

Mark O'Donnell
St. Columbas College, Glenties
Features - 2nd Place

GLENTIES LOVED ONES LIGHT UP CHRISTMAS

Having lived in Glenties my whole life, I have encountered and taken part in many celebrations down through the years, such as the National Tidy Town winner on numerous occasions. But this year, a very special one has stolen the hearts of the widespread community. A local man by the name of Brian Carr has come up with a remarkable idea to overcome the issue that arose in relation to the Christmas Lights. Given the fact that the lights had come to the end of their lifespan and the cost was going to be too much for our little town to bear, new lights were required. Glenties, along with many other towns in Ireland, has been a victim of the recession and until now, hasn't seen the light at the end of the tunnel.

Finding the money to cover the cost of the lights was not possible until Carr stepped up with his great idea; "Let Your Loved One Light Up Christmas". This idea consisted of an individual purchasing a bulb for €3 and writing the name of their loved one on the bulb to shine down over Glenties during the Christmas period.

When I heard of the success that the new lights brought, I immediately got in touch with Carr and we agreed to meet for an interview. When I arrived to the local public house known as Keeney's Bar that we arranged to meet on that cold, damp Saturday evening, he was there waiting for me. When we began to speak I could tell he was full of excitement and enthusiasm.

Where did this remarkable idea originate?

"It originated at a football match down in the Banks in Naomh Mhuire two years ago where they had just installed state of the art floodlights around their football pitch. What they did was; they got local businesses to sponsor each bulb and I thought this would be a great way of funding for our new lights. So myself, Frank McGuinness and James (Plumber) Boyle shared our idea and therein, the fundraiser was born; Let Your Loved One Light Up Christmas."

Did you think it would capture everyone's hearts like it did? How did they react?

"Absolutely not. We thought that maybe we could raise between €500 and €1,000 towards our new lights. That would have been a great help. But as it turned out, every single light bulb was sold. It really caught the imagination of everybody far and wide."

"People from all across the county, and around the country, and indeed even abroad, wanted to be associated with this idea."

I could see by looking at the lights that there must be thousands of bulbs. Did you run out of bulbs to sell in the end up, or were there any left over?

"There were 840 bulbs in our old system and every bulb was 1 metre apart, and for LED lights to work, every bulb needed to be a half a metre apart, so 1680"

bulbs were required to cover the whole main street. Every single bulb was sold, and everyone looking for a bulb was accommodated for.”

Did the whole outcome surpass your expectations?

“Absolutely. Nobody could have foreseen the momentum that arose because of this idea. We were absolutely overwhelmed by it all. When Eileen Magner got in touch with us, we just couldn’t believe it. She said we were the first town in the country to do something like this and she wanted to do a news broadcast for the switch-on of our lights. And true to her word, she camera crew for our switch-on at 6 o’ clock on Sunday the 4th December, and it was aired on the 9 o’ clock news that night.”

Were there any strange requests or famous names on any of the bulbs?

“Yes there was. Most of the bulbs were all to do with close family and friends but we did notice a bulb there for the famous singer Leonard Cohen. There was also a bulb there in memory of all the ones who have no one to remember them, which was very nice.”

Will this be an annual celebration or will it happen again when the bulbs fuse?

“It won’t be an annual celebration because the LED bulb is made to last longer. So given the fact that our old set of bulbs lasted seventeen years, we hope to let everyone’s loved ones light of Glenties for the foreseeable future.”

Judges citation:

In 2nd place was a fun and detailed write up on a remarkable idea instigated by Brian Carr of Glenties in Donegal.

The simple yet genius idea was the ideal topic for this student to write about - but I have to stress that the runner up spot was not awarded to Mark just because the subject matter was fascinating.

It was a clever, well-researched and articulated piece of work which was an obvious contender and worthy winner of our 2nd place prize. Congratulations to Mark O’Donnell of St Columbas Comprehensive in Glenties.