A trustee of Francis House Children’s Hospice has been appointed as the High Sheriff of Greater Manchester

Thursday 14 March, 2024

Eamonn O'Neal has been appointed as the High Sheriff of Greater Manchester.

A trustee of Francis House Children’s Hospice has been chosen by King Charles as the next High Sheriff of Greater Manchester.

The appointment of Eamonn O’Neal was formally announced by Buckingham Palace (March 13) and he will take up his ceremonial role next month.

In an unusual move, the father-of-three, from Sale, will be installed as High Sheriff for a second time, having previously held the position in 2020. This is unique in the history of Greater Manchester, as O’Neal has now been appointed by two different monarchs.

He will be installed as High Sheriff at Wardley Hall, Salford in April, succeeding Mary Elizabeth Walker whose term of office ends at that point.

O’Neal, who will hold office for 12 months, has been a prominent broadcaster and journalist in the North West, having been head of regional programmes at Granada Television, Managing Editor of the Manchester Evening News and a presenter with BBC Radio Manchester.

'Huge honour'

He said: "It's a huge honour and quite humbling to be chosen as High Sheriff of Greater Manchester again. I’m grateful to have the chance to connect and engage with the charitable, voluntary, faith, ethnic, cultural and business communities across the county."

O’Neal joined the board of trustees at Francis House in May 2023 and has been a longstanding supporter of the hospice since its inception in the early 1990s.

The hospice supports more than 600 families from across Greater Manchester, providing a range of services including respite care, homecare, sibling support, end of life care and bereavement support to children and young adults with life-limiting and life-threatening conditions.

David Ireland, chief executive of Francis House said: “Congratulations to Eamonn for being selected for a second time. It's great to see trustees so actively participating in the community.”

He was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Arts degree by the University of Bolton in 2015 in recognition of his 'outstanding contribution to the media and charity.'

Oldest secular title

The Office of High Sheriff is the oldest secular title in British history and among the most ancient in the world, dating back more than 1,300 years.

At that time the Sheriff represented the monarch, collected taxes, raised armies and was the rule of law across the county.

O’Neal said: "I won’t be collecting taxes, or raising an army, but as High Sheriff I'll be proud to represent the King as the ceremonial head of the judiciary in the county."

"I also regard this Royal appointment as recognition of the importance of meaningful connection with the communities. Francis House is a perfect example of how a hospice can be of substantial benefit to the lives of our children and their families.”

O’Neal was previously Chair and Chief Executive of St Ann’s Hospice in Manchester.

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