

Jalex Fest raises staggering £30,000 for cancer charity

MARIE Curie Cancer Care is delighted to have been presented with a cheque to the tune of a whopping £30,000 thanks to the Alexander family, Randalstown.

Nelson Alexander and his family, who are well known farmers in the area as well as running the Alexander tractor business, decided to host a fundraising event last summer in the form of "Jalex Fest". They received considerable support from local businesses who kindly donated items for a charity auction that was conducted on the evening by Richard Beattie.

The event, which took the format of a Barn Dance/BBQ, attracted crowds from near and far, with over 1,000 people attending on the night. Local musician Johnny Brady ensured that the dance floor was filled from start to finish.

Nelson and his son James were overwhelmed with the generosity of so many businesses and individuals who were keen to help or make donations. James added: "We would like to record our sincere thanks to each and every

person who helped in any way to ensure that Jalex Fest was such a tremendous success."

Marie Curie in Northern Ireland is heavily reliant on fundraising to ensure that it can continue its invaluable work throughout the community, whether this is caring for terminally ill patients in their home or at their hospice.

Anne McRoberts, Area Fundraising Manager for Marie Curie, explains more: "We need to raise around £3.5 million each year in Northern Ireland, which is a huge amount of money to source. We continue to be overwhelmed by efforts such as this made by the Alexander family, and wish to express our thanks for their support."

To find out more about Marie Curie log onto www.mariecurie.org.uk

■ RIGHT: James and Ruth Alexander are pictured with their children Jaxson, Mia, Isla and Alicia as they present Marie Curie with a staggering £30,000 raised by their Jalex Fest BBQ and Barn Dance.



■ UP CLOSE: Mark H Durkan, Environment Minister, getting up close with a local real live bat when he officially opened the Northern Ireland Bat Conference, funded by NIEA Challenge Fund 2015, and organised by Creggan Country Park, at the Drummond Hotel, Ballykelly. Providing all the information is Karen Healy, environmental officer, Creggan Country Park, and listening in are Robin Moffatt, MBE, chair, NI Bat Group, Dr Joe Nunez-Mino, Bat Conservation Trust, Aid Jack Rankin, MBE, deputy mayor, Limavady Borough Council, and Simon Pickett, NIEA, FW1511-1DL



■ INFORMED: Mark H Durkan, Environment Minister, getting lots of information on the state of bat life in Northern Ireland when he officially opened the Northern Ireland Bat Conference held at The Drummond Hotel, Ballykelly. Included are Dr Niamh Roche, monitoring co-ordinator, Bat Conservation Ireland, who presented a copy of her book Irish Bats 21st Century, Mike Meharg, head of Biodiversity NIEA, Dr Tina Aughney, secretary, Bat Conservation Ireland, and Austin Hopkirk, chairman, Bat Conservation Ireland, FW1511-2DL

Better understanding of bats at conference

CREGGAN Country Park recently organised and delivered the Northern Ireland Bat Conference in the Drummond Hotel with the help of NIEA, Derry City and Strabane District councils, Bat Conservation Trust and Bat Conservation Ireland.

The event was supported by a grant of \$6,885 from the NIEA Challenge Fund 2015 which builds on the success of a pilot programme in 2012 in which NIEA challenged local environmental charities, community groups and schools to devise and deliver 'oven ready' projects on a very short timescale.

The Bat Conference provided an in-depth understanding of bats, which are a European Protected Species. The event was attended by councils from across Northern Ireland, planners, environment organisations, statutory organisations, tree surgeons and renewable energy installers.

Environment Minister Mark H Durkan and Deputy Mayor of Limavady Alderman Jack Rankin, MBE, welcomed delegates from across Northern Ireland to the conference.

Karen Healy, Environmental Officer, Creggan Country Park, said: "We are delighted to receive funding from the NIEA Challenge Fund for the third year running. The bat conference is the first event of its kind in Northern Ireland and we are delighted to welcome speakers from various organisations."

"After the conference, we hope that delegates will be equipped with the knowledge of when to take action to ensure that bats are considered throughout any capital development proposal."

Environment Minister Mark H Durkan, addressing delegates, said: "Bats are an important and underappreciated asset to our environment. Making up a significant proportion of the North's native mammal fauna, they are vital in consuming hundreds of thousands of midges and other small flying insects throughout the spring and summer that would otherwise pest us."

"Unfortunately these valuable little mammals are vulnerable to disturbance and particularly so during building maintenance or development. I therefore welcome any initiative that builds awareness



■ PACKED: A section of the capacity attendance enjoying the Northern Ireland Bat Conference held at The Drummond Hotel, Ballykelly, FW1511-3DL

and understanding of our protected bat population and at the same time strengthens relationships between the environmental sector and the construction industry.

"Further, I would encourage the construction industry to 'think wildlife' starting at the design stage, provide time for surveys and develop innovative mitigation measures."

"I commend Creggan Country Park for organising this important conference and hope that their enthusiasm for bats spreads a little further across the island."