
MOHAWK VALLEY IRISH CULTURAL EVENTS NEWSLETTER

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2009 Great American Irish Festival Lineup Has Something for Everyone

It's an overworked phrase, but in this case it actually applies: there really is something for everyone at the 2009 Great American Irish Festival, held on Friday, July 24, Saturday, July 25 and Sunday, July 26 at the Herkimer County Fairgrounds in Frankfort.

"We're very excited about this year's lineup," said Festival Director Matthew Sullivan. "We're bringing in legendary entertainers and introducing our audience to exciting new acts, while still giving them their favorites. Any style of music you want, you will find it at the 2009 Great American Irish Festival."

The traditional stage boasts names that are among the most celebrated in Irish and Celtic music. The Tannahill Weavers have been Scottish music trailblazers for over three decades, and their unique combination of traditional melodies on pipes, flute and fiddle, driving rhythms on guitar and bouzouki, and powerful three and four part vocal harmonies have won them fans from beyond the folk and Celtic music scenes. Also making their first appearance at GAIF will be the band widely considered to be Ireland's top ballad and folk group, The Dublin City Ramblers. With a career that has spanned more than 35 years, 30 albums and eight Gold Albums, the Ramblers have thrilled audiences worldwide with their unique blend of ballads, folk, humor, wit and foot-tapping music. And, finally, in the world of Irish music, there is perhaps no name that resonates like that of Derek Warfield. Historian, singer, songwriter, and author, Derek is best known as a founding member and front man of one of the truly legendary bands in the history of Irish music, the Wolfe Tones. Derek, often described as "Ireland's greatest ballad singer," is bringing a new and exciting sound to his legions of fans with his new band Derek Warfield and The Young Wolfe Tones.

For those whose tastes are a bit more contemporary, back to headline this year's festival will be high-energy festival favorites, Enter The Haggis, The Elders, Hair of the Dog and Rathkeltair. In addition to these luminaries, festival-goers will also enjoy such world-class acts as The Fenians, Barleyjuice, Seamus Kennedy and two exciting new acts from Canada, The Shannon Quinn Band and Pogeys, as well as a variety of other local and regional performers, including Central New York's most popular Irish performers, The Blarney Rebel Band, Rattlin' Bog and Vince Colgan. Finally, taking the GAIF stage again this year will be some of the top Irish performers in New York State, including Pat Kane, The Stoutmen, Gerry Dixon, and Flynn' Column.

Returning this year will be the hugely successful Irish Mass to be held at 10:30 on Sunday morning, a 5k Run which will finish on the festival grounds, and a pipe band competition, featuring the top pipe bands in the Northeast competing and then all joining together for a spectacular mass march through the festival. And this year, for the first time, the Great American Irish Festival will feature a major Irish Dance competition, known as a Feis, boasting hundreds of the top dancers throughout the Northeast.

The festival will also offer Irish dance and music demonstrations and workshops, numerous sporting events, Irish history and culture seminars, and there will be events for children such as storytellers, rides, and games.

In addition to the non-stop music, merchandise vendors from across the U.S. and Ireland, carefully selected from a list of applicants, will be selling Irish and Celtic merchandise, and a variety of food booths will be providing a taste of the Emerald Isle for festival-goers. Campsites are also available.

Proceeds from the annual festival are used to help establish an Irish Cultural Center in the Mohawk Valley on the recently-purchased site of the former St. Patrick's Church at the corner of Columbia and Varick Streets. The Herkimer County Fairgrounds is located just off Route 5s in Frankfort NY, just minutes from the New York State Thruway. For directions, tickets or more information, visit the festival web site at www.gaif.us.

Meet the Artists As announced at the Halfway to GAIF Hooley on January 18th, this year's outstanding lineup is as follows:

Enter the Haggis From the minute they take the stage, the non-stop infectious energy of Enter the Haggis makes it impossible for anyone to stay seated. Returning to the Great American Irish Festival by overwhelming popular demand, Enter the Haggis has built an international touring and recording career based on its unique approach to Celtic-based music and high-energy performances. The group's constant touring schedule has made them one of the biggest draws at Celtic and folk festivals throughout the world, and their recordings have been no less successful, from the band's 2002 recording "Enter the Haggis -Live!", to their most ambitious and successful recording yet, "Soapbox Heroes," released in 2006, which once again established the band as possessing tremendous flexibility without abandoning their respect for the traditional Celtic genre. Their 2008 release, "Northampton," is effectively a live "Best Of" album, while a brand new CD is now in post-production and is expected to be released in time for the festival season. In addition to their recordings, Enter the Haggis has also become stars of the small screen. A television special on the group titled "Live at Lanigan's Ball" has aired on PBS affiliates throughout the U.S. and Canada, the band was recently featured on A&E's twice Emmy nominated "Breakfast With The Arts" program, and their meteoric rise to the top of the Celtic Rock world has continued with their recent spot on the popular PBS program Out Of Ireland. The band continues to tour constantly, including a tour of Ireland with their good friends, the Elders.



