

Jenny blooms best of all in Deise Final

Waterford Rose of Tralee Final 2016

Sheila Heffernan reports

On Friday last, the Waterford Rose of Tralee finalists gathered at the Tower Hotel early to begin the judging process, which would culminate that evening in Hillview's Jenny Walsh (representing Margaret Walsh Therapies) being selected to represent Waterford in Tralee.

From early morning, the roses took part in group and single interviews with the adjudicators Stephanie O'Dwyer, Brian Higgins and Jackie Watson.



Jenny Walsh, the 2016 Waterford Rose of Tralee winner. | Photos: Mick Wall

These interviews would combine with their public interviews with host Brendan Hennessy to take place on stage that night.

With 400 spectators and cameras from Irish TV present, which will air a highlights programme to on May 1st, this represented their first taste of what it would life could well be like as the Waterford Rose on the stage in Tralee come August.

To start off the night, each of the Roses were called to the stage, escorted by their own escorts and the 'Rose-buds', a group of children who clearly had a great night.

They were joined by reigning Waterford Sarah Tobin and following a verse of 'Let it go' from the rose-buds, the interviews began.

First up was Paula Fitzgerald, a self-employed hair-dresser based in Tramore, who was sponsored by The Raglan Road Bar. From Dunmore East originally, she sang Etta James song 'At Last' wonderfully.

Second was Sarah Power, who was sponsored by the Cove Bar, who is studying Theatre and Sociology in WIT and took part in several plays.

Next up was Intellectual Disability Nurse Kárina Coward, sponsored by Paddy Foleys Bar. Having watched the festival with her sisters, she really enjoyed the experience. Next was Emma O'Leary, sponsored by Keniry's Centra in Tallow. A bio medical engineer student, she hopes to one day be part of a major discovery.



Waterford Rose finalists posing with a Kia Optima outside the Tower Hotel.

Bernie Browne, who was sponsored by Carters Chocolate Café, was interviewed next. Also working in the café, she felt it was a good way to combine her love for coffee and design.

Zoe Cuddihy was the sixth Rose to be interviewed and was sponsored by EDrive, with the French and History teacher told of how she enjoyed debate.

The seventh rose up was Stephanie O'Hanlon, who was sponsored by Tramore Chamber of Tourism and Commerce. The dental nurse explained how she volunteered with the Waterford Marine Search and Rescue.

Next was Nicole Rushe, a law student who was sponsored by MM Halley & Son Solicitors. One of the top 10 finalists in Miss Universe Ireland 2015, she felt more at home in the Roses competition.

Before the ninth Rose was brought up on stage, Enda O'Doherty took to the stage to speak about Pieta House.

Last summer, Enda famously carried a washing machine from Belfast to Waterford, and come May 29th, his latest challenge shall see him carry the same machine up Slievenamon in his latest Pieta Challenge,

Just before the interval, Jenny Walsh came up on stage. Sponsored by Margaret Walsh Therapies, the part-time dance teacher treated the audience to a ballet piece while Chloe McGrath accompanied by singing.

After the interval, first up was Clodagh Murphy, sponsored by O'Keeffe Orthodontics, who played the violin in front of a packed ballroom.

Karen Haberlin, sponsored by The Limo Company, was the 10th Rose to appear. The WIT marketing graduate told of her spur of the moment move to Spain last year to work, having decided to go only two and a half weeks before.

The 11th Rose was Business with French student Paula Phelan, who was sponsored by the Reg Bar. A lover of travel, she had studied in France during her college degree.

Next up was Chelsea Goss, sponsored by Waterford Warriors, who works as a Special Needs Assistant and whose highlight of the year was meeting Francis Brennan (of RTE's 'At Your Service').

Grace O'Sullivan, who was sponsored by Beat 102-103, was next up. Working with Beat as a broadcaster, she spoke of her love for the Irish language.

The final Rose to appear was Ciara Larkin from Kilmeaden. Sponsored by Republic of Jewels, she sang 'City of Music', composed by the much loved and sadly missed Denny Corcoran.



Jenny Walsh receiving her tiara and sash from Viki Walshe and outgoing Waterford Rose Sarah Tobin

While the adjudicators were gone to choose the winner, reigning Waterford Rose Sarah Tobin spoke about the experience of the past 12 months.

Wishing the girls luck, she spoke of the strong friendships which are formed during the process. She was then presented with a bouquet of flowers for her time as Waterford Rose.

Just as the adjudicators returned, Rose organiser Steve Cronly spoke about the festival. He reminded everyone the semi-final, during which the number of Roses will be brought down to 32, will take place on August 17th and 18th in Tralee.

He thanked the Flower Shop and Tramore Chamber, as well as The Munster Express for all the coverage that had been given over the last few weeks.

Finally, it came for the judges to reveal Jenny Walsh as their choice, with the winner serenaded by popular local performer David Flynn. Given her many talents, it is undeniable that Jenny will represent Waterford wonderfully in the upcoming year.