



The Fitz Files

DEVON'S TREASURED BROADCASTING LEGEND DAVID FITZGERALD SHARES STORIES OLD AND NEW WITH READERS

Privilege to see four community stalwarts receive royal recognition

I HAD a visitor last week in the shape of Mr Fred Finn, the world's most travelled man, according to The Guinness Book of Records, having clocked up 15,000,000 miles around this planet and 718 trips on Concorde.

This time he was making the relatively simple journey to Devon to see me. Fred is certainly no stranger to the county as he grew up in Exmouth, so he was down in the area to visit relatives and catch up with the gossip. I was expecting him on the Friday, but a text arrived on Thursday evening with a rather strange message.

"I've got a flat tyre. I'm going to be about 20 minutes late."

The world's most travelled man had turned into the world's most troubled man. Then I began to panic. Had I got the day wrong? Was he turning up this evening, 20 minutes late! Also, he is now 85 years old and dealing with a flat tyre on the side of the road really isn't the best thing at that age. I messaged him back.

"Are you on the A38?"

"No, Düsseldorf!"

"What?"

"Sorry, that text was meant for my wife, see you tomorrow. By the way, they've changed the tyre quicker on the perimeter runway than they have ever done on my car... and nobody had to get off."

It kept me awake that night wondering what sort of jack was needed to lift a plane full of passengers...

A little later I had the great honour of attending the Devon Lieutenantcy Investiture at County Hall where the British Empire Medal was handed to recipients for incredible dedication and service within our community.

The first was a very familiar name, Rosemary Howell, who lives but a short distance from me and was being awarded a BEM. Rosemary has supported a voluntary adoption agency, Families for Children, over an extensive period of time where she has assisted the chief executive to achieve an outstanding Ofsted rating and chairing adoption panels which has placed children, often with complex and additional needs, with loving families.

In addition, she has been involved in ensuring families receive the right adoption support to thrive using her own experiences of being an

adopter. Rosemary has also contributed to the Girl Guides for over 70 years. She was a county commissioner for 10 years but has always remained very involved and has enabled changing guiding from 'camping fun and practical knowledge' to concentrating on development of leadership and professionalism in girls and young women.

She is also a very active member of the Devon Historic Churches Trust, helping to raise over £1 million to help many of the churches. But I found that one of her greatest passions is the development of Lukesland Gardens, the family-owned estate which clings to the edge of Dartmoor and offers beautiful plants and trees in magical surroundings, which at the time of writing is looking absolutely fantastic.

I asked Rosemary why she thinks she got the medal. She listed all of the above achievements but wanted to concentrate on the gardens of her beloved Lukesland.

"I have never seen so many handkerchiefs on the Handkerchief tree and the carpet of bluebells has been stunning. The season is wonderful, the flowering has been fantastic, helped by the fact that there has been rain at night, but we do need more."

Katherine Friedrich founded People Assisting Torbay's Homeless (PATH). She started by visiting the homeless on the streets of Torbay, talking, listening and being a friendly face, then supplying food and drinks and encouraging the community to make sandwiches.

She has visited and volunteered at the homeless charities in the area such as Street Pastors Torquay, The Salvation Army and the Totnes drop-in centre to learn as much as she could. She has also visited schools and colleges in the area to spread awareness to younger generations. PATH has evolved to support a large number of people, including those without a permanent address and families on low income. She has worked with Torbay Council to find new premises for PATH and has quietly and humbly built an organisation that literally saves lives and provides love and care for the most isolated members of the community.

Katherine explained the size of the problem in Torbay.



Sarah and Kenneth White from Torrington with David Fursdon, His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of Devon



Rosemary Howell is awarded her British Empire Medal



Katherine Friedrich, above. Inset: Fitz with Fred Finn and Concorde



"Homelessness is an umbrella; it is bigger than people realise. Apart from those we see living on the streets, there are the sofa surfers, who are vulnerable... people in temporary accommodation, which is not ideal, and rough sleepers; they

will always be our priority. The more work we can do to prevent homelessness in the first place will hopefully slow the issue down."

I asked if she knew who had put her name forward.

"Quite a few, I have recently discovered... very humbling. This has never been about me. It's a bizarre thing to be recognised... and is a bitter-sweet event for me."

Finally, to Sarah and Kenneth White, who co-founded the charity Supershoes in 2013. Their mission was to impact children fighting cancer by creating personalised converse trainers decorated with amazing designs chosen by the young people themselves.

Thanks to them, Supershoes have donated over 6,000 pairs to children across the UK and raised over £25,000 to provide young cancer victims with a unique pair of shoes they can wear with pride. Sarah was inspired to launch Supershoes after learning about an incredibly brave four-year-old called Henry Alan who was battling from a form of brain cancer.

Henry, who sadly lost his battle, was the first recipient of a pair of 'super shoes'. Sarah wanted to reach out to hundreds more children affected by cancer and asked artists to volunteer at that time to hand paint and design converse shoes, especially for a young person.

It is a volunteer-led organisation and together they have managed to secure over 350 artists, 18 administrative volunteers and five trustees. It costs between £70 and £100 to create a pair of shoes so their outstanding leadership and work to fundraise and spread awareness of the charity has been vital.

Kenneth has been a trustee of the charity for 11 years and is responsible for governance, ensuring their activities align with the charity's constitution and long-term strategic objectives.

Their original goal when founding Supershoes was to deliver 52 pairs a year. However, they now process over 50 referrals in a week. Thanks to their exceptional leadership, the charity has helped thousands of young people and their families across the UK.

So, what did they think of the award?

"We can't really compare the experience, especially as the two of us had to stand up. We are accepting these are part of the charity and not as individuals," said Sarah.

Kenneth added: "One of the surprises to us has been the improvement in mobility of those who have received the shoes. They give them a boost, make them feel really special."

Where are they going to place the medals?

"On my pyjamas," said Kenneth. "I'm very proud of it. I am sure we will find a place of honour in the house to display them both."