

wouldn't swap it for the world," said Ann. "We get on with it, simple as that, you have no other choice."

It was only when Ann's youngest child, Kevin, was six-months-old that the medical term Fragile X entered the family's life.

Up to then, it had been understood that the other three children had special needs. After Kevin, now 16, was diagnosed with Fragile X, it was discovered that Sharon, now 29, was also affected by the condition, while Sinead, 27, and Valerie, 22, were diagnosed as carriers. Both daughters also have epilepsy.

"We just thought that they had special needs, that was all. We didn't know what it was until Kevin was born. My two brothers have special needs so I was reared with it and I don't take an awful lot of notice really, to be honest with you. It

can be hard, but my husband, Martin, is brilliant. We are a very happy family, really and truly," she said.

During the day, Sharon goes to the workshop in St Joseph's Foundation in Charleville, Valerie stays at home, while Sinead has a part-time job in Bruree. Kevin, meanwhile, goes to the Holy Family School in Charleville.

"They love Manchester United and music, especially Daniel O'Donnell. They meet him often, and he is very good to them. He is great with special needs people in general.

Kevin is not able to read or write, but his routine when he comes home from school is to put on the Daniel O'Donnell DVD to watch Daniel, and there isn't a word out of him," she said.

Sharon, meanwhile, was the pride of the parish last month when she arrived home to Bruree with a bronze medal from the Special Olympics in Shanghai.

"She plays table tennis, and since she got involved with the Special Olympics she has been doing well. When she came home a few weeks

ago from Shanghai they had a big party for her in Bruree. They brought her over in a vintage car and gave her a lovely award," said Ann.

As well as catering to the needs of her children, Ann looks after her brother, Michael, who requires constant care and attention.

"He can feed himself, but he needs to be washed and dressed and looked after. He can't be left there on his own at any stage."

So does Ann O'Brien get any time to herself?

"My brother in Herbertstown might call and

leave us out, but we are not ones really for going out. All the children have little jobs, which helps and makes life easier. Sinead is like Mrs Bucket, she is always cleaning around, and Valerie helps, so I get to sit down and watch the soaps on the television, particularly Emmerdale," said Ann as she touches a locket that hangs around her neck.

"They are pictures of my late sister and mother. My sister, Mary, was a great help to me. She was outstanding and I miss her. But all the neighbours in Rockhill and Bruree are outstanding. I'm here five years and they are outstanding people. Myself and Martin have never met anyone like them."

The Limerick Person of the Month Award is jointly sponsored by the Clarion Hotel, Southern Advertising and the Limerick Leader.



## LIMERICK PERSON OF THE MONTH

# JP is officially Ireland's greatest giver to charity

By ANNE SHERIDAN

LIMERICK multi-millionaire JP McManus is now officially the country's greatest philanthropist.

One of Ireland's richest men, Mr McManus was named Irish Philanthropist of the Year at the Community Foundation for Ireland awards this week.

The quiet man of racing said he accepted the award "on behalf of the unsung heroes", and paid tribute to people whose work in the community went unnoticed.

"We in Ireland have a lot of philanthropy. If you look at some many people who give of their time without getting any award, taking care of our elderly, homeless, sick and handicapped," said Mr McManus.

He added that he felt honoured to receive the award, which recognised the businessman for his involvement in, and support of, many charities throughout the country, and particularly in his native Limerick.

One of only two recipients at the inaugural awards, Mr Manus was commended by the organisers for demonstrating "the vision, passion and generosity that true philanthropy is about".

Niall Mellon was awarded the International Philanthropist of the Year for his work in building houses for the



At the Philanthropist of the Year awards, from left, Niall Mellon, International Philanthropist of the Year; JP McManus, Irish Philanthropist of the Year; Tina Roche, chief executive, The Community Foundation for Ireland, and John Gallagher, foundation chairman

homeless in South Africa. The Niall Mellon Township Trust has built over 4,300 homes in Cape Town and brings over volunteers to the townships every year to take part in the project.

Mr Mellon called on more Irish people to support their own local communities and to get involved with projects overseas at any level they can.

Nominations for the awards were received from volunteer groups and other charitable organisations throughout Ireland. The winners

were decided by an independent judging panel which included the deputy leader of the Progressive Democrats, Liz O'Donnell; athlete Eamonn Coghlan; journalist and author Conor O'Clery and chairwoman, author Deirdre Purcell.

At the awards ceremony, Tina Roche, chief executive of The Community Foundation for Ireland, said both men were two highly-deserving candidates for the awards.

"These awards are not only about celebrating

their current philanthropic activity, but also recognising their ability to inspire others to think big, to get involved and to become the philanthropists of the future," said Ms Roche.

The foundation, which was established in 2000, helps people to engage in philanthropic activity by matching donors with the most deserving and worthwhile causes throughout Ireland. To date, they have made grants of over €4m on behalf of our donors to hundreds of organisations throughout Ireland.

## Limerick Leader Fun Run

By LEADER REPORTER

THE annual Limerick Leader Fun Run takes place on Sunday, December 23.

Runners and walkers are welcome to take part in the charity event in UL. All proceeds will be handed over to the Daughters of Charity in Lisnagry. Organised by Limerick Athletic Club, sponsorship cards are available from any club member or from the Limerick Leader office, 54, O'Connell Street. Callers must have identification.

Participants can dress up and prizes will be given for first man, first woman, best sponsorship collection and best fancy dress. The run begins at 10.30am. For further details, ph: 087-7982122.

## Hearing clinics

THE National Association for Deaf People has started outreach clinics in Abbeyfeale, Ennis and Nenagh. Clinics in Abbeyfeale will run on the second Friday of each month from 10am to 1pm in St Ita's Hall, starting December 14. Clinics in Ennis will run every second Wednesday from 2pm to 4.30pm in the Citizen's Information Centre on Bindon Lane, Bank Place, starting Wednesday, December 12. The Nenagh clinic will start this Tuesday and will run every Tuesday from 2pm to 4.30pm in Tyone Health Centre, Nenagh Hospi-

# Welfare group wins €30,000

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