully this hasn't had a major effect on my life, it did see me having to make some lifestyle changes, the biggest of which was having to give up playing competitive sports. This has provided me with opportunities to get involved with the club in other ways, though, and it underscores the point that routine screening can provide individuals with potentially life-changing information. Well done to the committee for organising this again, and thanks to all at "Healthy Hearts, Healthy Lives" for facilitating it.

The efforts of our Healthy Club Committee in bringing health and wellbeing-focused initiatives to the local community for the last decade was recently rewarded with them receiving Silver Healthy Club Status from the GAA's Community and Health Department. I think everyone will agree when I say this award is richly deserved.

### **Kerry McKeon Literary Competition**

As mentioned earlier in the report, the Kerry McKeon Literary Competition once again took place in the last term of the school year. I am delighted to say that it was very well supported again this year across all the primary schools in the club's area. The standard of entries was also again very high, and the adjudicators had their work cut out to select winners from the different age groups for the essay title: "What I want to be when I grow up." The prize-giving took place after our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary

commemorative walk, and I would like to commend all the winners. Thanks to all the children who submitted entries and for the schools for their help and encouragement. It was great that PJ McKeon was available to present the winners with their prizes for this competition also. Thanks to Mikey O'Grady for his work in organising this competition.

## **Facilities**

Thanks to Ronan Higgins, John Cryan and the rest of the Facilities Committee for the level of work and care they have put into looking after our pitch and facilities this year. Sanding and spiking works were carried out on the pitch in the early part of the year and again in September. This is very necessary work in ensuring the pitch is able for the wear and tear it gets in catering for all our club's different teams. As well as this, we hosted a number of external games this year, some of which were under lights as mentioned earlier in the report.

The matches we hosted this year included Cloonacool vs St. Molaise Gaels in the Junior A Championship; Geevagh vs Bunninadden in the IFC; Shamrock Gels vs Curry in the SFC; St. Mary's vs Eoghan Rua and Coolera/Strandhill vs St. Farnan's in the Sligo LGFA Junior "B" Championship; Ballymote/Bunninadden vs Tubbercurry/Cloonacool in the U17 "B" Championship final; as well as Ballymote/Bunninadden vs Coolaney/Mullinabreena in the U13 "B" Championship Plate final.

## **County commitments**

It was another positive year for Sligo GAA as a whole with Connacht titles being won by the U16 and minor girls, as well as by the U20 men who completed a major achievement in defending their Connacht crown from last year. All these teams went on to play in All-Ireland finals, also. Unfortunately, none of them could take the final step and win an All-Ireland title, but reaching them has to be seen as great progress for football in the county. It was an honour for the club to have representations on all these squads. Ada Conheady was a member of the Sligo U16 team; Hazel Redican was part of the minor girls' panel; and Dylan Walsh, Jamie McCoy, James Kiernan and Matt Henry were members of the U20 men's panel. Dylan was also selected on the U20 Team of the Year in recognition for his performances during the year. Well done, Dylan, on this fantastic achievement. Winning Connacht titles at any level is a significant accomplishment, so I congratulate all these young players. Also, well done to Ross Donovan who was part of the U20 men's management team.

It is always an honour to get the chance to represent your county at any level, so well done to all from our club who had the chance to do that. At U17 boys' level, Cian Carty, Cillian Duggan, Conor Walsh, David Lyons, Dean Davey, Eoghan Nerney, Josh McHugh, Liam Higgins, Jim Molloy, Marty Murray and Ryan Duffy were members of the squad. At U16 boys level, our club was represented by Aaron Healy, Alex Lillie and Noah Phillips. As well as this, we had a number of club members where were on development squads at some of the younger age groups. On the ladies' side, as well as Ada and Hazel, Mila Clancy and Gracie McDonagh were members of the U14 squad, and at senior level, the club was represented by Megan McCormack, Tara Phillips and Roisin Molloy.

At committee level Barry Convey was Secretary of Coiste na nÓg. I wish to commend Barry on this sizeable undertaking. Ronan Higgins was also a member of the Sligo GAA Facilities Committee, and Ciarán McGovern once again represented the club as our County Board Delegate.

## **Scór**

Once again, the club was represented with distinction by Sarah Snee who won the Amhráníocht Anair for the second year running at the Scór Sinsir county final which were held in Ballisodare in

mid-October. She went on to represent the club then at the Connacht final in Tubbercurry two weeks' later. Unfortunately, Sarah was unable to progress any further in this competition, with the eventual All-Ireland winner, Sarah Keane from Elphin GAA, going forward as Connacht's representative. I would like to congratulate Sarah on the achievement of winning a county title, though, and here's hoping next year she may be able to go one better. Unfortunately, Brendan McHugh, Martin Doherty, Shane Gallagher and myself had no such luck in the Tráth na gCeist, losing out to St. Molaise Gaels, but I would again like to thank the lads for coming out and representing the club at this worthwhile event. If anyone would like to get involved with Scór next year, please get in touch with me or any of the other committee members.

## Referees

Well done to Gavin Gardiner who represented the club as an active referee this year. Sometimes, it takes courage to be the man or woman in the middle, so I commend Gavin. Again, we have seen some unacceptable scenes in recent times regarding the abuse of referees. We need referees for our games to take place, and it is paramount for everyone involved in our games to ensure that referees are respected at all times.

~

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone on the club's Executive Committee for their work this year. In particular, I would like to thank the club's Assistant Secretary, Paul Judge, for all the help he gave to me throughout the year. Go raibh a maith agat, a Phóil. Also to our Chairperson, Seamus Hannon, and Vice-Chairperson, Pdraig Henry, for all their help and guidance. Our Registrar, Deirdre Gillen, steps down from her role this year after nine years. I would like to sincerely thank Deirdre for all her hard work in this role and in particular for all the help she gave me since I've been working as Secretary. I would also like to wish Ciarán all the best as he takes up the role, and I'm sure Deirdre will never been too far away for support and advice.

Thanks also to Carmel Taheny for her work in compiling our AGM booklet again this year, something which is always a great keepsake to have alongside our AGM.

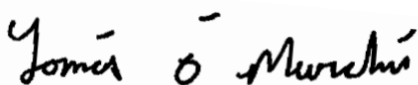
The club welcomed two new premium sponsors this year, Declan Wynne and Skanstec Engineering came on board as our men's team's main sponsor and Phillip Craig and Ellie Lally of The Mayfly as our ladies' team's sponsors. Sincere thanks to you, and to all our club's premium sponsors, for your continued support again this 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 2023. I would also like to offer sincere condolences to all those who suffered bereavements during the year.

Again, this report has ended up being longer than I had planned it to be, but I apologise if there are any errors or omissions. This report is submitted for ratification at this year's AGM.

Here's to continued success for our club next year.

Is mise le meas,



Rúnaí