

The Herald Scottish politician of the year awards 2004

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READERS of The Herald have begun to nominate the people's champions, the ordinary members of the public who have made an extraordinary impact on the political scene as campaigners.

For the first time The Herald Diageo Scottish Politician of the Year Awards will include an honour that is not open to parliamentarians. The award for the public campaign or campaigner of the year will go to those who have made energetic efforts on behalf of a good cause.

The Herald and Diageo decided that in a time of public disengagement with the political process and falling participation in the democratic process, this year was the time to honour those members of the electorate who decided to get involved.

Suggestions have included Lorraine Mann, the anti-nuclear campaigner in the Highlands; Jim Swire, who fought for justice over the Lockerbie bombing; Robbie the Pict and his fight against Skye bridge tolls; or campaigners in Lanarkshire and Clackmannanshire who resisted opencast mining and slurry dumping.

Then there is the hot issue of the moment, health service centralisation, which has sparked off campaigns all over the country as people fight to save services at their local hospitals. One of these campaigns, the fight to retain full maternity services in Wick, has laid claim to a nomination.

Bill Fernie of the North Action Group says: "Most people had never heard of the downgrading even within the county until NAG appeared. NAG has bound the whole community into the campaign: the people, the businesses, the council and the politicians. It has informed the public, informed the media and become the best-known pressure group in the far north of Scotland."

He also points out that the consultation period for maternity services in Caithness ends on November 9, just two days before the awards ceremony.

Another nomination has come in from Carolyn Leckie, the Socialist MSP, who would like to see the award go to the nursery nurses for the way they fought for a national pay and conditions settlement.

"I am sure everyone who was in Edinburgh through the 14 weeks of the strike enjoyed the exuberance, creativity and determination of the nursery nurses in the way they brought their struggle to the parliament," she said.

"Throughout it all they remained dignified and upbeat. Even the police and security staff were thoroughly impressed."

Another nomination has come in from Bill McFarlan, the broadcaster, who wrote: "When I heard about the award I felt compelled to enter Iain McKie, father of the former Kilmarnock detective Shirley McKie, who was wrongly accused of perjury after the misidentification of a fingerprint in a murder inquiry."

He added: "For eight long years, Iain has campaigned for justice for his daughter, who received an apology from the justice minister before the Scottish Executive incredibly did a U-turn and began to defend their actions."

Nominations are invited, with a brief explanation of why the campaign is so deserving.

They should be sent to Alison Martin, The Herald, 200 Renfield Street, Glasgow G2 3QB, or e-mail her at alison.martin@glasgow.news-quest.co.uk.

The Herald Diageo Scottish Politician of the Year Awards - the sixth year they have been the high point of the Scottish parliamentary calendar - are to be presented at a gala dinner in Edinburgh on November 11, which will be televised by Scottish and Grampian TV.

Apart from the overall winner of Politician of the Year and the new award of Public Campaigner of the Year, the six other awards will comprise: Best Scot at Westminster, Donald Dewar Debater, the Committee Award, the One to Watch, the Free Spirit of the Year and the Lifetime Achievement Award.