

Press Release

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Golden Glaslough!

Village Officially Recognised as one of Europe's Best

The picture perfect village of Glaslough put Co. Monaghan firmly on the European map last Friday, 15th September, as nineteen delegates from the village, accompanied by staff and Cathaoirigh from Monaghan County Council, descended on the spa resort town of Podčetrtek, Slovenia for the announcement of the results of this year's prestigious Entente Florale Europe awards, and came home with a Gold Award, the highest accolade in the competition.

The competition is run by the European Association for Flowers and Landscape, which is an international non-profit association, which aims to promote social and cultural development to enhance Horticulture, Tourism and Environment. They do this by encouraging actions that foster a better quality of life for urban dwellers, and their main tool for so doing is the annual Entente Florale Europe competition, which is run in 9 countries. Participating towns and villages are visited by an international Jury during the summer, awarding marks against set criteria. Depending on the marks awarded, each participating village or town is then awarded either a bronze, silver, or gold merit, and given a rather substantial plaque to display in their town.

Ireland's entries are nominated by the National Tidy Towns unit in the Dept of Environment each year, with only two towns or villages representing any participating country. Abbeyleix in Co. Laois, Ireland's other representative, was awarded a Silver merit, and won the President's Award for Biodiversity for their wonderful bog conservation work.

Speaking at the awards, Cllr Cathy Bennett, Cathaoirleach of Monaghan County Council, said,

"I am thrilled for the county. A gold medal in this competition is a mark of excellence which is recognised throughout Europe. It will without doubt help to put Glaslough and Co. Monaghan on the tourist map. I'm also delighted for the community, especially the hard working volunteers of Glaslough Tidy Towns, nineteen of whom have travelled out here to Slovenia for the announcement tonight. And of course

they still have the National Tidy Towns competition results to be announced in a little over a week's time. Hopefully tonight is a good omen for that, as I know how dearly they would love to add that title to their achievements. '

Gareth Corrigan, Chairman of Glaslough Tidy Towns, also chaired the Steering Committee which was formed to prepare for this competition. He was quick to point out that there was a team of over one hundred people involved in bringing home gold to Glaslough, including Tidy Towns volunteers, the children of Scoil Mhuire and Glaslough Junior Tidy Towns, the staff of Monaghan County Council – past and present, the staff of Donagh Parishes CE Scheme, the Castle Leslie Estate team and the many, many businesses and residents whose high standard of care for their premises play such a huge part in making Glaslough such a beautiful place to visit, but an even more wonderful place in which to live.

“ We are so proud to be from Glaslough, and taking part in Entente Florale enabled us to share our beautiful village with communities right across Europe, which was a real privilege. It was an honour to be selected to represent Ireland, and we are so glad to have rewarded the Department of the Environment’s faith in selecting us. We learned so much from the two Irish judges, who mentored us in preparing for the Jury’s visit, and we will take that information forward to help us over the next few years. Hopefully, it won’t be long before there will be another title making its way home to Glaslough – the National Tidy Towns title would look really well beside the bronze plaque we’ve brought home from Entente Florale!”

Glaslough’s journey to Europe began in July, when they were visited by the Entente Florale Jury, who spent four hours examining every aspect of life in the village. The Jury assessed the village against ten criteria, awarding marks for the quality of the natural and built environment, the care that the community take of the landscape, the level of awareness and education, the quality of the public spaces, how new buildings blend with the old, and how the village blends with the surrounding countryside. Community effort was also taken into consideration, as was the effort the community makes to communicate their participation in Entente Florale to the public. The involvement of local businesses and partnership with local government also were factors in the marking.

The Jury members were all highly knowledgeable experts in the fields of landscape, architecture, horticulture, biodiversity and conservation and came from across Europe including Slovenia, Austria, Germany, the Czech Republic and the Netherlands, bringing a wealth of experience with them to look at how the community of Glaslough sets about creating a good quality of life for the people who live there, and for those who visit.

