

Third Age celebrates growing older as it turns 25

“Quality of life gets better as we get older. Nine out of ten over 65s appreciate life more than in young adulthood. Nine out of ten feel more in control. One in five volunteers regularly. One in four looks after family and friends and one in two gives significant time to grandchildren”, said Professor Rose Anne Kenny, founder of the Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing, (TILDA), Trinity College Dublin.

“Staying engaged, volunteering, helping each other, making a difference is part of what Third Age is about. We are here today to recognise the contribution they have made to ageing, the value they bring and the importance of using the human capital of retired people”, she said.

She was speaking at Third Age’s 25th anniversary celebration in Summerhill yesterday. A turning of the sod ceremony on a new primary care centre took place in the village after the celebrations. The purpose-built centre will incorporate HSE offices, GP surgery and the Third Age national office.

Third Age, which began as the Summerhill Active Retirement Association a quarter of a century ago, has grown to become a national organisation with over 1,200 volunteers delivering a range of local, regional, national and international programmes which benefit communities. Third Age Senior Help Line received over 28,000 calls from older people throughout Ireland last year; Fáilte Isteach, Third Age’s award winning programme offers free classes in conversational English to 1,600 migrant families each week, while the Third Age National Advocacy Programme has trained over 200 volunteers to work as independent advocates in over 120 Irish nursing homes, and training continues.

In tracing the history of Third Age, board member, Pat Cox, spoke of a story of goodness and belief. “Third Age Founder Mary Nally had the compassion to see life through the eyes of others, to see what was needed, to see what can be done and to see how to respond to those needs”, he said. Third Age used yesterday’s occasion to showcase its many programmes and activities. Members and volunteers past and present from throughout Ireland mingled to reminisce.

Grace O’Shaughnessy, ambassador for Third Age spoke elegantly and honestly about growing older: “Old age is a privilege denied to many people. I’m much more at my ease; I don’t have to prove myself anymore. I feel wiser in many ways. At 73, I feel better than I did at 33 and 43. The only way is to go on, to become involved, to go out and think about other people. If we get involved with other people we’re the ones that benefit.”

Guests were entertained by the Garda Band before gathering at the site of the primary care centre for the sod turning ceremony performed by Alex White, Minister of State for Primary Care. The new centre will be the first in the country to include a HSE and GP facility with a Third Age centre under one roof.

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