

Award proves we're best in Europe for volunteering

BY GEOFF BAKER
geoff@londonweeklynews.co.uk

HAVE-A-GO Londoners have won the capital the crown as the best city in Europe for volunteering, beating 10 other cities to become the best example of a big society.

London scooped the European Volunteering Capital 2016 award in recognition of the innovative programmes that Mayor Boris Johnson has developed as a legacy of London 2012, when volunteering took centre stage at the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Since then, the mayor's volunteering initiative Team London has mobilised over 120,000 active volunteers, including 60,000 school children and young people.

Team London led the successful bid with support from local volunteer centres and Greater London Volunteering. The accolade is awarded by the European Volunteer Centre, a network of agencies which promotes volunteering across Europe.

Mr Johnson, said: "I'm very proud that London has been recognised as the top volunteering city in Europe. Tens of thousands of Londoners are now giving a hand to others and helping to make London a cleaner, greener and more welcoming place for everyone. Team London has created an incredible volunteering legacy for the capital, with people of all ages and backgrounds giving up their time to make the city an even better place to live in."

The other candidate cities for this year's title were Belfast, Bruges, Cagliari, Cascais, Edinburgh, Lucca, Perm, Rome, Varese and Viterbo.

London's achievements that were recognised by the expert judging panel include:

- Mobilising over 120,000 active volunteers including over 60,000

- Delivering the UK's first speed volunteering app
- Supporting nearly 1,600 charities and offering grants of over £3 million to date

- Signing up over 100 businesses to offer employer-supported volunteering through the Mayor's Corporate Commitment. Some 65 per cent of employees now say that they would be more likely to work for an employer that encourages volunteering.
- Offering innovative recognition for volunteering through a guaranteed interview scheme for young volunteers seeking paid work experience or full-time jobs.

The mayor's senior adviser Veronica Wadley, said: "This is not only an extraordinary legacy of 2012, but it also shows that with will, every leading city can deliver the big society. More and more people are now taking social action in their local area and increasing numbers of businesses understand the value of volunteering as a route in to work. Some 70 per cent of our young volunteers are assessed as work-ready compared to just 20 per cent of the normal pool of job candidates.

"With continuing problems of youth unemployment, we've demonstrated that volunteering gives people the skills they need to compete in the job market and this model could be adopted by any city in the world. Team London looks forward to capitalising on this honour by working even more closely with the voluntary sector and businesses to drive greater impact for London's communities."

Director of the European Volunteer Centre, Gabriella Civico said: "London is an outstanding example of how local government, local people and businesses can strategically harness the benefits of volunteering to improve people's lives, the environment and contribute to socially cohesive communities."

Milestone for new police HQ

THE new headquarters of the Metropolitan Police was officially 'topped out' earlier this month by the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe, and the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime, Stephen Greenhalgh.

In the heart of Westminster and close to the Met's founding location, the Curtis Green building is undergoing a refit and security upgrade and will become the new HQ at the end of next year.

The move is part of the Mayor of London Boris Johnson's drive to put bobbies first by selling off under-utilised police buildings and redirecting funds into frontline police services.

As part of the biggest programme

of transformation in the Met's history, the sale of the outdated New Scotland Yard, now to be known as 10 Broadway, for £370million will help modernise and streamline London's police service, saving money, keeping officer numbers high and equipping them with the latest technology to enable them to be more effective, more mobile and more accountable. The relocation to the slimmed down new premises on the Victoria Embankment will save an additional £6million a year in running costs.

Since 2012, the mayor's programme has helped to cut costs across the Met by £391million. The Curtis Green building has been empty since late 2011.



■ FROM GRASSI WITH LOVE: Bond Girls as you've never seen them before are on exhibition at the Ransom Gallery until Christmas Eve. The Pimlico Road gallery has landed the UK exclusive of the latest 007 works by famous Italian painter Marco Grassi, highly-collected by young bankers. 'Grassi has painted nine Bond girls in an edgy contemporary style, realism plus a layer of fantasy, repeating his favourite neon colours of hot pink, turquoise and acid green,' said a spokesman. 'As in *Goldfinger*, he uses real gold, the gold leaf which is a current feature of his celebrated work, inspired by the Russian icons of Moscow and St Petersburg.' Grassi has had solo and group exhibitions all over the world. Recent shows in Miami, New York City, Moscow, Milan, Bologna, Perth Australia, Montreal, Los Angeles, Aspen, Positano. The spokesman added: 'His paintings attract a young affluent public, for their glamour and extraordinary technical ability. They are all different, but alike with tousled hair, full lips, and a powerful confident stare.' Pictured above is Barbara Bach in *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977) and below is Britt Ekland in *The Man With The Golden Gun* (1974).



Carol service raises £13,000

WITH the generous support of residents, local businesses, celebrity readers and pupils from a local school, Royal Borough Mayor, Councillor Robert Freeman, raised nearly £13,000 for his mayoral charity at a carol service held at Our Lady of Victories Church in Kensington earlier this month.

The Mayor's charity is supporting lung cancer research at Royal Marsden and The Royal Brompton hospitals.

The packed congregation heard poetry, prose and readings from the Bible given by Lady Ella Windsor, Penny Junor, Cerys Matthews, Andrew Pierce, Melanie McDonagh and Liz Arnold. Soprano Marie Macklin delighted the audience with a solo piece, accompanied on the piano by her husband, Timothy Teague (who also played the organ for the evening). The church was filled with song from Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School's VI Form choir, which earned rapturous applause at the end of the service.

The evening was rounded-off with mince pies donated by the Ivy Restaurant, which is soon to open a brasserie on Kensington High Street.

Guests at the service heard the medical directors of the Royal Marsden, Professor Martin Gore, and The Royal Brompton, Professor Tim Evans, speak of the advances in understanding lung cancer and finding ways to treat it.

Professor Gore said: "The door to finding new treatments is ajar and now is the time to push it open. That is why the financial support given by the Mayor's Charity has the power to make such a difference."

Councillor Freeman, said: "I am hugely indebted to all those who gave their support to my charity this evening.

"Monsignor James Curry, my chaplain, made his church available to us and gave us the warmest of welcomes. The readers and musicians gave their time so willingly and the guests responded with great generosity for my charity. It was such a lovely occasion and has done much to help research into lung cancer."

Red, white and blue... it's Santa

FATHER Christmas and his reindeer will visit Stamford Bridge next week as the football ground kicks off its season's celebrations with a Festive Family Fun Day that's free for everyone to attend.

For one day only, on Tuesday, December 22, the Fulham Road home of Chelsea Football Club will be transformed into a mini festive winter wonderland, inviting visitors to count down the final days before Christmas in a fun-filled day of food, drinks, craft stalls and activities for all the family to enjoy.

The day will feature a host of special guests, including everyone's favourite, Father Christmas, who along with his reindeer will join a group of real penguins in a fantasy festive grotto with log cabin and flickering lights. The children can let their imaginations run wild before whispering their Christmas wishes in Santa's ear, only having to wait three days to see if they come true.

Simon Hunter, head of venue and brand at Stamford Bridge, said: "Our venue is at the heart of the Fulham and Chelsea community and with so many residents on our doorstep, we're looking forward to welcoming as many as possible to Stamford Bridge for a day of pure fun and good old-fashioned festive entertainment."

■ The Festive Family Fun Day at Stamford Bridge takes place on Tuesday, December 22 from 11am to 4pm. Entry is free.