Glaslough's bid was presented to the Jury jointly by Louise Duffy from Glaslough Tidy Towns and Shirley Clerkin, Heritage Officer for Monaghan County Council. The four hour-long adjudication process started with a short overview, followed by a viewing of the key plans and strategies which influence the development of the village, and talked to some of the key people who are responsible for developing and regulating planning in the village. They viewed the six weighty dossiers which have been compiled by Scoil Mhuire in the process of earning their six Green Flags. They also spoke with Dympna Condra of Monaghan Tourism, heard about the ongoing work to prepare an Architectural Character Assessment for the village from the consultants of Lotts Architecture & Urbanism, and learned about the Integrated Constructed Wetlands, and the work of the Group Water Schemes and the Local Authorities Water & Communities Office.

This was then followed by a walkabout around the village and surrounding area, where the Jury visited a number of sites to gain a better feel for both the village and the people who live in it. They visited the Allotments where Martin Wood, a plot holder highlighted how the plots are managed strictly without pesticides. Jackie Gormley, Chairperson of Glaslough Development Association spoke to them about the Oakland Centre and playground where Donal Mc Elwain spoke to the jury about the imminent upgrade and the Council's involvement in insuring the playground. Denis Flannery, the Council's horticulturist brought the Jury through the biodiversity garden and explained the educational importance especially in terms of facilitating pollination. Louise Duffy then gave the Jury a detailed overview of the construction of the Coach Garden and how Diane and Ron Kendrick provided the Tidy Towns with this disused area to develop a green open space for the community and visitors to enjoy.

The Jury then boarded a bus and took to the roads to visit the reconstructed Railway Signal Cabin and then went out past Glennan Graveyard and Chapel. On the way the Jury also

heard about the drumlins, Drumbanagher fort and how Monaghan's hedgerows date back to the 19th Century. They then visited Glennan Presbyterian Church where they were given a brief history and tour of the grounds and Church by David Aiken, before passing Glaslough Villa soccer grounds. They were delighted to see all the children out at the summer camp and to hear about the club's achievements, including Glaslough's connections to Liverpool FC and to the invention of the goal net.

The Jury then arrived at St Mary's school corner, where the delegation paused for a photo at the newly constructed welcome feature for Entente Florale with Mayor of County Monaghan Cathy Bennett, Municipal District members and the Entente Florale steering committee. The feature was sculpted by an artist blacksmith who works on the Game of Thrones production, and will become the permanent home for the plaque which will hopefully be awarded to Glaslough in September when the results of the competition are announced at a gala ceremony in Slovenia.

Mark Macklin, Principal of St Mary's then took the delegation around the school where the children themselves spoke about all their Green flags, their biodiversity garden, trees, hedgerows, spinney, Can Train and mill, raised beds, water harvesting, insect hotel, pond and orchard. The Jury were overwhelmed with the effort, interest and knowledge the children displayed. Nial O Connor, environmental awareness officer from Monaghan County Council then spoke about the environmental education and support to the school. The children were treated to a picnic by Monaghan County Council for their efforts after the Jury departed.

After departing St Mary's, the delegation headed back into the Village green housing estate where Sammy Leslie gave the Jury a brief overview of the development, focusing on how the houses were designed to blend with the character of the village, and how period features such as 9 foot ceilings and sash windows as well as traditional materials such as slate and stone were used in their construction. The Jury also heard about the Leslie Foundation's Collective Memory project, which has been using items and photos in the Leslie archive to invite local people to reminisce about their memories of particular events in the village's past. Walking from here, the Jury headed down Main Street, where they viewed the streetscape, the buildings, the Diamond, the rookery, the traditional cast iron

signage, the replica seating from the railway station, the telephone kiosk which has become an information point for local businesses and the fantastic floral displays by private householders throughout.

