

Saluting Our Unsung Heroes



What fulfils the notion of a 'hero'?

Last week I reached the conclusion that Ireland must have officially put all its troubles behind her.

There couldn't possibly be any more unemployment, poverty or health care problems in our country - what else could explain the ongoing Garth Brooks saga?

According to some, our country's reputation is apparently "in tatters" because of the concert debacle.

I would instead argue that our country's reputation is "in tatters" because of the reaction which the refusal of Dublin City Council to grant licenses for all five concerts prompted.

That uncertainty over concerts attracted such coverage says much more about our country than anything else and certainly ranks high among the list of 'first world problems'.

I actually like Garth Brooks and understand the inconvenience caused to those who purchased tickets, but it's worth having a sense of perspective.

If the Second Coming of Our Lord had happened last week, he would more than likely have gained less air time and less newspaper column inches compared to the Oklahoma country singer.

One word which emerged again and again during last week's coverage was 'hero'.

Fans expressed their disappointment at being denied the opportunity to hear their 'hero' perform.

He isn't the only pop star or film star referred to as a 'hero', so how did the meaning of this word become so diluted?

It caused me to think of what actually constitutes a 'hero' nowadays and why the word has become so overused. Music, movie and sporting stars are labelled as 'heroes' in the same breath as real heroes such as inspirational Kerry teenager Donal Walsh.

With our faith and trust in the traditional pillars of society (be it the church, our banks or our politicians) somewhat diminished because of various scandals, we're increasingly finding ourselves looking elsewhere to find our 'heroes'.

Well, our heroes exist all around us within our local communities.

Each week, the pages of local newspapers including this publication, highlight the positive work which is taking place within local communities.

Be it the activities of a Tidy Towns group or the actions of an individual aiming to raise money for a particular charity, it's heartening to see that plenty of good still exists all around us.

These people are working towards the betterment of their communities and carrying out their work quietly.

In fact, the very essence of a 'community' would not exist were it not for these voluntary efforts.

Local newspapers are an important means for communities to highlight their work and I've been fortunate enough to meet and interview so many people who are doing such good within their communities.

This work is undertaken by people who aren't seeking awards or accolades and are certainly not being financially rewarded.

A great initiative which is highlighting such community work is the 'Get Involved' competition.

Throughout Ireland, communities are partnering with their local newspapers to help bring about positive change within their local areas.

This year, The Munster Express has chosen the work taking place at St John's River, Kilbarry as its worthy project.

A group of hard-working volunteers are endeavouring to clean-up the area along the footpath and cycleway which has become overgrown and is heavily littered due to antisocial drinking.

Plans are also in place to utilise the river as a recreational facility for locals and tourists alike by exploring the possibilities of kayaking, canoeing, fishing etc.

As the area is a haven for wildlife, it's hoped that this aspect can also be further developed.

The St John's River, Kilbarry project is a great example of people coming together in a community and working hard for the betterment of their area.

It is one example of the countless worthy efforts which are being undertaken throughout the country by people who have pride in their area and want to contribute towards the betterment of their surroundings. The outpouring of generosity which the 'Save Ryan and Ethan Appeal' prompted is a local example of the great lengths people will go to in order to help each other.

As brave Ethan begins treatment for a bone marrow transplant in the US as recently reported in our paper, his family can rest assured that the thoughts and prayers of everybody will once again be with them.

When you consider the goodness of people in times of such difficulty, it makes you reevaluate who our 'heroes' actually are.

So, apologies to Garth Brooks - I won't be losing sleep over a cancelled gig or lamenting a chance to meet this so-called 'hero'.

Another music star once famously sang that she was 'Holding Out For A Hero'.

Well, Bonnie Tyler should observe the fantastic work taking place in each and every community, from the very smallest upwards, and she will find a plentiful supply of wonderful heroes.