

## **Pride of the Forest Award Finalists 2016**

### **Community Star (sponsored by The Warranty Group)**

This award is for an individual who has made a significant contribution to their community.

#### **Winner - Michael Parry**

When Michael's wife Janet sadly passed away after having cancer 25 years ago, Michael wanted to do something to help other people in need. He started to organise coffee mornings in the village of St. Briavels where he lives so he could raise some money for local charities. A massive 25 years later his coffee mornings are still going strong. Michael has raised over £70,000 which has helped Lydney Hospital, Great Oaks Hospice, The Forest of Dean Children's Opportunity Centre, Hope for Tomorrow Mobile Chemotherapy Unit and the Cobalt Cancer Unit in Cheltenham and Gloucester Royal Hospital to name but a few. Michael is supported by his daughters and has a dedicated team of volunteers who love helping as much as he loves organising the events.

#### **Finalist - Sophie Hawkins**

Twelve months ago Sophie discussed the idea of setting up a mental health support group as there were not many in the district. She has supported many people in the community who suffer from mental health issues and is now setting up Rollercoaster, a support group to provide individuals with somewhere to meet others who have had the same experiences. Sophie has used her own experiences to support others in similar situations. She has attended many meetings with professionals in the field and has been a part of networking days to promote Rollercoaster with many other agencies and members of the public. Sophie also does the administration on social media sites and spends a lot of time supporting people online as well as face to face. Helping the community is important to her and she has put a lot of work into supporting people in the area.

### **Young Community Star (sponsored by Lucozade Ribena Suntory)**

This award is for a young individual (aged 18 and under) who has made a significant contribution to their community.

#### **Winners - Maisy Williams and Eiren Whelan**

In March 2015 Eiren was outside his house when he heard a smoke alarm coming from a neighbour's property. When Eiren and his friend Maisy got to the property they could see their elderly neighbour on the sofa, surrounded by thick smoke. Knowing that the neighbour struggles with his mobility and without worrying about their own safety

they entered the property and helped their disorientated neighbour out of the house. Both Eiren and Maisy were treated at the scene for smoke inhalation following this impressive and selfless act. It is likely that, faced with the same risks, there are many adults who would not have entered the house, let alone rescue the man so calmly. In recognition of their great courage and bravery Eiren and Maisy received a commendation from Gloucestershire's Chief Fire Officer, Mr Stewart Edgar.

### **Finalist - Jake Norris**

Jake is a young volunteer who works in the Lydney outlet of the Great Oaks Hospice shop. Jake volunteers every other Saturday and at least two days each week, during school holidays, topping up the shelves and serving customers. At only 10 years old he is very diligent and he always greets his customers with a smile and a warm welcome. Jake is also busy at home where he supports his siblings and, in particular, his younger brother who suffers from autism. Jake is strongly committed to not only his family, but also his local community.

### **Sportsperson of the Year (sponsored by Freedom Leisure)**

This award is to acknowledge the sporting achievements of a Forest of Dean official, organiser, competitor or team.

### **Winner - Paul Davis**

In 1991 at the age of 26 Paul was diagnosed with a Brain Tumour which resulted in him suffering severe headaches and losing most of his sight. In 2003 he started attending Forest Sensory Services to learn Braille. Whilst there, the staff discovered that he had been very sporty, so they encouraged him to take up Bowls for the visually impaired. He is now a regular at Visually Impaired Bowls England competitions and, since coming runner up in the B3 Men's category at the Visually Impaired Bowls England National Championships in 2009, he has gone from strength to strength. He has represented his country at international level, most notably at the UK Outdoor VI singles played on the Commonwealth Games greens in Glasgow in 2014. Paul represented England at the UK Visually Impaired indoor championships in September 2015 and at the time of the Chairman's dinner he was representing England in Israel.

### **Finalist - Alex Gray**

Eighteen year-old Alex Gray is the vice-captain of the Newent Cricket Club 1st XI and captain of the Midweek League XI. Alex is an established opening batsman and has been the club's leading run scorer for the last 3 seasons. In the 2015 season he scored 4 League centuries in an overall total of 840 runs (with an average of over 64 per game), winning the Division 2 batting award in the Gloucestershire County Cricket League in the process. Alex

also bowls spin and can deliver both leg and off-breaks. He will complete his BTec Level 3 Diploma in Sport in summer 2016, is a qualified Pool Lifeguard, a Level 1 Tennis coach and hopes to become a full-time cricket coach. Alex's Best Cricketing Moment is the opening partnership of 210 he shared with Ben Sillince to beat Birdlip & Brimsfield by 10 wickets in July 2015.

### **Young Sportsperson of the Year (sponsored by Hartpury College)**

This award is to acknowledge the sporting achievement of a young Forest of Dean official, organiser, competitor or team (aged 18 and under).

#### **Winner - Shauna Bennett**

Having started playing rugby three and a half years ago, Shauna has truly excelled in this sport. She began with the Drybrook RFC girls under 15's although Shauna has spent the last year playing for the under 18s. Her commitment is outstanding and she has been selected to play for Gloucestershire in each of the previous three years. She also played for Dene Magna School in the national final at Twickenham, where they won. She was recently selected to play for the South West and has been put forward for the South West Talent Development Group for under 18's. She has been accepted into Hartpury's Advanced Apprenticeship in Sports Excellence programme and will continue to pursue her passion for rugby academically as well as physically.

