

## ***Deputy Grand Marshal***

### ***Brian O' Connell***

Brian O' Connell is in his 23<sup>rd</sup> year as an educator with the New York City Department of Education. A life-long Rockaway Native, Brian's extensive career, spanning every level of education, began in Brooklyn where he worked as a Pre-K-5 physical education teacher at PS 203 in Old Mill Basin. Brian was later assigned to be an early childhood reading/mathematics intervention teacher and a fifth grade classroom teacher at PS 236 in Mill Basin before being promoted to assistant principal, where he first became fondly referred to as "Mr. O."

Leaving Brooklyn and District 22 for Queens and district 27, Brian became the principal of PS 114 in Belle Harbor before founding the Scholar's Academy Middle School in 2005. At that time regional Superintendent Dr. Kathleen Cashin tapped "Mr O" from PS 114 in response to parental requests to create an integrated gifted school in the Rockaways, while phasing out faltering Middle School 180.

Pleased with the middle school's successes, and to again accommodate parent and community requests, Principal O' Connell phased in Scholar's Academy High School. While at the helm of the Scholar's Academy, "Mr O" has earned ample honors for the school. Scholar's Academy received separate "A" rating progress reports for middle and high school components three years in a row from 2011-2014, while consistently earning "Well Developed" (highest possible) Quality Review Ratings. Due to the school's successes, Mr. O' Connell earned the title of the New York City Department of Education Emerald Society's "Irish Principal of the Year" in 2009 and Education Update's title of "Educator of the year" in 2010-11. Unprecedented, Principal O' Connell earned Education Updates "Educator of the Year" Award again during the 2012-2013 school year while navigating a wave of challenges thrust upon the Scholar's Academy by Hurricane Sandy.

During this stormy year of disruption, distraction and relocation, Principal O' Connell mobilized an incredibly bright and dedicated staff and student body to stick together and work harder than ever, finding that something special within

launching the school into the top ten ranking of all schools in New York State. During this same time period, 60% of Scholar's Academy students and 30% of Scholar's Academy Staffers were rendered homeless or displaced. From October 29<sup>th</sup> to January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2013, the Scholar's Academy would be broken into two pieces and sent to two different relocation schools (PS 13 and Maxwell High School) in Brooklyn, NY. As a result of these successes, "Mr O" also earned the Daily News "Hometown Hero" Award while also bringing the "2013 Blackboard Award for schools of excellence" back to the "Resilient Rockaways" to the "Stronger and Smarter than Ever" Scholar's Academy.

"Mr O" has attributed the many honors received, including recognition as a 2015 Deputy Grand Marshall, to the hard work of the Scholar's Academy students and staff, the support of the Scholar's Academy and Rockaway Community, and the love and support of his family: wife Jean Marie, daughter Shannon Bella, Son, Shane Vincent, and mother, Dominica. Brian is honored to be sharing this event with so many phenomenal honorees and their biggest supporters during a celebratory event launching Irish Heritage Month and raising necessary funds to support the "Rockaway St. Patrick's Day Parade."