

GAA star garda escapes jail over ATM cash scam

Refunds dodge netted him just €450

By Tom Tuite

A DISGRACED Garda and former GAA star has been fined €2,000 but spared jail for defrauding a bank out of €450 in an ATM scam.

Garda Brendan Phillips, 35, an ex-Sligo inter-county footballer, who had been based in Blanchardstown in Dublin, is facing the sack after he pleaded guilty yesterday to three deception charges and two counts of attempted deception.

Judge Bryan Smyth heard at Dublin District Court that Phillips is now regarded as a 'pariah' as a result of the €450 fraud which will cost him his career in An Garda Síochána. He was prosecuted in connection with withdrawals from AIB bank machines in Dublin in March and April 2013.

Judge Smyth said Phillips, who is now living and working in the UK, faces 'catastrophic consequences' as a result of his poor judgement.

Det Superintendent JJ Keane, of the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, told prosecuting counsel Ronan Kennedy that AIB officials noticed unusual transactions occurring at some of its ATMs.

Det Supt Keane explained in evidence that Phillips had used his own bank cards and PINs at ATMs in Cloness, Clonsilla and Blanchardstown on separate dates.

He requested €170 from the machines and on each occasion that amount was dispensed. However after taking €150 he left €20 in the dispensing tray.

When a customer forgets or is too slow to take money it is 'sucked' back into the machine.



'Pariah': Garda Brendan Phillips

Det Supt Keane said the machines were unable to identify how much money was taken back in. It was flagged as an 'extraordinary transaction' and the full value refunded to the account. This could only occur twice within a certain time period and on his third or fourth attempt using the same card he failed to make any money.

The court heard he then moved on to using a second bank account card and managed to get another €150 using the same trick. However, when he again tried the method too many times with this card 'anomalies' were noticed by the bank's fraud prevention unit.

He was contacted and immediately agreed to give back the €450 he had fraudulently taken.

Gardaí were then alerted and he

co-operated with their investigation and identified himself on CCTV. Phillips was also suspended from duty pending the court case.

He had originally indicated that he would contest the charges; the trial had been set down for two days and it was expected 25 prosecution witnesses would be called.

Michael Bowman SC, defending, told Judge Bryan Smyth that there had been a change of plea and the prosecution had been given advance notice.

He asked Det Supt Keane if he agreed the offences were opportunistic and that Phillips had used poor judgement. He replied, 'it was certainly poor judgement'.

Phillips, who joined the force in 2002, was well respected in his career and cherished his role in community policing, however counsel said he 'now finds himself a pariah

'It was certainly poor judgement'

as a result of his own actions'.

Mr Bowman said Phillips, who previously had an address at Charnwood Green, Clonsilla, Dublin 15, was looked up to by children in the community and he gave them football training in schools. 'For a small amount of money, he finds himself effectively disgraced professionally, disgraced within his community and, I would submit, practically unemployable,' the counsel told the court.

In December, the co-accused Garda Raymond Geelan, 38, from Hayworth, Ongar, Dublin 15, entered a guilty plea at an early stage and was fined €3,000. He managed to fraudulently obtain €600.

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Farmer wins right to burial on own land

A BACHELOR farmer has won the right to be buried on his own land after a long planning battle.

Martin Neary, from Mullenmadogue, near Swinford, Co. Mayo, already has the hole dug for his last resting place.

An Bord Pleanála overturned a decision by Mayo County Council to refuse permission to Mr Neary for a single burial plot on his property. The decision could now set a precedent nationwide for private burial grounds.

Mr Neary, who is single with no close next of kin and in good health, said: 'I was born in the place have lived in the place apart from a spell in England, and want to be buried in the place.'

The pensioner explained he had no wish to be buried in 'consecrated ground', a traditional burial ground, as he is an atheist with 'no interest in religion'.

An Bord Pleanála decided that the site for the proposed grave was far enough away from water sources as not to pose any environmental threat.



Swim coach let out early

FORMER national swimming coach and child abuser Ger Doyle has been released early from prison after serving four years.

Doyle, of 54 Emmet Place, Wexford town, was sentenced to six and half years in prison in July 2012 by Judge Alice Doyle at Kilkeny Circuit Court. He had already been in custody for a year.

The former Olympic coach, pictured, was convicted of 35 child-related sex offences against five different boys aged between ten and 15 years, at New Ross pool.

