

## Press Release

# YOUNGEST EVER GRAND MARSHAL ANNOUNCED TO LEAD 2016 NATIONAL ST. PATRICK'S PARADE

*Joanne O'Riordan, Young Person of the Year winner, is selected as Grand Marshal of the 2016 St. Patrick's Festival Parade*

### Dublin, 25<sup>th</sup> February 2016:

Joanne O'Riordan, 19, has been selected by St. Patrick's Festival to lead this year's Festival Parade and in accepting this honour Joanne has become the youngest ever Grand Marshal. It is fitting that Joanne will lead out the parade as the youngest ever Grand Marshal as in 2016 the festival will celebrate the future as part of the Ireland 2016 programme for Youth & Imagination with the theme Imagine If...

This year's Festival promises a world class line-up of cultural events that will showcase all that is great about Ireland both domestically and internationally, creating a carnival atmosphere across the Capital.

At only 19 years of age, Joanne has achieved remarkable things in her life. She has been awarded both Cork Person of the Month and Young Person of the Year and spoke in 2012 at the United Nations about technology where she challenged the technological minds of the world to invent a robotic device that would assist her in becoming even more independent in her daily life. Trinity College Dublin answered this call and is currently in the process of developing 'Robbie the Robot'. Recently Joanne appeared on RTÉ Television in an independent documentary titled **No Limbs No Limits** which was directed and produced by her brother Steven. The film explores Joanne's personal relationships with her family and those she meets on a daily basis and is seen as an education on how the human spirit can triumph over adversity.

Joanne, a 2<sup>nd</sup> year criminology student at UCC and from Millstreet Co. Cork is one of seven people in the world living with Total Amelia, a syndrome in which individuals are born without limbs. Total Amelia is a very rare congenital disorder which is caused by mutations in the WNT3 gene and in Joanne's case means she was born without all four limbs. Joanne received a Quercus Scholarship to study in UCC for her Active Citizen work. Joanne recently won the JCI (Junior Chamber International) Top Outstanding Young Person of the World award which saw her fly to Japan to accept the accolade.

Both Joanne and her family have never allowed her condition to hold her back. Using technology to enhance her abilities in both her educational pursuits and the wider social environment has led to Joanne conquering major challenges at home, in school and around her local community. Joanne lives life with a no limits mentality and her outlook on life has served as an example both nationally and internationally to all able bodied and disabled bodies to live very happy, independent and fulfilled lives.

On receiving the honour of Grand Marshal, Joanne commented; "I am extremely honoured and delighted to be this year's Grand Marshal in the Dublin St. Patrick's Festival. As a small child growing up in Millstreet I have always been awe-inspired and filled with joy seeing the colours, enthusiasm and buzz that fills the streets of Dublin every year. To be a part of it is a serious dream come true. I have been around the globe, to New York and Japan, giving the people with a disability in this world a voice. To be able to come home and be the Grand Marshal in this parade, it helps the people of Ireland see it's not the disability it's the ability. I am proud to be in the St. Patrick's Day Festival and I'm incredibly proud to be a voice for the voiceless."



Susan Kirby, CEO of St. Patrick's Festival commented; *"We are thrilled to announce Joanne as Grand Marshal for this year's Festival Parade. Joanne and her outlook on life are an incredibly powerful story and an important message to share. Her achievements to date are an example of the ability of a strong will and she is a great ambassador for people young and old, of whatever ability to live life to the full. We wish Joanne, our youngest ever Grand Marshal, the best of luck in her role and we hope she enjoys every minute of the experience."*

In 2014 the Festival embarked on a three-year creative thematic for its principal event, the Festival Parade, each year being inspired by the Past, the Present and the Future respectively. The 2016 theme, **Imagine If...**, responds to the Future thematic and marks the final instalment of an exciting creative trilogy which will see the streets of Dublin come to life with spectacular pageantry and performance. St. Patrick's Festival is proud to be an official programme partner of Ireland 2016. In what is a significant year for Ireland, the principles of the proclamation and the significance of this period of history in shaping the future of Ireland and her people have inspired a number of events on the 2016 Festival programme.

