

# Night of the shining Stars



The Argus Community Star Awards 2014

3 Nov 2014

THERE was not a dry eye in the house come Saturday evening at The Argus Community Stars Awards ceremony.

After hearing countless inspirational stories from some of Sussex's finest achievers, the hundreds of people packed inside the glamorous **Theatre Royal** in Brighton could be forgiven for feeling a little emotional.

Formerly known as The Argus Achievement Awards, the ceremony returned for a 13th year with a brand new name, logo and award categories to recognise the outstanding efforts of men, women, children and organisations across the county.

It was this newspaper's intention to champion all those who deserved recognition for their selfless, brave and generous actions during the past year – and to provide a platform to honour the people who have touched all our lives.

And it was also to thank our readers, generous sponsors and of course the nominees and winners, for their support.

In recent weeks The Argus office has been inundated with brilliant nominations for 20 different categories including Young Sports Star of the

Year, Grandparent and Parent of the Year, Green Project or Person of the Year and Carer of the Year. A judging panel led by editor Michael Beard was tasked with sifting through the amazing entrants to a shortlist of just three for each category – all of who were invited to the ceremony on Saturday.

It was no mean feat. Everybody who was nominated, even those that did not make the shortlist, had a positive impact on lives and personified the true meaning of community spirit.

Saturday's ceremony was hosted by newsreader and patron of The Argus Appeal Nicholas Owen, who began proceedings by announcing nominees and winners of the first category, Charity of the Year.

It was the most popular category in terms of number of nominations, with The Connor Saunders Foundation, Baby Buddy and Extratime making the final three.

Portslade-based Extratime scooped the award for its work in providing affordable and accessible childcare to families with severely disabled children.

The charity, which opened its first club in September 2003 at Hillside School, was approached by the council shortly after its opening to see if it could repeat its success in Woodingdean.

One nomination said: "Extratime provide such fun and caring childcare and support to children with disabilities and families. They look at a child and instead of saying outright that they can't do something, they modify each activity to accommodate the individual's ability."

Next was the Outstanding Contribution to Sussex award, with the shortlist, decided by sponsor American Express, including [Brighton Festival's](#) Andrew Comben, Paddle Round the Pier's David Samuel, Glyndebourne's Sir George Christie, charity worker Mervyn Weeks and Brighton business guru Tony Mernagh.

David Samuel took the crown for leading the world's biggest annual free beach festival since 1996 – and raising more than £2million for charity in the process.

Ivan Mainprize, vice president of American Express said: "David proved a popular choice, receiving a huge number of votes. Paddle Round the Pier has gained an international reputation and David, the founder, has transformed the event into the world's largest free charity beach festival."

The Community Event of the Year award saw Fulking Fair fend off competition from Patchfest and Patcham Horticultural Society's annual show.

Bob Rowland, of Fulking Fair, said: “More than 200 people now help us put on the best fair in Sussex and a lot of work goes into it, so we’re so happy to have received this award.

“The rest of the village will be delighted, we’ll put the certificate in the village hall.”

Grandparent of the Year was contested by tremendous trio Terry and Heather Blaza, Michelle Dann and Barbara Wesley. It was Barbara who took the prize for her 24 years of tireless work as chairman of the West Sussex Children’s Liver Disease Foundation, helping to raise more than £200,000 through grassroots fundraising.

The nominees for the Beyond the Call of Duty award were paramedic Gary Criddle, who disarmed a gunman, friend to the homeless Adam Brooks and kind nurse Rosemary Campbell. Rosemary was crowned winner for her efforts in ensuring a dying patient saw her beloved dog one last time.

One of the biggest cheers of the night came for the winner of Volunteer of the Year. Paul Collins raised more than £20,000 over six years for complex Brighton and Hove special needs charity Sparkles and Surprises – despite dealing with cerebral palsy himself and being a wheelchair user. He was chosen ahead of the dedicated Peter Bowles and Java Community Cafe.