As they moved down Barrack Hill they remarked on the Pillar House building and planting schemes and especially the heritage planting at the rear. They were then treated to some ice cream from Jeremy at Ambledown Cottages as they passed by. After viewing Lisbannagher houses and planting on the high banks, the Jury then proceeded to the Horse Pond where they heard briefly about the project to restore it and its significance in olden times. The Jury were impressed at the new planting along the Caledon road and remarked at the flower displays at the graveyard and lynch gate. As they passed by n and Ardbannagher estates, they were delighted to see the effort made by residents to welcome them with the Entente Florale colours!. The last few stops on the tour included the Integrated Constructed Wetlands, where engineers Cathal Flynn and Mark Johnston from MCC, along with the engineer whose brainchild the project originally was, Dan Doody, who returned to the fold especially for the occasion from the heady pastures of retirement, explained how the wetlands process the entire sewage of the village and estate with no pre-treatment, yet were constructed at half the cost of a conventional treatment plant, are run for a fraction of the cost, and discharge water of a higher quality than the water upstream of the village, all whilst providing a fantastic habitat for wildlife.

Gretta Mc Carron from the Local Authorities Water & Communities Office was on hand to show samples of the water quality in the area and explain the work she is doing to get communities more involved in minding the rivers and lakes in their area, so that the ground water is protected, and water quality improves. The delegation was then treated to a short walk around the gardens of Castle Leslie in the company of estate manager Jackie Gormley and head gardener Dessie Clements, who explained how they manage the 1000 acres of estate and care for the Champion Trees on the estate. The Jury were impressed to learn that professional tree surgeons visit the estate twice a year to inspect the oldest trees on the estate, some of which are estimated to be up to 250 years old, and that Dessie collects seeds from the old trees and nurtures them into saplings, which are then planted out around the estate, to ensure the genetics of the original tree continue for many more years here in Glaslough.

The Jury's four hour adjudication was wrapped up at the Hunting Lodge, where they were shown photographs of the building before and after renovation, to demonstrate the seamless blending of old with new, and were given a quick tour of the Victorian planting scheme which wraps around the exterior of the building and down into the courtyard. The context for the scheme was explained to the Jury, that being that the original gardens were designed for the Castle in the Victorian era, and that the plan is to restore the original planting scheme throughout the gardens.

As the Glaslough delegation were called to the stage to receive their award, the announcer made the following commentary, which was accompanied by photographs of the village:

“Glaslough is a small beautiful border village located in the County of Monaghan within the Irish Republic. Its Christian roots go back to the time of St. Patrick who visited the area several times. The Co. Monaghan tourist brochure tells us it is a county of rolling Drumlins and Hidden Treasures. It is also a village of three churches, yet the village proclaims the horse as king. It is also a planned village emanating from the influence of the Leslie Family who own the castle which sits on 1,000 acres consisting of a mix of lakes, wetlands, parkland and woodland. Its greatest strength lies in its community endeavour and its capacity for engaging in fruitful partnership with the Local Authorities and statutory bodies. A former overall winner in Ireland's national Tidy Towns Competition it has sustained high standards down through the years and today it continues to be an award winning entry in a competition that will celebrate 60 years of activity next year. Over recent years in particular, it has won great favour for its vision of the future and lays great emphasis on the involvement of its youth and especially its award winning school of which it is so proud. Its numerous projects aimed at enhancing the environment have won praise from a variety of sources and play an important role in the economic, cultural, social and sporting welfare of this lovely village. A huge welcome awaits all visitors to Glaslough.”

At this point, twenty four people from Co. Monaghan were now standing on the stage, awaiting news of their fate. The Chairman of the Entente Florale Committee, Mr Dirk Vandromme from Belgium, quoting the opening line of the village's anthem, 'Beautiful Glaslough' asked:

“Have you ever been to beautiful Glaslough? Well, better do, because you win a GOLD medal!”

