

Facing challenging times head-on

By Darragh Kelly

As a proud Kilmore, the attributes of resilience, courage and fortitude all too evident in the parish's Gaelic football teams, are qualities that are very much in evidence in the make-up of Joe Tiernan. His philosophy on life is simple, yet straight to the point. "There are three types of people. There are people from the shoulders down who are good manual workers. There are those from the shoulders up who are theorists, economists or politicians, many of whom talk but produce nothing of substance. And there's a minority who can think and execute it - I'd like to think I'm in that latter category," says Joe, when asked to describe himself.

"Housing was always a political football. In my lifetime, many of the Ministers for the Environment couldn't build a henhouse. And that's the sad reality. Of course, we're in a housing crisis. The only variable, after materials and labour, is the price of land.

"Until there's an abundant supply of developed land, land will always be scarce and housing will therefore be expensive. It's unsustainable prices that are being paid for land. The land is controlled

by politicians - local councillors rezone it in a grudging way. In the 1970s, there was a report by Justice Kenny on building land and successive Governments have sat on that report. The problem was compounded by Michael Noonan when NAMA was set up and took in all the development land and sold it off to Vulture Funds who are holding the country to ransom. Little progress will be made until those vulture funds are taxed and dealt with," he claims.

As to recent Government housing policies, Joe is sceptical, particularly in relation to plans to develop co-living spaces, devised by former Housing Minister Eoghan Murphy, which have since been shelved. "It's incomprehensible to be telling Irish people

to be living in cramped conditions." Joe, a former chairman of Homebound and president of the Construction Industry Federation of Ireland says that "Insulation has been the biggest change during my lifetime in construction. There's also the emergence of deluxe bathrooms, factory manufactured kitchens, and many innovations in heating. There's been huge progress in my lifetime. All of the changes were for the better.

"Our housing in Ireland is on par with the best in the world and better than many. But land is the problem and Governments have shielded away from a solution. Take the Kenny report off the shelves and dust it down," he says.



Kathy O'Flynn, Irish Ambassador to Spain; Sila Maguire; and Kilmore native and Papal Knight, Chevalier Joe Tiernan KCMS at an Irish Ball at the Kempinski Hotel, Estepona.

A political activist...

By Darragh Kelly

Parallel with his successes in the construction industry, there have been two other constants in Kilmore man Joe's Tiernan's life besides his family, namely his involvement in political affairs and his deep religious convictions.

For over forty years, he has been a member of his local Fine Gael branch in Castleknock, which he founded in 1979. Last year, the Castleknock Branch held a function in Joe's honour to acknowledge him as branch founder with Taoiseach Leo Varadkar making a presentation to Joe to mark the occasion.

He also served on the then Fine Gael National Executive for four years, working with Peter Prendergast, the party General Secretary, and Garret FitzGerald, the party leader, helping to reorganise the Party. Later, Joe stood for election to Dublin County Council in 1974 but was unsuccessful.

In 1982, he was selected to be the FG candidate in a famous Dublin West by-election, with even the suggestion of a Cabinet seat! On mature reflection, he decided, with some regret, that elected office was not for him, and he remained in the construction industry. Dublin West was then in the political hands of the late Jim Mitchell.

"I've always had a passion for politics. I've read all the Treaty debates, which is more than most people have done. I saw politics as a conduit for bringing about

change and I still do, although it is a slow process.

My late wife Mary's father, John Meighan from Ballaghaderreen, was a founder of Clann na Talmhain and he became both a T.D. and Senator, as well as serving as chairman of Roscommon County Council." He feels strongly about the electoral system and believes there is a need for fundamental change in how politics is organised: "We'll never have proper politics in this country until we abolish the multi-seat constituency model. I believe that single-seat constituencies with the single transferrable vote are the answer; not first past the post, like Westminster.

"The multi-seat constituency model means that a politician's real enemy is in his or her own party, as candidates from the same party are fishing in the same pool for votes. The internal party rivalry doesn't serve us well. I always try to act honourably, not alone do I try, but hopefully, I usually succeed. I never tell a lie about anything. That's a principle I have. High standards are sadly lacking in many people. I have tremendous admiration for the Priests and Nuns and the sacrifices they have made, not just as missionaries, but for all of us at home," says Joe.

In 2009, he was invested as a Knight of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, a Papal Order of the Sovereign Vatican State, with a Cardinal ap-



Kilmore man Joe Tiernan, Commander of the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem in Ireland represented them recently at a event in Madrid, Spain. He is pictured here with Kathy O'Flynn, Hillstreet and Cardinal Edwin O'Brien.

pointed by the Pope as Grand Master. Joe had been invited to join the Order in 2008 in recognition of his contribution to the work of the Catholic Church, and of his wider societal contributions.

He has since been twice promoted in the Order, as a Knight Commander in 2012, and more recently as a Grand Officer (Knight Commander with Star). He is the first native of County

Roscommon on record to be so honoured.