Juice 107.2 sponsored the Parent of the Year category, which saw veteran foster parents Thelma and Lawrie Young, cyber-bullying activist Scott Freeman and wonder-mum Janice Ellis all up for the award. It was Thelma and Lawrie Young, from Worthing, who were celebrated for their near four decades of fostering across the county.

The Young Sports Star of the Year award was given an extra touch of magic thanks to sponsors American Express. The firm arranged for Brighton and Hove Albion star Craig Mackail-Smith to record a special congratulations video for winner Freddie Sharpe, aged seven.

Albion fan Freddie won for his prolific goal scoring exploits for Denton and South Heighton Junior Football Club’s under-sevens.

The beaming winner, who scored 120 goals in a season for his club, was also presented with a personalised Albion shirt. The youngster saw off competition from talented wakeboarding prodigy Buddy Redman and wheelchair basketball and discus ace Lewis Edwards.

Michael Sharpe, Freddie’s dad, said: “Freddie is really made up, and so are all of us. There were so many special people at the event so we’re privileged.” Ten-year-old charity fundraiser Levi Spong won the Young Community Star of the Year award, ahead of crime-fighting Kiya Ingham and charity founder Tyler Murphy.

Levi's dad Jon said: "Levi was absolutely gobsmacked when they announced him as the winner. Tyler and Kiya were such amazing company that Levi couldn't believe it when he got the award. The award has really put the wind under his wings."

Levi has raised £3,229.00 for charity, including fundraising for The Mo Farah Foundation.

For the Public Services award the winners were [Sussex Police](#)'s PC Ali Deller and PC Alec Barrett, chosen after saving a man's life by plugging his stab wounds with their hands for 90 minutes.

The pair told The Argus they were "shocked and humbled" after being recognised ahead of the valuable Beachy Head Chaplaincy Team and admirable St John Ambulance volunteer Rita Marley.

'Mr Burgess Hill' Peter Chapman was unveiled as the winner of the Community Star of the Year award for his efforts in running the popular Burgess Hill Uncovered operation. Community gardening stalwart Barbara Aston and charity fundraiser Joanne Jameson narrowly missed out on the prize.

Mr Chapman said: "It means so much to receive the award. When I saw all the reasons I'd been nominated it was the first time I actually stopped to think about what I actually do locally and it's so much more than I ever realised."

Housing maintenance firm Mears scooped the Business in the Community Award ahead of the Ladies Mile Pub and Trevor Sorbie. The prize was given for the company's efforts in rewiring a local scout hut completely free of charge.

Employee of the Year was won by [Royal Sussex County Hospital](#)'s Diana Cracknell for her commitment to keeping up the spirits of her patients, while the Green Project or Person of the Year went to the [University of Brighton](#)'s Waste House project.

As the ceremony rolled on, popular Brighton music venue [Concorde 2](#) won the Contribution to Arts and Culture prize and Di Bacon won the Carer of the Year award.

Other deserving winners included Local Hero award winner Alan Gibson, who founded a now-popular martial arts group after arriving in Brighton with just a sleeping bag, and Youth Group of the Year award winner the Boathouse Theatre Company.

Chairman of Brighton Parks Tennis Association Mike Jenner won the Contribution to Sussex Sport award and all five nominees of the Carole Barnes Courageous Child award were made winners in the ceremony finale.

It was an emotional ending to proceedings, with all the nominated children invited on stage for a rapturous round of applause and pictures.

There were cheers and tears as the heart-wrenching stories of Ellie Mae Wile-Dunne, Sam Harwood, Oliver Poinsignon, William Pedersen and Annie Nealgrove were heard.

As the confetti rained down, host Nicholas Owen brought the event to an end for another year.

Argus editor Michael Beard said: "We've been doing these awards for a number of years now and they just keep getting better and better.

"The stories behind the nominations were really moving and it was a privilege to be able to honour people in the community who really deserve recognition.

"You could tell from the reaction from the audience that all the nominees were thoroughly deserving of awards and I congratulate everyone for making it an evening to remember."