**TRIBUTE TO GERRY MCGONIGLE [RIP 30.03.19]**

Members of Omagh Probus Club were stunned when the news filtered through on Saturday morning that their dear friend, Gerry McGonigle had died suddenly in the South West Hospital. Gerry had been the Club Secretary for many years and had been out at the Club on Wednesday morning as was his wont. He appeared to be his usual hale and hearty self despite being in constant discomfort from sciatica which of late necessitated the use of a rollator to move about. However, he was still able to drive and as recently as Friday evening had driven himself and two pals to the birthday party of a 90-year friend. Sometime during the night he was taken critically unwell and rushed to hospital where he passed away.

His funeral mass in the Sacred Heart Church was attended by his many friends in Probus and across the wider community. Gerry had for several years been a loyal member of St Eugene’s Band and the atmosphere was set for a most dignified church service by the band playing some of Gerry’s favourite hymns as mourners gathered. Moving tributes were paid by friends and family and passages of Holy Scripture beautifully read by Gerry’s two grandchildren, Isobel, aged 14 and Alex, age 11. Among those in attendance were senior girls from the Assumption Grammar School in Ballinahinch where Gerry’s daughter, Karen, is Head of Technology and Design. The pupils had come to support their teacher, and after the service formed a guard of honour outside the door of the chapel, flanked by members of the Probus Club

In his address Father Christopher acknowledged Gerry’s selfless service to his family, to his colleagues when he was working and the wider community in retirement. He was a man who always put others before self and despite having to face down many obstacles along the way, he never complained. His contributions to the Samaritans in Omagh, to St Eugene’s Band and the Probus Club were celebrated during the service along with Gerry’s contribution to the many activities in which he was an active participant. He was a great committee man, with an eye for detail and a delight in the good order of things. His record keeping was legendary. Gerry could drill down into the depths of his laptop and come up with documents to add weight of the files he carried in his brief case.

Following his funeral service Gerry was laid to rest in the cemetery at St Mary’s Church, Drumragh. As members of St Eugene’s band escorted his coffin to the graveside, piper, Ray Moore, played a lament on the bagpipes. In a final salute which Gerry would have been sure to appreciate Shay Turbitt from the band sounded the last post on his trumpet. Those who had not been able to pay their respects to the family at O’Kanes rest home on Sunday afternoon had a further opportunity to do so following refreshments in the Coach Inn.

Gerry will be remembered by those who knew him and had the joy of working with him as a cheerful, generous, positive person, for whom nothing was too much trouble when it came to keeping the organisations with which he was involved moving forward. His cheerful chuckle and self-deprecating sense of humour endeared him to all as did his determination never to let life get on top of him. His quiet dedication to his wife, Kathleen, during the latter years of her life in care, earned him the respect and regard of all. As was said at his mass, if heaven is ruled by a committee, then Gerry is sure to be on it, and heaven will be a better place for all who have gone before and follow on.

Jim McBain

Omagh Probus Club
02.04.19