Joe lives for part of each year in Marbella, Costa Del Sol, Spain, where he is president of the English-speaking

Roman Catholic International Community of Marbella. That community comprises persons of more than twenty nationalities. "It's so important to have faith;

without it, one has no standards. We are the Church, it's not just 'them', the clergy. If we see something going wrong, there's an obligation on each of us if we

feel strongly to do something about it. We can't change the world overnight, but it's important that we put our shoulder to the wheel and try to influence the Church."

'I love Kilmore and Roscommon - it's part of who I am'

Now enjoying retirement, Joe Tiernan spends about half the year in his native Kilmore where boating and golf are his major passions, together with the preservation of some of the area's iconic buildings.

The old Church of Ireland in Kilmore was falling into decay and the church authority wanted to demolish it for security reasons. However, Joe, with others, influenced the authorities not to demolish the building. Instead the historic building is now managed by the local development association, which it is hoped, will mean the building is preserved for posterity.

"My roots are in Kilmore. I love the area and its countryside. It's easy for me

to say that as I live there from May until September or October. The River Shannon, which I boat on regularly, is not appreciated enough.

"Prior to the River Shannon being made navigable, there was no flooding. The water levels were raised by five/six feet to make the river navigable in about five different places. Consequently, when there's flooding, the Shannon has no capacity to take the water.

"Change the five sets of gates to vertical gates, establish a dedicated single authority to manage the River Shannon. Let the water run off to its natural level over a month in a controlled way in September or October. This would create capacity for water overflow off land when



Happy out near Kilmore.

Pic. Gerry Faughnan

it rains. A lot more could be done for the county from a tourism point of view. Roscommon can rightly be called 'the Royal County of the West' when you think of the

likes of Rathcroghan. I'm amazed greater strides haven't been made to highlight this resource."

As to the future, Joe is positive and in good health to

enjoy it. "My late wife, Mary (who passed away in 2013), was a rock of sense. She didn't approve of some of the things I did, but she was a stabilising influence. I have three great children - two of them are Chartered Surveyors. The third girl Michelle has had senior jobs in Aer Lingus and banking. Sharon went to Oxford University and at 23 years of age, was made manager of the 143 Disney stores in Europe. Our middle daughter Marika was a captain in the British Army; she manages the property side of things and also established her own property company, MR Real Estate."

And as to advice to anyone starting out, his words are succinct and to the point:

"You've got to have an entrepreneurial flair, and think big. If you think it, you can do it. Do good market research, be competent, comply with regulations and always act honourably. Try and pay the bills on time and in full. Develop a reputation for that, and you'll find that business will be easy."

Joe Tiernan remains very much a Roscommon man at heart. "I've had and continue to have great friendships from the county. "The late Bryan Murray, like myself, was a native of Kilmore and we were great friends in Dublin and remained in close contact. I love Kilmore and Roscommon - it's part of who I am."



Kilmore native Chevalier Joe Tiernan Knight Commander of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem received a Papal Star at a ceremony in Maynooth College on July 20th, 2019 from the Cardinal Sean Brady. Joe received a Papal Knighthood in July 2009.

Nurturing a strong business philosophy

For over fifty years, Kilmore native Joe Tiernan, through his company 'Tiernan Homes' was a major player in the capital's construction industry. Both Joe and his company earned a reputation for professionalism and reliability that continues to this day. Nevertheless, the industry can be challenging.

"It's never easy, people in construction are always under-capitalised and the business has an insatiable appetite for using up money. I would urge anyone going into the business to do good market research, be competent in obeying regulations, be well-capitalised and always act honourably and discharge all their debts in full," says Joe.

During a highly successful career, he and his colleagues at Tiernan Homes constructed over 40 developments throughout Dublin including warehouses, factories and office blocks, together with drainage, roads, parklands and the associated infrastructure.

"The development I'm proudest of is in Lucan where there are 525 houses with a 'T' on the front elevation of each house! The develop-

ment was opposed by politicians. Everything that's proposed in this country is opposed like what's happening with Coillte and licensing at the moment. The 'Tiernan Homes' Lucan development was a 'copybook' development from beginning to end.

"I'm very proud of my achievements. People moved from development to development buying houses off me. I built Trinity Court; it's now the National Drug Centre beside Trinity College in Pearse Street. I called one 125-house development in Swords, 'Foxwood' after where I came from in Kilmore. I always prided myself on setting standards and raising standards. It's either right or wrong. Never settle for half measures. A lot of people in construction may say it's good enough. But it's either right or its wrong," stresses Joe.

Luckily for Joe Tiernan, he left the construction business in 2004, four years before the economic crash. Luckily for him, he left unscathed, unlike many colleagues. He foresaw the crash that was to come and felt the then level of construction activity was simply unsustainable.