A video of the prize giving ceremony is available on YouTube at the following link: <https://youtu.be/Sc9K7g2Nsvl> (or on the Entente Florale Europe website)

Glaslough's time on the stage begins at 1 hour 11 minutes.

Cllr Paudge Connolly, Cathaoirleach of Monaghan Municipal District, in which Glaslough village lies, made the long trip to Slovenia for the awards to support the community. He praised the hard work of all involved in achieving the gold merit award.

“The whole experience of preparing for the adjudication, and coming out here as a community together like this has been a demonstration of partnership between community and the local authority at its very best. I'd like to congratulate everyone involved, and thank you all for throwing your hearts and souls at this initiative. It is initiatives like these that build communities, sustain them through hard times, give them direction and provide their youth with the tools which will see them through life. I am so pleased that Monaghan County Council can support communities to get involved in this kind of work, and I would like to commend the staff of Monaghan MD and the Community Dept of Monaghan County Council for their hard work and excellence.”

Minister for Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht, Heather Humphreys, sent a message of congratulations to the people of Glaslough, and to Monaghan County Council.

“Achievements like these don't happen by accident. They take years of effort, and months of planning. They need the commitment of many people and the support of all, from the local authority to the school, to the business community to each and every house owner in the village. This is a community achievement, and one that every single person in Glaslough has played a part in making happen.

Achieving success at the highest level in Europe requires leadership, and Glaslough is lucky to have that both within the community, and in the staff of Monaghan County and Municipal District Councils. The vision which was shown by Castle Leslie Estate and Monaghan County Council in opting to build an Integrated Constructed Wetlands instead of a conventional sewerage treatment plant to treat the sewerage for the entire village is without a doubt a model for all to follow, and I believe the Jury hadn't seen its likes anywhere in Europe. It had to have played a part in helping Glaslough edge towards that prestigious Gold award.

Congratulations to everyone, and let's hope that it's a good omen for the National Tidy Towns results for 2017, which come out on Monday next.”

The Minister for Rural and Community Development, Mr. Michael Ring, T.D., also sent his congratulations, saying:

“Glaslough should be immensely proud of its achievement. Irish entrants to the Entente Florale competition always perform very well on the European stage. This stems from the great community spirit and involvement we have in Ireland's Tidy Towns competition which has been running for nearly 60 years. The award to Glaslough is a testament to the work carried out by the Tidy Towns committee and by Monaghan Co. Council.”

Whilst in Podčetrtek, the Glaslough delegation also participated in a European Market, where they flew the flag for Co. Monaghan by tempting passersby over to the Glaslough stand with handmade chocolates from Glaslough Chocolates, before bombarding them with images of beautiful Glaslough and the unique rolling drumlin landscape of Co. Monaghan. Before long, guitars and tin whistles were produced, and Glaslough took over the centre of the market, where fourteen year old Jamie Duffy, fresh from receiving his Junior Cert results en route overland to Slovenia just days earlier, was crowned undisputed king of Entente Florale for his haunting rendition of the Lonesome Boatman, accompanied by his granddad, Packie McGhee.

There was much praise for the village of Podčetrtek, which is an outstandingly beautiful location. The awards were hosted in a thermal springs resort, which has accommodation of varying types to cater for different guest needs. Carol Lambe, Community Development Officer with Monaghan Co Co, co-ordinated the Entente Florale bid and made the trip out to Slovenia. She said:

“The resort fits in to Slovenia’s economic development strategy which is to target the development of green, eco tourism. With Monaghan County Council currently involved in the development of a tourism development strategy for the Sliabh Beagh region, and since Sliabh Beagh holds one of only a handful of water sources in Ireland which still hold a ‘pristine’ rating for purity, the visit to Podčetrtek could not have been timed more perfectly for giving the Council some food for thought. Although, we may have to re-think the ‘no swimsuits’ rule in the thermal baths!”

There is a celebration planned in the Coach House bar in Glaslough for Saturday night to celebrate this monumental achievement for the village. All are welcome to attend.

Ends

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