

Soccer club pillar of the community in Renmore

Future looks bright with launch of a five-year development plan

BY STEPHEN CORRIGAN

RENMORE AFC has been a pillar of the community in Renmore now for over 40 years and with the launch this year of a five-year development plan for the club, the future looks bright for the long-established soccer club.

The club has come a long way from its humble beginnings in 1973 when Bernard Shapiro brought together a group of committed individuals to field a community games team for Renmore.

Described as a "bit of a local legend", Bernard sadly passed away in 2014 - but his mark on Renmore will long live on in the soccer club.

Renmore AFC's Academy is an initiative focussed on the development and enhancement of young players' skills and abilities.

Tom Hurley, the current manager of this programme, says he believes that the work put in by Bernard and his colleagues has led to the continued success of the club.

"What we see is a continuing legacy of those involved in the very early stages - and some of those people are still involved.

"Kevin McCaffrey was our chairman in the 1980s and early 1990s and now he is our Honorary President. Bernard passed away a couple of years ago but his sons and grandsons are still involved and that is his legacy," says Tom.

The club, as it currently stands, has around 200 members and 25 coaches - a relatively small organisation in comparison to some of the other soccer clubs in the city.

Despite its size, Renmore has been punching well above its weight in their efforts to win silverware.

Just this year, their Junior Team claimed the Western Hygiene First Division Title and



Tom Hurley: "We want to reconnect with the community in Renmore."

won promotion to the top flight of Galway soccer for the first time in over a decade.

Their Under 15 team also scooped top spot of their league with a team that have been together for over five years - first totting out as Under-8s in 2012.

"This year with the Under-15s and the Juniors winning their titles, they are both playing at a premier level.

"The next phase of development will be the introduction of floodlights and an astroturf facility"

"With the Juniors winning, we see it as only fitting that they are back playing premier league football after all those years," exclaimed Tom.

The club will soon launch their plan for the next five years of development.

Following on from the construction of their very own clubhouse, Tom believes that

this has spurred them onto further improvements - not only to facilities but also to the club as a whole.

Front and central to the plan is the examination of the quality of football Renmore players are bringing to the field.

"We want to get the best coaches and ensure that these kids are getting the best possible training," says Tom.

Another major element of the plan will be to enhance the connectivity between the soccer club and the wider community in Renmore.

Part of this will be increased involvement with schools in the area and through the Power Soccer Academy - run by John Power.

"John has a long history of working with Renmore and he invests a lot of time into the training of our players and the quality of our coaching," explained Tom.

He views the connection between community and club as a two-way street and says he hopes that in time, both will be able to meet somewhere in the middle.

"We want to reconnect with the community in Renmore because we feel that we lost a little of that connection with the community.

"We are playing every single Saturday and there are very few people coming to the events," says Tom.

He points out that it costs a huge amount of money to keep any club running and says that the funding from local businesses has been "the lifeblood of the club".

Further improvements to the club's facilities are already in the pipeline and redevelopment of the pitch is scheduled for next year.

"The next phase of development will be the introduction of floodlights and the construction of an astroturf facility.

"We currently use facilities in



The Renmore AFC Clubhouse and pitches.

Gaelscoil Dara and Renmore Community Centre and they have been hugely supportive of us - but we would like to get to self-sufficiency while still working with the community," says Tom.

This is being carried out by the club to ensure that they are at the cutting edge of training and high quality football for years to come.

Tom outlines how the club tries to strike the right balance between competitiveness and the nurturing of players.

"Our new focus is to try and get the right mix of competitiveness and ability as well as being very open to the community.

"At all levels, we compete against other teams in the city and there is a friendly rivalry - we beat them sometimes and they sometimes beat us.

"Our next move is to beat them more often than they beat us," he laughs.

Another area under development is that of football for girls

- something that the club sees as an important part of its plans.

Tom encourages both boys and girls to play together in the academy and believes that by doing so, the emphasis is placed on football - not on gender.

"We make no distinction and all of the kids do the same session because kids don't see gender - if you treat them separately, then they will feel separated.

"Also, parents have to actively encourage their kids to get involved because it doesn't happen by itself and in the same way boys have to be introduced to football, so do girls," he explains.

In 2013, the club celebrated 40 years in existence with a trip to Áras an Uachtaráin to visit a former coach for Renmore AFC - President Michael D Higgins.

A celebration was held in The Huntsman where all former and current members were in-

vited to meet up and come together once again under the club's banner.

Tom says that similar plans are afoot to mark 40 years since the club's most successful period - where they managed to win four different trophies in one weekend.

"It was great because people got to meet up again and it brought some of our older members back into the community," says Tom.

As this new stage in the club's development approaches, Tom believes that this year's successes, coupled with the support of the people of Renmore would secure a bright future of the club.

"We ask for the community to support the players and cheer them on - we will do more to get the word of games out there.

"The successes of our Junior team and the Under-15s are driving the regeneration of the club," he says.