

Irish Girl Guides press release

Galway Guide Leader passes on the mantle of Irish Girl Guides' top role

- Golden Trefoil presented for only the 10th time in 108 years of Irish Girl Guides -

Sunday 8 December 2019: A specially crafted golden Trefoil badge was passed on from outgoing Irish Girl Guides (IGG) Chief Commissioner Helen Concannon to incoming Chief Commissioner Amanda O Sullivan at a board meeting yesterday [Saturday 7 December] at the organisation's National Office in Dublin.

Helen, who originally hails from Furbo, Co Galway, where she joined Brownies at the age of eight (Brownies is the IGG branch for 7-10 year olds), has held the post of IGG Chief Commissioner since April 2013.

Under her leadership the organisation has gone from strength to strength. She spearheaded the development of a number of partnerships with high-profile businesses and organisations, including Aer Lingus, Engineers Ireland, Trócaire, Dublin City University and Dragon's Den investor Alison Cowzer, which has resulted in initiatives that see IGG members from as young as five developing confidence and life-skills as they earn Aviation, Engineers, STEM and Climate Action badges as well as participating in Lego robotics workshops and developing entrepreneur skills through a #FutureCEOs cookie-selling programme.

Helen explained the significance of the golden Trefoil badge, which was presented on Saturday for only the 10th time in 108 years. "The Trefoil symbolises the history of the organisation and the important role the Chief Commissioner plays," she said. "She is the Chair of the board and the lead volunteer. The Trefoil was introduced in 1957 by the then Chief Commissioner Eileen Beatty. Prior to that, the only Chiefs of this long-running organisation had been the Viscountess Powerscourts.

"Pinning on a Trefoil is a symbolic ceremony that occurs for all 11,000 members of the organisation across the country. It means that each girl and young woman undertakes a Promise to do her best. Guiding gives girls opportunities to try a number of activities through the Journey Programme and, no matter what the task, girls are asked to always give their best.

"The skills of being forward-focussed, optimistic and dedicated to following through on their Promise is something special that Irish Girl Guides promotes. These skills, along with all the others they gain in Guiding, help them to become responsible citizens and leaders in their schools, families and communities."

Helen said, when she started out as a Brownie in Galway in the 1980s, she could never have imagined all that she would gain from being a member of IGG. "It has brought me such joy, great friendships and a unique opportunity to contribute to the youth and charity sector in Ireland," she said. "Being over 100 years old means the organisation needs to continuously move with the times to stay relevant to the young female membership. I have been very lucky to be able to contribute to that development.

“Together with volunteers and staff, we have brought STEM to Guiding through the wonderful programme and badges. We have worked hard to continue the tradition of demonstrating best practice and to comply with all the new legislations and requirements on charities. For us, this is inherent in what we do as Guides because we believe in accountability and transparency.

“Our ethos is strongly built on the goodness of women around Ireland who volunteer every week with over 550 units and on their shoulders, our committees stand. It has been a privilege to work hand in hand with these inspiring women - volunteers who find time to give generously of themselves to ensure the next generations of females in Ireland can take a step further from discarding the glass slippers and shatter the glass ceilings instead.”

Helen has received extensive thanks and good wishes on finishing up her term as Chief Commissioner. One such message came from Nonie Hickey, who was Leader of Sí Gaoith Guides in Barna for many years and only retired two years ago. She said, “Where have the years gone? It just seems like yesterday when Helen was in Sí Gaoith Guide Unit, full of fun and determination. Helen always said 'Yes, we can do it' and was an inspiration to all her friends and especially to me, her Leader at the time.

“I was present the day she was appointed Chief Commissioner and it was obvious by the atmosphere in the room that she had amazing support. But there was no-one more proud than I to sit there and see her lead the most amazing organisation in the country. Thank you, Helen, for all you have done for Irish Girl Guides with all its challenges and changes during your term of office.”

Helen is confident that IGG will continue to flourish under the leadership of new Chief Commissioner Amanda O’Sullivan. Amanda has twice been Assistant Chief Commissioner, including during the past year, and has also held other high-profile posts in the organisation, including Eastern Region Commissioner, Chair of Brownie Branch and Chair of the IT Strategy Team.

“Amanda brings a supreme knowledge of the organisation from grassroots to board table with her,” said Helen. “Having worked with Amanda in her role of Assistant Chief Commissioner, I have closely seen her dedication to the Girl Guides and, together with the board, she will lead the movement through the next three years with aplomb.”

Irish Girl Guides welcomes new youth members from age 5-30 and volunteer Leaders from age 18+. No previous Guiding experience is necessary. Find out more on www.irishgirlguides.ie or tel: 01 6683898.

ENDS

Irish Girl Guides has around 11,000 members. Guiding started in Ireland in 1911 and operates throughout the 26 counties with 1,600 volunteer leaders providing an informal educational programme of fun and challenging activities that foster confidence and leadership skills in girls and young women, enabling them to develop to their full potential and to become responsible citizens. Girls from age 5+ can choose to earn a wide range of

badges, including Aviation, Community Action, Cultural Diversity, Disability Awareness, Drug Awareness, Online Surfer, Science Investigator, STEM, Engineering and Global Traveller.