#### **Finalist - Oliver Rennison**

Oliver runs with Forest of Dean Athletic Club and Forest of Dean Canicross (running with your dog on trails or cross-country). Oliver has increased his training over the past year in various disciplines including road, track and cross country and shown great character and determination. He is a regular parkrunner at Coleford with his dog Ebony. Between March 2013 and November 2015, Oliver reduced his 5k Parkrun time from just under 26 minutes to 17 minutes 30 seconds, shaving an amazing 8 and a half minutes off his time. Oliver was crowned the UK under 17 Canicross champion last month and he has qualified to compete in the European Championships later this year with Ebony.

### **Carer of the Year (sponsored by NHS Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group)**

This award is for a Forest of Dean resident's carer who goes above and beyond their role.

#### **Winner - Michelle Bluett**

Michelle cares for a young boy, George, who has Down's Syndrome. Michelle has made a huge difference to George's life and was instrumental in preparing him to start school last September. She instinctively responds to his needs and is always seeking ways to support him and has helped build his social confidence. Michelle uses signing with all the children so

that they can communicate with George. She has taught him so much and has taught others to include him and to be comfortable around children who are different in some way. She is enthusiastic, tireless and always cheerful and positive. Michelle sees George for himself rather than seeing his disability. She has helped to minimise the challenges that George faces and makes the world a better place for children with disabilities.

### **Finalists - Dave & Anna Eaton**

Dave and Anna Eaton are the Parents of Archie and Isaac, brothers who are both affected by Morquio syndrome, a rare genetic condition that causes serious mobility issues. In 2008 Archie and Isaac started on a clinical trial for a new drug treatment. The pair's regular infusions of the drug enabled them to live an active life. The drug was provided by the manufacturers free to patients on compassionate grounds, but in May 2015, they withdrew the treatment. Anna Eaton wrote to Prime Minister, David Cameron urging him to support the campaign to get the drug approved. In December last year, Anna succeeded. Archie, Isaac and many others will now be able to access the drug through the NHS. Dave & Anna continue to work hard to raise awareness of Morquio syndrome and support others trying to access treatment.

### **George Read Community Award (by Glevum Conservatories)**

This award is for a local community group or Parish Council that has done the most for its community or delivered the best community project/scheme. The award winners will also receive a cheque for £250 to be used for the benefit of the local community.

### **Winner - Forest Pulse**

Forest Pulse is a local registered charity which provides a range of exciting out-of-school social, sport and recreational activities for disabled children and young people up to the age of 19. The activities give the children the opportunity to meet up with friends, have fun and learn alongside their non-disabled peers. The activities are varied so that everybody has the opportunity to access them whatever their ability or mobility. They promote independence for the young people and a welcome break for the parents, carers and siblings. All staff are trained and experienced in meeting the individual needs of the young people that come along and the charity also supports parents and carers in a variety of ways.

### **Finalist - Newent Community Café**

The Armoury Village Hall Community Cafe was first opened in September 2013, and has been held every Saturday morning since then. It provides a warm and relaxing place for members of the community to meet, have a chat and enjoy good quality, home-made refreshments. It is supported by local businesses and volunteers who regularly donate baking

ingredients, cakes, tea, coffee, crockery and newspapers. After paying rent and some refreshment costs the rest of the income has been put back into local community projects, charitable groups and initiatives. More than £10,000 has been raised to date. Initially set up and run by the founders for 18 months, long term sustainability has now been achieved. Today, local groups and organisations run regular cafe sessions with loyal support from the community.

### **Citizen Reader's Choice**

Decided through a Citizen reader's poll, this award is for the person who has made a significant difference for the benefit of the Forest of Dean.

### **Winner - Marilyn Smith**

Marilyn Smith has worked extremely hard supporting hundreds of families who have a child with a special need or disability within the district. She is Centre Manager for the Forest of Dean Children's Opportunity Centre but it's not only when she is at work that she provides help. She spends hours of her free time supporting fundraising, doing promotional work, giving talks and training staff, students and volunteers. Marilyn also works voluntarily in the centre's charity shop that provides vital funding to enable the services of the centre to continue. She has shown great dedication to the charity which has had a huge impact on the local community. She is kind and supportive, providing hope and inspiration to many.

### **Finalist - Gillian Davis**

Gillian is a very strong supporter of the Great Western Air Ambulance Charity, which is the local air ambulance for Gloucestershire. The Air Ambulance receives no day to day government funding and relies heavily on donations. Attending on average four incidents a day the charity relies on the public to raise the £2.3 million it needs each year to stay operational. Giving up her own time every day Gillian runs the Forest Aid Shop, where proceeds are donated to the Air Ambulance Charity. So far Gillian has raised £42,000 for the charity, thus helping to keep the air ambulance flying and saving lives across Gloucestershire.

### **Chairman's Lifetime Achievement Award**

Chosen by the Chairman, this is her Lifetime Achievement award for an individual's service to the local community.

### **Winner - Edith Duberley**

Edith ran the village store in Ruardean for 52 years and the post office for 28 years, providing a lifeline to residents. She has raised thousands of pounds for numerous local groups. Through her tireless efforts Edith has raised money for good causes such as Joshua's Wish to Walk (which sent an 8 year old boy with cerebral palsy to America for treatment) and the Dean Forest Hospice. It was for this particular good cause that she raised money by

walking over hot coals - at the age of 75. She has also been a key figure running the local Brownie pack, the village hall and supporting the annual carnival and ancient tradition of the Lord Mayor's Court. In recognition of her work Edith was awarded the British Empire Medal in the Queen's Birthday Honours List in 2015 for services to the community in Ruardean.