

Making lasting friends and memories over 20 years in u3a

by Jessica Campbell



THERE was a celebratory atmosphere in Fermanagh House, Enniskillen as members of Erne u3a gathered together to mark the organisation's belated 20th birthday.

The space was alive with chatter as cake was handed around, and cups of tea and coffee were poured. The event was a chance for members to catch up with each other and for potential new members to get a taster of the organisation which provides those no longer in full-time employment with an opportunity to pursue social, intellectual, active and practical interests, just for the fun of it.

Ena Brown, who has been a member of Erne u3a for over 10 years, explained that she enjoys the camaraderie of the organisation.

"Chatting, getting to meet people and mixing with all sorts of different people," she said, going on to comment that she has met more new people since she retired than she ever did when she was working.

"So that's really a part of it," she added.

An abbreviation for University of the Third Age, one of the aims of u3a is for members to have opportunities to continue learning. Therefore, with the ethos of "by members for members", members are encouraged to share their skills with each other, taking on the role of animators to facilitate u3a groups, classes and trips. These include crafts, watercolour painting, a book club, poetry and storytelling, choir, genealogy, iPad training, walking and ambling, heritage trips, day trips and annual trips.

Ena oversees two groups; watercolour painting and walking.

"We just meet as a group and I give ideas," she said of facilitating the watercolour painting group.

"We use the smart TV sometimes, for ideas from the internet. We all work together twice a month, we meet in the afternoon and we do our watercolours."

The walking group also meets twice a month.



Ann McGirr and Pauline Flanagan look over some photos from trips.



Pat and Maureen McGee catch up with Anne Murphy.

"I just email my whole group to say where we're going, where we're meeting and off we go," said Ena, adding: "We have 10,15, maybe 20 people depending on the weather."

Meanwhile, Edna Topping organises the Erne u3a choir.

"I love singing. It's a good aerobic exercise," said Edna.

"I also enjoy the company - sometimes we chat more than we sing but sure that's all right," she added with a laugh.

She explained that the "thriving" choir has been going since the start of Erne u3a, running for over 20 years.

"Peela Gamble was the original accompanist and organiser, the accompanist now is Barbara Aiken and she's doing a brilliant job," said

Edna, who was the choir conductor but the mantle has now been passed on to Jenny Thomas.

"I still do the admin and the organising," she added.

Appealing for new choir members, Edna said: "We're always looking for more members and we need more men in the choir."

"The Erne u3a choir meet on the first and third Tuesdays of the month at 11am in Fermanagh House."

Sitting in a corner enjoying a cuppa was returning member Frank. He explained that he enjoys playing an occasional game of Scrabble with fellow Erne u3a members.

Kathleen Young has been a member of Erne u3a for 10 years. She currently holds the committee role of Treasurer.



Mary-Anne Grant and Moyra Tapster display their watercolour prints.



Paddy Murphy and Fanchea Treacy share a laugh at the event.

"I worked with money my whole life and I'm still working with money," she said with a laugh.

She explained that she enjoys Erne u3a as "it's great to have people of my own age to socialise with".

After the socialising and refreshments, those in attendance were led upstairs to enjoy a presentation all about Erne u3a

along with displays of watercolour art pieces, crafts and photographs from the various different groups and trips over the years.

Moira Tapster, a member of the watercolour painting group had three of her paintings exhibited.

"I've always liked art," said Moira, who had been a member of different art groups over the years so was glad to return to painting as a member of