

Recommendation for Mayor's Community Award Scheme

MR RAY CONNOLLY

I confirm that I have known Ray Connolly for a period of 19 years, during which time I have seen him give unstinting services to many people of the borough, always with a very cheerful attitude, and for no recompense whatsoever, and I believe, often at personal cost.

Ray and I were part of the Holmesdale School Parents Association in 1988 where we used to organise and take part in "Saturday morning sports" for the benefit of anything up to 40 children at a time, most Saturday mornings during school terms. These mornings gave the children of the school, who at that time were based in a Victorian building in Holmesdale Road, the opportunity to take part in possibly the only physical activity of the week. Many parents joined in, and subsequently became part of a very strong school community, which I believe continues today.

Our children then moved on to Reigate Priory First School, and once again, we offered the opportunity for football coaching sessions on a Saturday morning. On the first Saturday that we took the session, over 60 boys and girls turned up, and it was apparent that a lot of effort would be required to keep it going. Once again, Ray gave great service to the school community and I decided that I would approach Reigate Priory Football Club to try and introduce a structured environment for football at youth level. We commenced with an Under 11's football team in 1993 following an invite from the then Chairman of Reigate Priory Football Club, Mr Ian Stemp. Should you wish to seek any further endorsement in regard to the following statement, Mr Stemp can be contacted on 01737 223603.

Following our link up with the Club I took on the role of manager of the team and Ray continued with the coaching and organisation of mini games during Saturday mornings for the boys and girls at the lower ages. I have witnessed occasions where we have had over 100 children taking part in sport on a Saturday mornings through the efforts of this one man alone.

In 1995 Ray was asked to become Chairman of the Football Club as work pressures were making life difficult for Mr Stemp. He somewhat reluctantly accepted the position, as he has never been a man for title or great recognition. From that day he has almost single handedly run one of the oldest Football Clubs in the world, albeit through much personal sacrifice over the past 11 year period.

He now can be found on a Saturday refereeing an Under 8's game in the morning, a man's game in the afternoon, working the bar in the evening, and cleaning the club changing facilities after everyone has gone. He will return on a Sunday and again, may referee anything up to 3 games and once again, carry out all the necessary duties to keep the club facilities in good order. He has continually negotiated with Reigate Priory Cricket Club, the Club's landlord, to ensure that this famous Football Club continues to play on its original pitch. No other football club in this country has managed this feat for so long.

He can be found most evenings at the Club carrying out repairs, cleaning, running the bar and assisting myself with coaching on Wednesday evenings. I strongly believe that he truly does deserve some recognition for the fantastic amount of effort that he puts in for the benefit of men and boys from the age of 8 to 45 plus.

Over any one weekend the Club is represented by up to 11 football sides, providing physical exercise and enjoyment for up to 130 individuals – all because of one man – Ray Connolly.