

Report from Joint Conference Belfast May 2015 Europa Hotel



Maria Finnegan, SI Ballinasloe with Ann Garvie, President SI International at the North/South Conference in Belfast.

The 49th North South Conference took place in the Europa Hotel Belfast on May 15th to May 17th, 2015.

Regional President Karen, National Association President Margaret and Soroptimist from Northern Ireland's thirteen Clubs welcomed the visitors. Thirty three clubs were represented at this annual get together.

Some members and friends enjoyed a very pleasant game of golf on the Friday and relaxed over dinner that night. The Conference was formally opened by Federation President Jenny Vince.

A beautiful cake made by a Soroptimist was auctioned that night and over £500.- was presented to President Jenny. This money will be used for the benefit of women and children in Nepal where her daughter is doing voluntary work at the moment.

The lucky winner of the cake was Maria Finnegan, Vice President SI ROI and President of SI Ballinasloe.





The delegates at the Joint Conference in Belfast enjoyed wonderful speakers, including the winners from the Public Speaking Competition.

Speakers at Joint Conference:

Jim Gamble, Child Protection expert & CEO of INEQUE Group

Jim spoke of his experiences in Northern Ireland, London & Cambodia that led him to challenge the system and make a difference to children suffering abuse, particularly of a sexual nature. In his life he was influenced by strong women taking the lead. He was appalled by the number of young & vulnerable, near & far, being protected by panels made up of only men. He spoke of the fact that historically we know for a fact that images of a sexual nature goes back at least to 1874 so likely throughout history. It is not only the internet that has allowed this abuse of children. It is the people (mainly men but sometimes women) not the equipment that are at fault. We need to be aware, curious & challenging to support these children. Be aware for your own & others. Children need to be at the central focus, not those doing the protecting. Jim differentiated between abuse & the naturally occurring sexual curiosity of teenagers & that incidents should be handled differently. Jim spoke with conviction & clarity on a difficult subject & gave us insight that perhaps we had avoided or misread in the past.

Mary Clare Deane, Chief Executive of the Grand Opera House in Belfast, right next to the Europa.

Mary Clare gave us her history of how, as the eldest of seven girls, she was influenced by women throughout her childhood and through her third level education at Queen's University and into her various careers. She suffered only once at the hands of a female boss, who, she thought, took on her role in the fashion of a man rather than being a female boss as she was. Singing had been Mary Clare's forte from being a child but her work had been in administration of companies & the finance involved. Once she knew of the vacancy at the Grand Opera House in Belfast that would give her an opportunity to return home & take a job that would be her every wish, she applied immediately. Her appointment shows how being a woman should not impede your progress in your career. She spoke with passion & conviction & was a pleasure to hear.

Billy Dixon, Motivational Speaker

Another speaker with fond memories of strong women at home & in the technical college who influenced him to make the changes that resulted in his becoming a teacher for twenty two years before progressing to a motivational speaker to football players, business people & companies as well as women like us.

He considered himself thick without any particular talent but discovered that ability can be learnt by raising your confidence and extending your comfort zones. He did not recommend always having a positive attitude because from the negative could come good. Be prepared for failure as well as success then either way you are ready to move to the next stage. Learn to fill the gaps in your ability. You don't always know how you will respond in different circumstances. It is important to change your behaviour to change your attitude. Cumulative stress can have a higher effect on your resilience than individual but high impact stress.

The tips he gave to improve your image were these:

The way you stand & the way you look

The way you walk

Make eye contact with those within 6 feet of yourself

Smile

Change your routines, routines re-inforce attitudes.... Your routines of dressing for example

To improve your image you should work with facts not your emotional response.

Public Speaking Winners

Rebecca Ross spoke on Gender quotas

Hannah Martin spoke on Apprenticeship or Degrees

The presentations were excellent particularly as the students had to follow professional speakers.

Spanner in the Works A drama group, with specially written plays, depicting difficult life experiences.

Three actors depicted a scene between a mother, with dementia, & her relationship with her nurse, her son & her own thoughts. A very harsh reality that affected us all on an emotional level. A hard hitting experience that was good for us to see.

The conference business was brought to a close & the other events were social & friendly.

After a free afternoon to shop and sightsee the members then assembled for Gala Dinner.

Guest speaker was International President Ann Garvie.

The evening concluded with entertainment and music.

Following an Act of Rededication and Thanksgiving on Sunday morning we said our goodbyes with promises to meet again at the North South Conference in Mullingar in May 2016.