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**Press Release**

For Immediate Release

**Tragic loss leads to annual event that is much more than a rugby game.**

Rural and farming communities in Caithness and Orkney are coming together for the third annual Come Ashore Cup, highlighting the importance of connecting and supporting each other.

The event, which this year will take place over two days on 31st May and 1st June, was launched to raise awareness of the value of spending time together, talking, connecting and supporting wellbeing, after the tragic loss of Farmer Alexander Mill at just 45 years of age in April 2021.

The low-key simplicity of the Come Ashore Cup, which is formed from a traditional Orkney bridal cog mounted on an engraved Caithness stone base, belies the huge role it has played in helping a community come to terms with the loss of one of its own.

His cousin, Russell Mill who instigated the cup, explains that the name of the trophy comes from Alexander’s propensity to invite people in with the words, “come ashore.”

*“He was a much-loved husband, father, son and brother who was so very well thought of in the local community,”* recalls Russ, who spoke to us on behalf of the Mill family*. “If he wasn’t on the farm he’d be working in the livestock mart, having a chat and a laugh with everybody. He was passionate about his North Country Cheviot sheep and very well respected for his knowledge and the quality of the stock that he bred.*

*“We all grew up playing rugby, all us cousins - Alexander, me and my brothers William and James. We all went through young farmers together and Alexander was especially talented when it came to tug-of-war, having many successes with the Forss team including winning two Scottish Championship medals.*

*“When the pandemic came the lockdown hit Alexander particularly hard and he just couldn’t find his way back. His death was something that nobody ever expected and although everyone was in shock we were all united that we wanted to create an event to remember him. We wanted to get everybody to come together - to come ashore. We also wanted to encourage people that it’s ok to talk about things. The Come Ashore Cup has succeeded in being both things - a coming together of people and an opportunity to talk. Getting the veteran team going gave me and others an important focus, something to get stuck into during the darkest of times.”*

Caithness Rugby Club, in partnership with Farmstrong Scotland, will host the Come Ashore Memorial Rugby Match this year, where rugby veterans from the Caithness Evergreens and Orkney Vikings will take to the pitch on Saturday 1st June.

The event, which last year welcomed hundreds of members from the farming and rural community, now attracts individuals from all across Scotland and has been developed to offer a wide range of activities to suit all interests. This includes a distillery tour, farm walk, Women’s Seven a Side Rugby Competition, stalls including crafts, arts, food and drink, charity auction raising money for Farmstrong Scotland and Befriending Caithness, and an after-match party with music by Ady Harper and Friends.

Frank Bremner, President of Caithness Rugby Club said the event is now a key date in the calendar,

*“The Come Ashore Cup extends our reach as a community rugby club into the hearts and minds of us all, promoting positive interaction far and wide. Our ability to share even a little time to create meaningful fun and laughter in very challenging times would be very difficult to achieve without the huge forum the Come Ashore Cup creates for us all.”*

The Friday evening will also include a standing buffet, prepared by Grant MacNicol, an award-winning chef born and raised in Caithness and Sutherland. The son of a gamekeeper from a rural estate, Grant was raised with an intuitive knowledge of food from both land and sea and how best to prepare and cook it. Bringing out the best of local seasonal produce and using his trademark combination of traditional and innovative skill and knowledge empowers Grant to create memorable food. Commenting on why he is passionate about the event, he said,

*“The Come Ashore Cup and what it represents is close to my heart and I’m always keen to support this event because it reminds us to help each other out all year round, offer support and a listening ear for those who need to talk. Men tend not to talk, so this is very important. We all lost a very dear friend again this year, so we need the support more than ever.”*

The evening will be joined by guest speakers’ former Scottish rugby union player, Allan Jacobsen and Farmstrong Chairman and Farmer John Scott.

*“We are delighted at Farmstrong Scotland to be partnering with the Come Ashore Cup, which aligns perfectly with our ethos of prioritising wellbeing through peer-to-peer support,”* added John.

*“The Memorial Rugby game was initially launched to remember Alexander but has become the catalyst for bringing a community together to connect, talk, and spend time away from their farms, crofts and businesses.*

*“The value of this time cannot be underestimated and helps us all top up our wellbeing reserves so when we do face challenging times, we can dip into our wellbeing bank account and be more resilient. My heartfelt thanks go to everyone behind the event, and for helping us raise awareness of Farmstrong Scotland so we can continue to encourage those farming and crofting to prioritise their own wellbeing so they can live well to farm and croft well.”*

The event is open to anyone to attend, and more information can be found on the Farmstrong Scotland website or Caithness Rugby Club Facebook page.

**Notes to Editor**

Farmstrong Scotland is an initiative to help farmers, crofters and their families to cope with the ups and downs of farming and crofting by sharing things they can do to look after themselves and the people in their business. It is a peer-to-peer led programme, driven by scientific information and real-life stories, so together we can share, learn and support our wellbeing.

The organisation is supported by RHASS, the Movember Foundation and NFU Mutual Charitable Trust, who supported the launch of the organisation.

Movember Foundation are matching every £1 raised by Farmstrong Scotland, to the sum of £350,000. Anyone wishing to donate or find out more about supporting the charity, can get in touch via hello@farmstrongscotland.org.uk

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