A Garda source said: 'He is out and living in Wexford town. He is on our radar and is subject to the Sex Offenders Register.'

New voting machines to aid the blind?

BLIND people could soon have further help in voting, with the Government to study the introduction of tactile voting machines.

The Coalition will not oppose a Private Member's Bill from Fianna Fáil TD Colm Keaveney at its introduction in the Senate on Friday.

A spokesman for the Taoiseach said the Government was interested in methods of tactile voting, including machines that were trialled at the recent British general election, although converting them to accommodate the single transferable vote (STV) could pose a challenge.

Minister for the Environment Alan Kelly, whose department is in charge of elections, will also look at methods of 'independent voting' for those who need it, whether by postal ballot or online electronic means.

Existing law allows for a blind person to bring a helper with them to a polling station and for that individual to assist in filling out their ballot.

Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

Treat every day as your first and last... the secret to happiness

THEY say that Rome wasn't built in a day. Great things take time and patience to bring to fruition. We know that is true yet we also know it takes but a day to change everything.

A day is a period of time stretching from dawn to dusk. At this time of year, we have long days of endless light. It is a time of heat and growth, of warmth and wonder.

That, however, is not the only way to measure a day. Whether short or long, hot or cold, a day is packed with events that we shall soon refer to as 'history'. Each day begins as a clear canvas but, by nightfall, it resembles an exquisite collage of events that becomes yet another page in the human drama.

The human drama is something to which we all contribute. With each word spoken and each activity undertaken, we add a little more colour and life to the canvas. Our part in the drama is not predetermined, which is why the unfolding of each day is so fascinating.

'So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will take care of itself. Each day has trouble enough of its own.'

Those precious words remind us that our only concern should be this day and how we live it. For today could well be our legacy, it could be that moment in the drama when we take centre stage.

It takes great control to let go of the past and to cease projecting into the future. It takes courage to stay rooted in the present and to consider every action as though it were your first and last. I have come to believe, however, that this is the key to human happiness.

Our middle son lives like this. Every now and then, I try to drag him back to the past. That he refuses to go shows that he exists in and for the moment.

Such is the reason why he smiles from dawn to dusk, why each day is for him a new beginning. There is no looking back, no regrets for what was or might have been. He simply lives in the now and milks it for all it is worth.

The sun rises and a fresh canvas stretches out before each of us. A new day has begun, one that is full of opportunity. Each action, word and decision will have a bearing, which is why we should act with charity and speak with sensitivity.

Rome was not built in a day but many great things can be. With a single soft word, a life can be healed of pain. A hand of forgiveness can release a person from a poisonous past.

A phone call, an email or even a

text can make someone's day. It can lift the loneliness and make a person feel as though they matter. And in the end, that is all that really matters.

Of course, there are days we all remember and others we wish we could forget. We remember wedding days, those on which our children were born and those marked by success. In every life, there are also days marked by sickness, disaster and death.

None of us can recall each and every day but we can remember moments from various days that, when added together, become the story of a life. Those days constitute the highlights that, in time, we share with our children and grandchildren. They are tales of courage and love, of good times and bad.

In between those highlights are the many thousands of forgotten days. To you they have been lost but elsewhere they may still be very much alive. The days that have long since faded from your memory, might well be the most memorable for others.

There was the day when, perhaps, you unconsciously smiled at the stranger on the street. That person had given up on life, had lost everything, even her will to persist. You smiled and, with that one kind gesture, you saved her life.

There was the day when, perhaps, you chatted to someone about nothing in particular. That person was alone in the world, forgotten by friends and family. You weren't to know but those few words gave new life to that sad soul.

There was the day when, perhaps, you simply said 'Hello' to someone, called a friend or sent a little note.

SMALL things, yes, but they made all the difference and are still recalled with great gratitude. People everywhere remember such days as those of wine and roses.

It only takes a day to build up or drag down a life. With each sunrise, we are given our chances to save and heal, to deny or destroy. And from the second we open our eyes, we can opt to be a source of light or of shade.

The direction we choose to take will determine if this day is remembered or forgotten. If, however, it is forgotten by you, it may well be remembered by others because of something you said or did.

Such is the difference a day makes. The sun soars and so do we. And then begins the drama from which no one can escape.

None of it is rehearsed, but all of it has lasting consequences. Remembering that may well ensure that you too shall be remembered.

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