

## Ambassador Declan Kelly - 2010's Irish Person of the Year

Ambassador Declan Kelly has been honored with the title 'Irish Person of the Year' by the committee of the same name in Toronto yesterday.

"I'm absolutely delighted. It's a great honor. *The Irish community in Canada are my peers. It's always nice to be recognized by ones peers,*" says the native of Balbriggan, County Dublin.



*"I honestly see it as recognition of the appreciation of the work of the Embassy. The staff here, both diplomats and our great local staff, all play their part in interacting with the Irish from coast to coast."*

He said that by winning the IPOY award, he was in "very august company," alongside previous winners like Sean Murphy (2007), Jonathan and Robert Kearns (2008) and "the four horsemen of the apocalypse!" he jokes, referring to "four great friends of mine," Toronto Irish radio show hosts Eamonn O'Loughlin, Colm O'Brien, Frankie Benson and Hugo Straney.

But, not unlike the Hollywood A List, he is aware that with such a high profile comes the pressure of being Ireland's face to the Canadian people. *"People are always looking at you, what you wear, what you say,"* he says. *"We always want to put the best image forward (because) we're representing Ireland."*

Kelly is in the unique position in the diplomatic corps that he has been posted to the same country twice in his career. From 1985 to 1990, he lived in Ottawa when he was the First Secretary and Charge d'Affairs at the Irish Embassy. *"I was absolutely delighted when I got the chance to return as ambassador,"* he said when he heard the good news a few years ago. *"You don't often, in our business, get to go back to countries."*

Because of this unusual diplomatic second act, he has a unique insight into how Canada and its Irish community has changed from the time he left in 1990 to today. *"I've seen a tremendous growth in the knowledge of Ireland in Canada,"* he said, with the *"growth of Irish organizations in Canada from coast to coast."* As one example, he points to the permanent exhibit on the Irish contribution to Newfoundland and Labrador at The Rooms Provincial Museum in St. John's, partly funded by the Irish government. *"I recommend this to anyone visiting St. John's,"* says Kelly. He also points to *"the astonishing memorial to the relationship between our two countries,"* at Grosse Ile in Quebec. *"If you looked down from space, the St. Lawrence Seaway is like a giant umbilical chord connecting Ireland to Canada,"* he says, which is likely why so many tried to make their way here during the famine in the 1840s. *"There's both tragedy and triumph,"* he says of the many stories that came from that period.

One of the highlights of his time as Ambassador was when he accompanied Ireland's president, Mary McAleese, to the opening of Ireland Park on Toronto's waterfront in the summer of 2007. *"It involved those who were born in Ireland, and those whose parents came from Ireland,"* said Kelly.

During his four year posting, one of his top priorities has been to *"integrate the embassy within the community, so as they see us as a resource. Anybody who is involved with the community, the Embassy will support them."*

Kelly was honored during for the accolade 'Irish Person of the Year' at a luncheon at the Toronto Hilton Hotel, on Sunday, March 7. He will also be driven along in style as part of the 23<sup>rd</sup> annual Toronto St. Patrick's Day Parade on Sunday, March 14, from noon until 3 p.m.

by Desmond Devoy