

## **Soroptimist SIGBI Federation Conference 2016**

### ***Engineering the Future***

As you are aware the 82<sup>nd</sup> Soroptimist SIGBI Federation conference was held in Malta on 10<sup>th</sup> November to 12<sup>th</sup> November. There are excellent reports and photos from the conference hosted on the SIGBI website <http://sigbi.org/malta/club-news/sigbi-conference-2016/> and on our website [www.soroptimistireland.ie](http://www.soroptimistireland.ie) as well as facebook. All during the conference blogs were published with lots of tweets being sent. I know that many of you have already viewed this information. There is an array of photographs available for viewing on <https://www.flickr.com/photos/sigbi/albums>

This report does not set out to reproduce all that information but rather to give you brief pointers on the key highlights.

Overall the conference was a wonderful success as it was one of very high quality – beautiful setting, excellent conference facilities, excellent educational speakers and very good social entertainment. We had a wonderful representation from both North and South of Ireland. Some of us were lucky to take a full week in Malta flying out on the Tuesday evening!

#### **The conference.**

**THURSDAY** The conference was formally opened as it usually does on the Thursday evening with the Flag ceremony and the opening addresses and welcomes. We were then entertained by Paul Curmi dancers which gave us a history of dance in Malta and some of the Maltese culture.

**FRIDAY** - The day started with the *Pink by the Pool* gathering at 8.30 a.m. Many delegates came together all dressed in pink to raise awareness for Breast Cancer.

#### **Keynote Speaker: Dame Professor Sue Ion – Engineering OUR Future**

Sue Ion gave an account of the achievements of women engineers throughout history, illustrated the critical importance of engineering applications in all areas of life and industry, and presented ideas of how we can encourage young women into exciting careers in engineering. The striking feature of her talk was how young girls even today are not encouraged to study engineering, and how it is really important to make them take up this stream for steering change in future.

What can be done to address the issue of attracting girls into engineering?

- Develop active campaigns with schools and employers aimed at encouraging girls into engineering careers, including apprenticeships.
- Engage with parents (who may not have engineering backgrounds).
- Offer role models – bring women engineers into schools.
- Enthuse and encourage girls to take up physics.

Sue showed a great video which captures how early on in their education, children already define career opportunities as male and female – watch the video below.

**Bandana Rana, Committee Person of CEDAW** (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women elected in 2016) spoke of her stride in taking up the cause of women in Nepal, and establishing a NGO called 'Saathi' in 1992, which was a shelter home for victims of domestic violence. Her words were **Let us walk the talk** - women forming a movement can bring about change. She used her communicator skills to reach the policy makers in Nepal where status for women was a non subject.

On this day we also had the presentation of the projects that won the Best Practice awards last year and the AGM which is covered in the Programme Action update.

## **SATURDAY**

**International President Yvonne** President Yvonne used the analogy of how we introduce ourselves and our children and how we introduce Soroptimists – what is the difference?

She then spoke on how engineering is about making something happen, bringing together all the people, resources, planning, to achieve something greater for the future, it is about problem solving to making it happen. IP Yvonne posed the question, “How do you engineer to bring about the best outcome?”. She outlined that the SI Board has a Vision for the future, one where Soroptimists have an impact.

- We need to know what we want, we need a VISION for what we want to achieve.

President Yvonne advised that Advocacy is the key priority for SI, we are a Global Voice for women and girls and to have this voice in creating strong, peaceful communities worldwide, we must be HEARD at the highest level. No country has yet achieved gender equality so the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are relevant for all countries. SI must advocate at the United Nations on behalf of all countries.

We then had speeches from **Sara Ezabe Malliue, Steve Arthur, Dave Coplin and Dr. Helen Sharman.**

### **Sara Ezabe Malliue**

Sara, being a very young social activist from Malta spoke of her plight of being discriminated against because she wore the hijab and was a Muslim. She spoke of how she embraced the hijab out of choice and because she strongly believed in her religion, and not because it was forced upon her. She said that people discriminate against others (the minorities) because they fail to understand the essence of humanity. Her message was to embrace multiculturalism which would help us engineer the future.

**Steve Arthur**, who is associated with Water Aid, spoke of how gender discrimination occurs against women and girls due to access to clean water and sanitation, and how it was Water Aid's goal to provide universal access to clean water and sanitation by 2030, which has been recognised as a basic human right by the United Nations only recently.

**Dave Coplin**, the CEO or Chief 'Envisioning' Officer of Microsoft was vibrant and entertaining, and he encouraged us to harness the power of technology talking about the third generation of technology predicting and answering our questions e.g. the intelligence of google . He stressed on how we should make technology work and not let technology make us work in an highly technology driven era.

**Dr. Helen Sharman** the first astronaut from Britain. She spoke of her journey to space, and left us inspired with the words 'seize the moment'.

We had later that evening the closing ceremony and the change of Insignia – the changeover of Presidents. Then Soroptimists from the North and South joined together and had a lovely celebration evening.

### **SOCIAL Outings**

**Sunday** – some of us went to the Market and the Blue Groot.

**Monday** – some of us went to Gozo, Camino and the Blue Lagoon.

At various times we came together to eat and taste the local wine and simply have a wonderful time. Some of us shopped!!

For me and I think for many we had a fantastic time one that couldn't have been better.

Thanks to Society Travel Ballinalsoe who made the reservation for a number of us that travelled.

Here's to 2017 for another wonderful conference in Cardiff.

***Sarah McCormack***  
***November 2016***