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ARTS GROUP FOUNDER'S TOP AWARD

ONE OF the founding members of Deveron Arts who remains at the helm of the organisation today is the 2013 Huntly Citizen of the Year.

Claudia Zeiske received the award during Huntly Rotary Club's Christmas Festival last night. After being named as top citizen in recognition of the contribution she has made to the local community, Claudia officially switched on the lights on the Christmas Tree.

Nominations for Claudia said that she worked beyond her remit to promote Huntly on the cultural map.

Another said, "She is tirelessly brilliant, bringing talent from around the world to Huntly."

"Single handedly she has changed the national profile of Huntly," another stated.

Others highlighted the wide range of artists brought to Huntly as a result of her endeavours and the £100,000 Creative Fund which she helped to secure for the area.

The contemporary arts organisation started from small beginnings in 1995 when Claudia and two others who all shared a love for the arts and culture found themselves at a distance from where such activities were available.

The group hit on the

idea of bringing arts events to Huntly and Deveron Arts was born.

Around the same time, Claudia was appointed as development manager at Duff House which brought her into contact with artists, touring theatre and music groups whom she was able to attract to Huntly from time to time.

The first artist in residence, Ewan McLure came to Huntly in 1996, received no fee but left a painting as a reminder of his time in the town and set the pattern for what has followed.

Soon after the first residency, the group undertook a feasibility study for an arts and culture centre in Huntly.

The outcome of that was that it would not be viable but as Claudia is now the first to admit the knock back turned out to be some-

thing really positive.

"We were very disappointed at the time but turned that around by taking the decision that we could have art and cultural activity at any and all venues



Winner of the 2013 Citizen of the Year Award, Claudia Zeiske was named during last night's Christmas Festival hosted by Huntly Rotary Club. (H.E. Photo)

around the town," she explained.

"Although born in the countryside, I had lived in cities like Munich, Amsterdam, Paris and Berlin and I very much missed the art and

culture when I came to Huntly and developing Deveron Arts filled that gap," she explained.

Claudia's background is in social anthropology and she ran her own fund raising business

working for organisations such as the Royal Scottish Academy, Peacock, the Scottish Sculpture Workshop and Glenfiddich to help them secure funding and offering their advice on the development of their art projects.

"Deveron Arts was always where my heart lay though and so I used my fundraising to secure the financial support to get it up and running," Claudia is exception-

ally proud of the growing international reputation of Deveron Arts which has hosted artists from all over the world including Brazil, Zimbabwe, Palestine, The Congo, India, China and Mozambique.

Since 1996, over seventy artists have taken part in Deveron Arts residencies, each leaving their legacy in the form of a piece of art or publication which can be found in spaces throughout the town and its surrounding areas including supermarkets, churches, garages, schools and more.

Asked what about Deveron Arts was her greatest source of pride, Claudia said that it was hard to identify one single item.

"I was very proud last year when Huntly received the Creative Place award but I am also very proud of what interns from Deveron Arts have gone on to achieve, forging international careers for themselves. It is also really a thrill when you learn that an exhibition created by an artist in Huntly is on show in some highly acclaimed gallery where it is to be seen by an international audience.

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we do at Deveron Arts is completely unique. Out of a small place like Huntly comes art that is seen internationally but at the same time we are working with the community to find ways of bringing the community together," she said.

Although the award of Citizen of the Year is to Claudia, she is very much of the view that the accolade should be shared by the whole organisation and she was warm in her praise of the staff, interns, volunteers and board members who all contribute to the success of the organisation.