The ever popular cultural programme, **I Love My City**, returns to the 2016 festival. The series of engaging, evocative and intimate cultural events and happenings that have been curated by the Festival will be staged in some of Dublin's most beautiful, historic and prestigious cultural venues and spaces. Headline events, featuring established and emerging Irish and international artists, from a variety of disciplines, including literature, music, film, spoken word, design, visual art and more, will be presented throughout the Festival.

Speaking today, Noel John McLoughlin, Fáilte Ireland's Director of Marketing said: *"Fáilte Ireland is delighted to once again be investing significantly in St Patrick's Festival and look forward to this year's event kicking off the tourist season in style. We are delighted to hear that Joanne O' Riordan has been selected as this year's Grand Marshal and wish her all the very best for the big day."*

Dublin City Council are a principal funder of the Festival and the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Críona Ní Dhálaigh, said; *"Comhghairdeas le Joanne ar a ceapachán mar Mharascal 1916. It is wonderful in this special commemorative year to have someone who demonstrates such a strong zest for life as a great example to others. We wish the very best of luck to Joanne."*

Joanne follows in the footsteps of inspirational Irish figures, Nicky Byrne, Katie Taylor, legendary GAA commentator Mícheál Ó Muircheartaigh, and most recently Brendan O'Carroll.

St. Patrick's Festival will take place this year from 17<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> March. For details on the programme log on to [www.stpatricksfestival.ie](http://www.stpatricksfestival.ie), download the app, or join the Festival's official **Facebook** <https://www.facebook.com/StPatricksFestivalIreland/?fref=ts> and follow on **Twitter** <https://twitter.com/stpatricksfest>.

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**For further information, images or interview requests please contact:**

Shane Lennon, FleishmanHillard, on 01 618 8444 / 087 900 0320 or [Shane.Lennon@fleishmaneuropa.com](mailto:Shane.Lennon@fleishmaneuropa.com)

Kevin Moore, FleishmanHillard on 01 618 8444 / 086 825 2611 or [Kevin.Moore@fleishmaneuropa.com](mailto:Kevin.Moore@fleishmaneuropa.com)



## NOTES TO EDITOR

St. Patrick's Festival is funded by Fáilte Ireland and Dublin City Council.

The principal aim of St. Patrick's Festival, since its inauguration, is to develop a major annual international festival around the national holiday over which the Irish people would stand proud. It sets out to reflect the talents and achievements of Irish people on many national and world stages, and it acts as an exciting showcase for the manifold skills of the people of Ireland, of every age and social background.

There were over 112,000 out-of-state visitors at St. Patrick's Festival in 2015, including about 100,000 overseas visitors and 12,000 visitors from Northern Ireland. These visitors spent an average of 6.5 days in Ireland, and 4.5 days in Dublin, with two people travelling in the average visiting party. With an average expenditure per person of just over €650 in Ireland, including over €450 per person in Dublin, this means that out-of-state visitors generated an estimated total expenditure of €73m while in Ireland, including expenditure of €51.3m while in Dublin.

As the one national holiday that is celebrated in more countries around the world than any other, St. Patrick's Day is the day when everyone wants to be Irish.

### Why was it started?

- To offer a national festival that ranks as one of the greatest celebrations in the world
- To create energy and excitement throughout Ireland via innovation, creativity and grassroots involvement, and marketing activity
- To provide the opportunity and motivation for people of Irish descent (and those who sometimes wish they were Irish) to attend and join in the imaginative and expressive celebrations
- To project, internationally, an accurate image of Ireland as a creative, professional and sophisticated country with wide appeal.

The first St Patrick's Festival was held over one day, and night, on March 17th 1996. The live audience for the day was estimated to be 430,000.

Preparation for the first St. Patrick's Festival used to take only 5 months, but with the growth of the Festival, it now takes 18 months to plan for Ireland's biggest annual celebration.