

THE KERRY McKEON LITERARY AWARDS 2020

The majestic splendour of Eastern Harps state of the art new clubhouse in Keash allied to the enchanting history of the ancient limestone Caves of Kesh Corran perched invitingly in the background provided haunting old versus the new setting for the Eastern Harps annual Kerry McKeon Literary Awards presented to the 2020 winners on Saturday evening July 25th.

Organised by Eastern Harps in tandem with the National School teachers of the area and sponsored by The McKeon family these awards are dedicated to the memory of Kerry McKeon whose writings are fondly remembered by Eastern Harps before his untimely passing in 2012. Four awards are now being presented each year an under 6, an under 8, an under 10 and an under 12 to the winners of an essay competition selected by the teachers in addition to an overall award which is a perpetual trophy, a carving in wood depicting the ancient history Kesh Corran. The carving has been done by Sligo craftsman Michael Quirke and among its many features include the Caves, a portrait of Fr. Micheal O' Cleirigh of Four Masters fame who spent some time writing in the area, a feather quill he used for his writings, a portrait of a wolf who allegedly reared an abandoned baby namely Cormac Mac Airt who later became High King of Ireland and a harp being the respected and devoted instrument of the day although Eastern Harps might lay claim to that one! The four remaining trophies are educational and suitably inscribed for the winners to retain.

These awards have become highly popular in recent years and this is reflected both in the quality and the quantity of presentations returned. Eastern Harps have many off the field activities running at the moment and this one is right up there with the annual draw for €22,000, the Gaelic 4 Mothers and Others(G4MO) and the annual weight loss programme in terms of interest. This endorses the club's policy of widening activity in the social, recreational areas and educational areas. With the awards coordinator Mikey O'Grady on the mic, the presentations commenced and following an introductory few words he called on thirteen-year-old Shane Brennan, a nephew of Kerry McKeon to present the awards. The first receiver with an almighty smile on his face was a youngster with a flawless Eastern Harps pedigree Michael Donovan from Carn National School to take the Under 6 award. With an equally broad smile on his face, Aidan Flaherty from that scenic village of Monasteraden went home to the shores of Lough Gara proudly carrying the Under 8 award. Isabelle Higgins from Keash made sure the boys weren't going to do a home run on her patch of ground by taking the Under 10 trophy with a splendid contribution that the Four Masters would be proud of even with a quill! While the champion scribe of the day proved to be Evan O'Gara from Cloonloo National School who took the Under 12 award. It certainly was an outstanding day for the O'Gara family as not only did Evan take the Under 12 award he also took the prestigious overall award plus a couple of bonus prizes as well. Winding up proceedings Mikey congratulated all of the winners having a thankful word for the teachers who helped create a competitive atmosphere as well as youthful presenter Shane Brennan who performed with the coolness of a veteran.

Club chairman Seamus Hannon also spoke showering praise on the quality of the presentations from the youngsters in an ever-improving competition. As Keash is noted worldwide for its aforementioned historical connections going back centuries, unfortunately, it's annual festival on Garland Sunday to celebrate its culture couldn't go ahead this year. A strange and silent but lethal enemy from abroad took care of that. But it will come again. And when it does you can bet that Eastern Harps with its ultra-modern facilities and ability to introduce new community initiatives will be at the heart of it.