**BELFAST PRIDE AWARD 2011**

I've been asked by the Pride Committee to give a special award for contribution to Belfast Pride.

I’m not sure what I can say about this person that you will not already know.

The recipient is outspoken, eccentric, a tireless campaigner, and has a huge personality.

For most of us, this person has always been there:

* in the middle of the community’s campaigns, our festivals, our protests;
* a listening ear to counsel you - just with friendly advice;
* leading the Pride Parade - dressed to impress (latterly on wheels) as it weaves its way through the city.

One claim to fame is that he’s been helping organise Pride every year since the very beginning. No one else here can say that.

Who is this person? It’s none other than our dear friend PA MagLochlainn.

Educated in St Columb’s College in Derry and at Queen’s, and, as a teacher by profession, PA has always been concerned for the real education of everyone in society.

Never one to kow-tow to authority, he’s a natural born rebel, who has been President of NIGRA for decades, worked within a myriad of LGBT organisations, his trade union, and in the SDLP where he became the first gay person to sit on any party’s executive

He has fought long and hard for many of the rights we now take for granted and he has been successful. He is a winner in more ways than one.

Respected and feared by our opponents, PA is never afraid to challenge but is always the first to extend the hand of friendship.

He is the activist that keeps on coming; the gift to our community that goes on giving.

As NIGRA President and our public face on TV and radio when few, if any others, would answer the media call, he has been bravely OUT and PROUD, through difficulties and recent disabilities. And always understanding of our opponents, never shrill.

PA has been here so long it is difficult to remember a world without him.

Like very few others, PA has been ‘on call’ nearly 24 hours a day, seven days a week for many years.

How many of us realise how often his phone goes off and it’s someone phoning NIGRA for help. PA’s phone is the first the press call, for they know that they will always receive a considered, balanced statement that seeks to move forward with dialogue - and often great humour.

Whether in his role as a member of the Pride Committee, a Cara-Friend volunteer, or a gay spokesman, he is not only an activist in his own right but a passionate supporter of others who carry the torch.

He is not PC, but liberal, libertarian, republican, monarchist, nationalist, and a genealogist - he can bore for Ulster on that one. He is in the kindest possible way, the Forrest Gump of Northern Ireland gay politics.

I can’t picture, and I’m sure that none of us here can picture, an LGBT event in this city without him - perhaps because there has not been one. No matter when, or where, in sickness or in health, PA is - and has been - a constant.

He is a wonderfully modest man who may hate the attention this evening. None the less I formally declare him to be the winner of the 2011 Award for Contribution to Belfast Pride, and give you Mr PA MagLochlainn.

**Jeff Dudgeon**

**Europa Hotel, 25 June 2011**