

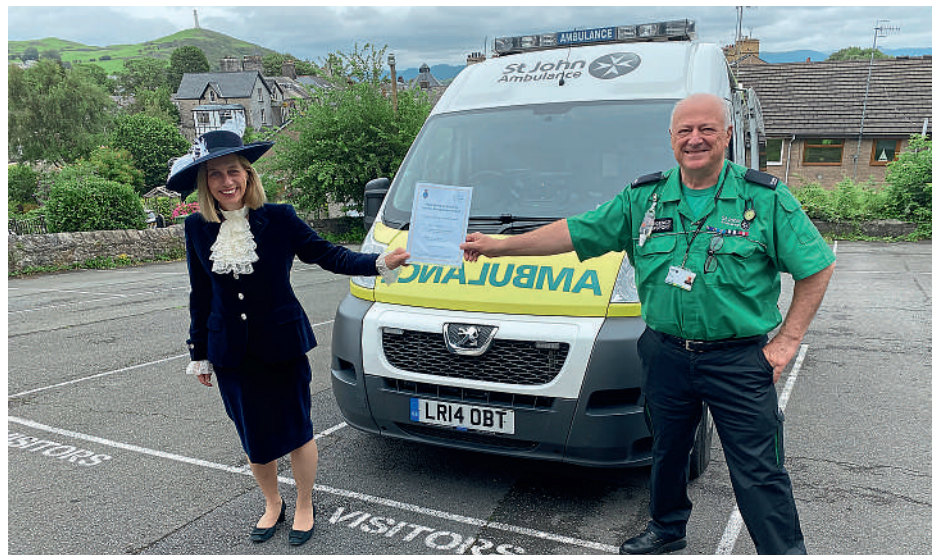


The power of appreciation

TWO DAYS after my Declaration, lockdown started. My diary emptied and for a brief time my years of planning seemed wasted. Not surprisingly during an international pandemic, no one's first thought was: 'oh I must contact the High Sheriff'. I was, however, determined not to do some quiet nightshift. Instead, out of necessity my year to date has been a proactive one, and as there is no blueprint for a High Sheriff in lockdown, I was free to take a fresh approach to lending active support.

Initially I concentrated on contacting virtually those charities and projects which were working to tackle social isolation and loneliness, the focus for my shrieval year. Organisations have appreciated both 'meeting' the High Sheriff and having the office recognise their work via social and local media. The COVID-19 crisis has made fundraising so difficult for charities but press coverage has brought visibility to their causes.

Summer has enabled me to get out and meet people. From launching a walk



Presenting Ian Gaynor with his Special Recognition Certificate

with 'Happy to Chat' benches in Kirkby Stephen, climbing mountains for charity and visiting natural flood defences on the River Eden, to visiting mental health, farm-based charities, delivering reminiscence boxes in Milnthorpe, sitting on the bench in Carlisle Crown Court and celebrating VJ Day with care home residents in Whitehaven, I have met some amazing people. Most of these activities only happened because I proffered a visit. This has been met with enthusiasm, as have my efforts to share each visit on social media.

In June I launched a High Sheriff of Cumbria's Special Recognition Award Certificate to acknowledge and thank those volunteers, voluntary organisations and individuals who have been outstanding in their support of others during the COVID-19 crisis. I was inundated with amazing stories of generosity and kindness shown to often complete strangers and it was a privilege to select and send out certificates and personal letters to recipients. Judging from the reply letters I received, I have also made a lot of people cry... but in a good way. I am pleased I included in my letters the option for recipients to contact me to give permission to share details of their award. I was delighted that the majority wrote back in agreement. Working with

BBC Radio Cumbria, every recipient was given the option of an interview resulting in the most wonderful stories and pride in local communities being broadcast. This in turn led to more nominations being submitted and local newspapers running positive stories about those who have done so much to support others. Every time I posted recipients' stories on Facebook, they were shared many times over and up to 12,000 people per post were reached. It is certainly appreciated when the Office of High Sheriff publicly acknowledges and thanks others.

Looking ahead, new risks keep emerging in our strange new world. The Lake District has been inundated with more visitors than ever before, while local businesses elsewhere are struggling. Cumbria has twenty mayors and I am proactively planning walking tours with each of them. These are opportunities to put a spotlight on 'shop local', and 'visit local', as well as tackling social isolation and loneliness. I now have so many other new plans in the diary for what is developing into a very different, yet thoroughly engaging year in office.

Julie Barton
High Sheriff of Cumbria 2020-21



Presenting Joan Johnstone with a Bench Walk Map which includes Happy to Chat benches in Kirkby Stephen



Delivering a Powsowdie Box to Butty Hayhurst. The box contained reminiscence resources, activities and afternoon tea

Photo credit: Darren Andrews