



Longford Leader



Jim bows out after 40-year career with An Garda Síochána

Retirement

BY PATRICK CONBOY

Having served as a member of An Garda Síochána for 40 years, Longford town-based sergeant Jim Parker retired from the force in August.

Originally from Finglas in County Dublin, Jim graduated from the Garda college in Templemore in the 1970s and was originally assigned to a station not far from where he grew up.

"I joined on the 25th of September, 1974," he recalled. "I was stationed in Cabra, where I spent 11 years. Among my duties there, I patrolled Áras an Uachtaráin, the US ambassador's residence, and the Papal Nuncio's residence in the Phoenix Park."

"One of my highlights of that time was the visit of the Pope in 1979. I was on motorcycle patrol, providing full-time protection of the cross in Phoenix Park. Gardaí were drafted in from all over the country to police the event."

In the mid-1980s, Jim made his first move to the midlands and he revealed it was romance which prompted him to seek reassignment.

"I married a Galway woman. Una is originally from Creggs in County Galway, so in 1986 I moved to Kinnegad as it

was halfway between Galway and Dublin," he laughed.

His stay in Westmeath would be relatively brief, though, as within a few years he was promoted to sergeant, which necessitated another move.

"I was promoted in 1989 and transferred to Burtonport in Donegal. At the time I hadn't even heard of the place; it's a very quiet fishing port," he admitted.

Although the area was quiet and remote, Jim still has fond memories of his time on the north Donegal coast.

"One of my highlights of the time was the visit of the Pope in 1979."

"Packie Bonner is from Burtonport so there was great excitement during the World Cup in 1990," he remembered. "When he saved the penalty against Romania there were celebrations on the street and the local pipe band played into the early hours. I met his family during that time and I was on duty when Packie returned home to a hero's welcome."

After six months in Burtonport, Jim found himself on the move again, this time being relocated to Longford, where he would settle down permanently.

"We moved to Longford in 1990 and rented a house in Newtownforbes for the first two years. My two daughters, Karen and Susan, went to school there, too. Then we built a house in Clonbalt; we've made our home in Longford," Jim explained. "We have great friends and neighbours."

Recalling memorable events he patrolled in the town, Jim said Albert Reynolds' triumphant return to Longford as Taoiseach was unforgettable.

"There were thousands out on the street to hear his speech outside the courthouse," he said.

As a keen sports fan, other stand-out moments for Jim include being on duty at Flancare Park to witness Longford Town's League Cup success in 2004, and Longford's game against Dublin at Pearse Park in 2006.

"There was great excitement in the town," he added.

Jim's final eight years in the Gardaí was spent in the Traffic Corps, a role he enjoyed but which also presented challenges. "Over the years I attended a lot of accidents involving young people."

"One of the hardest jobs for a member of the Gardaí is calling to a home to inform parents that their son or daughter has been killed; it's heartbreaking. I'll always remember the tragedies I attended," he admitted. "I appeal to people to slow down and not to use mobile phones and concentrate fully when driving."

As he hung up his uniform for the last time, family, friends and colleagues turned out in great numbers to wish Jim all the best at a party held in his honour.

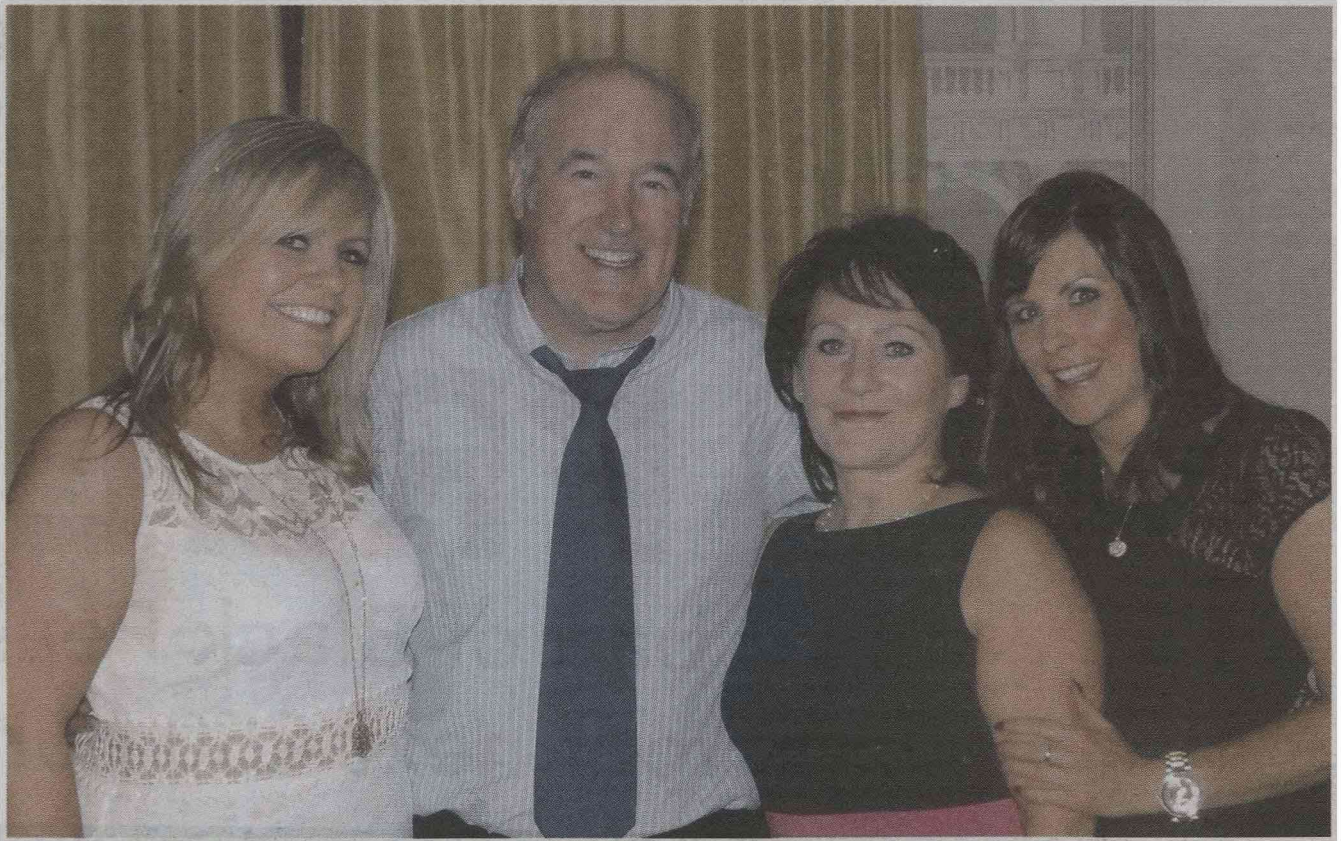
"We had a lovely function in the Longford Arms. There was a great turn-out - a lot of my colleagues from Longford, Roscommon, Westmeath, and Cabra were there, as were my family, friends and neighbours."

bours.

"Superintendent Fergus Treanor said a few words and made a presentation to me, as did the Traffic Corps and the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors and Donie Sweeney made a presentation to me on behalf of the International Police Association," he said.

"The plan now is to enjoy life," Jim smiled. "I'm a member of Longford Golf Club now; I'm not much good at it at the moment but I'm hoping to improve!"

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Jim Parker pictured at his retirement party with his wife Una (centre) and daughters Susan and Karen.