

The woman behind Leixlip's Strictly Simon

by Kate Donoghue

LEIXLIP-native and Dublin Simon employee, Tina Bergin found the inspiration to organise "Strictly Simon" in quite unusual circumstances.

Two years ago, she fractured both legs while training. Then, when she had almost recovered, in May 2016, she had a serious cycling accident.

"I came off my bike in Bray and knocked myself out at the scene," she recalled this week.

"I had two minor bleeds to the head, dislocated my shoulder and had a severe concussion up until October."

Needing something to occupy her mind while she got back to full form, she decided: "I know, I'll organise a dancing competition."

And while the idea to organise a Strictly Come Dancing might have been born out of strange circumstances, Tina knew instantly where any funds raised would be going.

"I'm eight and a half years with the Simon Community. I started when I was 20. I loved it from the minute I walked in the door."

"It was the best thing I've ever done. That's why when I organise stuff for them it's because I want to, not that I have to."

In the last few years, homelessness has risen to become one of the biggest challenges facing Irish society.

The people in Dublin Simon, who also operate in Meath, Wicklow and Kildare, work tirelessly to tackle the root causes of homelessness.

"Because it's Strictly Simon, it's easy to motivate myself because I know exactly where the money is going."

"Sometimes, when people give money to charities they don't know where it's going, but I think when someone works in the service and they're passionate about it, you know they'll make sure it goes to the right place."

"And I am absolutely, 100% passionate about it."

Working in the rough-sleeper team, Tina knows that any funds she manages to raise will drastically help those sleeping on the streets.

"My main focus is on primary healthcare and harm-reduction. We go around the city in a mobile health unit offering GP service three times a week. It's really cool."

"We do that with Safety Net; it's a joint-partnership. It's about intro-

ducing normality, those things that people don't have in their lives and showing that you care."

Tina went on to explain that even simple things can make a huge difference.

"It'll keep us in a supply of socks, jocks, thermals, toiletries, sleeping bags and those basic things."

"Even something as simple as giving someone a backpack so they don't have to carry all their belongings around in plastic bags."

Strictly Simon will take place in the Springfield Hotel, Leixlip on 5th May. Lined up so far are 24 competitors, celebrity guest judges and more surprises on the night, according to Tina.

"So now I have something to motivate me until May which is great. I'm 30 this year so I wanted to do something really good before then."

Teaching 24 beginners ballroom dancing to raise much-needed funds for the homeless isn't a bad place to start.



• Tina Bergin outside the Springfield Hotel in Leixlip where she is hosting her 'Strictly Simon' on 5th May.

Celbridge Manor Hotel plan revamp of grounds

by Laura Mc Loughlin

THE CELBRIDGE Manor Hotel is being prepared for a complete revamp of the grounds of the hotel.

The hotel, on the Clane Road, submitted a planning application to Kildare County Council for permission to remove 36 of their car parking spaces to develop the outside of the protected structure.

The application seeks to develop a landscaped area, including the provision of a fountain and the resurfacing with pebbles of the balance of the tarmac area within the forecourt area to the immediate front of the Hotel.

Submissions will be accepted by the Council on the development until 28th February and planners will make a decision by 21st March.

Kishoge Community College to Exhibit Projects for SciFest

by Jade Sweeney

THE next generation of scientists will be showcasing their science projects at the SciFest@School at Kishoge Community College in Lucan next week.

Over 155 students from both 1st and 2nd year in Kishoge Community College will exhibit 70 unique and innovative science projects in this year's competition. The Science fair will be held Thursday, 16th February, from 9.30am to 1.15pm.

SciFest@School gives second-level students from all over Ireland a chance to take part in their own in-house SciFest science fair.

Students are encouraged to let their minds roam free and exhibit their science projects, where there are a variety of prizes to be awarded from the judges.

SciFest@School is the first strand in the programme.

Winners from these in-school fairs go on to compete in the national final in winter of each year, with the winners of the final go on to represent Ireland at science fairs in the Netherlands and the USA.

SciFest@School was first introduced in 2011 and has proved to be extremely popular in schools across Ireland - 57 schools participated in last year's 2015/2016 competition.

Second-level students can also participate in SciFest@College in their local Institute of Technology or in DCU.

SciFest is funded primarily by Science Foundation Ireland's (SFI) Discover Programme, Intel Ireland and Boston Scientific. The programme is also supported by a number of other companies and organisations.

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