The Elders The Elders, the most popular Irish band throughout the Midwestern United States, are a six-man group that melds the energy of rock with respect for Irish musical traditions. The Kansas City-based group has become famous for their high-energy rock shows that exude a fiery Celtic-influence and comical story telling that is true to the culture they represent. The Elders released their sixth album, Racing the Tide, in mid-2006, which introduced the sextet to the rest of the United States, and the band has been garnering accolades everywhere, ranging from top album of the year on paddyrock.com to second place in the Celtic Music Awards, beating out such bands as Dropkick Murphys, Flogging Molly and Great Big Sea. Virtually unknown on the East Coast two years ago, the



Elders exploded onto the scene with a four-set performance at the Great American Irish Festival that immediately established them as GAIF favorites and cemented their reputation as one of the hottest acts on the festival circuit. The group consists of Norm Dahlor (bass, banjo, guitar and vocals), Brent Hoad (violin, mandolin and vocals), Joe Miquelon (keyboard and saxophone), Steve Phillips (guitar, mandolin and vocals) and Tommy Sutherland (drums and percussion) and, from County Wicklow, Ireland, Ian Byrne, (vocals and percussion).

Tannahill Weavers The Tannahill Weavers have been one of Scotland's premier traditional bands for over three decades. Their diverse repertoire and exuberant performances span the centuries with fire-driven instrumentals, topical songs, and original ballads and lullabies. The band's diverse repertoire reflects both sides of Scotland's musical heritage: the mystical quality of the Highlanders' Celtic



melodies, and the rollicking fun of the Lowlander's Anglo-Scots tunes. Contemporary rhythms drive their arrangements, while the Highland pipes keep a thread of ancient memory running through it all. These versatile musicians have received worldwide accolades consistently over the years for their exuberant performances and outstanding recording efforts. Born of a session in Paisley, Scotland, the group has become renowned for its special brand of Scottish music, blending the beauty of traditional melodies with the power of modern rhythms. Over the years the Tannies – considered the first band to successfully incorporate the

Highland Pipes into an ensemble setting – have been trailblazers for Scottish music, and their unique combination of traditional melodies on pipes, flute and fiddle, driving rhythms on guitar and bouzouki, and powerful three and four part vocal harmonies have won them fans from beyond the folk and Celtic music scenes.

Derek Warfield and The Young Wolfe Tones In the world of Irish music, there is perhaps no name that resonates like that of Derek Warfield. Historian, singer, songwriter, and author, Derek is best known as a founding member and front man of one of the truly legendary bands in the history of Irish music, the Wolfe Tones. An outstanding singer, stage personality, composer of songs and historian of the song tradition, Derek Warfield is a legend wherever Irish roots have been put down. He enjoyed phenomenal success for some 37 years with the Wolfe Tones, with best-selling albums, number one hits, television appearances and shows in Carnegie Hall in New York and the Royal Albert Hall in London. He's also been prolific as a solo artist, with eleven albums in just over a decade. Through his songs, music and lectures, Derek Warfield has been forceful in reminding the Irish at home and abroad of their debt to patriots of past generations and his recordings are a must for any serious student of Irish or Irish American history. Now the man often described as "Ireland's greatest ballad singer" is bringing a new and exciting sound to his legion of fans in Ireland, across Europe and the United States, with his new band Derek Warfield and The Young Wolfe Tones, featuring a melding of one of the great voices in Irish music with some the finest Irish musicians from a younger generation, singer-songwriter Padraig Allen, banjo/mandolin player Damaris Woods and accordion and bodhran player Jim Woods.



The Dublin City Ramblers The Dublin City Ramblers have thrilled audiences worldwide with their unique blend of ballads, folk, humor, wit and foot-tapping music. They are widely considered to be Ireland's top ballad and folk group, and with a career that has spanned more than 35 years, with over 30



albums and eight Gold Albums, it is a title that would be hard to dispute. In addition to their eight Gold Albums and numerous awards for Top Irish Folk Band, they have several worldwide top 10 hits to their credit, including The Ferryman, Carrickfergus and Dublin in the Rare Auld Times, a song written specifically for the band. They have performed at most major festivals worldwide and have performed at every major venue in Ireland and abroad, including Dublin's National Stadium, National Concert Hall, Cork's Opera House, England's

Royal Albert Hall, and Carnegie Hall. Along with the Dublin-born Sean McGuinness on banjo, mandolin and vocals, the trio features bass player Tom Miller and guitarist Derrick Keane. The

Ramblers' performances feature traditional Irish ballads and folk music and, while the repertoire includes some soft, haunting songs, the band is known for delivering lively Irish tunes and creating a party atmosphere, engaging audiences with humorous stories and laughter.

The Fenians The Fenians are an electrifying Irish musical quintet based out of Orange County, CA. The lads offer a mix of their original creations, and contemporary and traditional songs. Their foundation is decidedly Celtic, but there is no mistaking the complimentary influences of Rock, Folk, Bluegrass, Jazz, and World music. The Fenians – Terry Casey on lead vocals and mandolin; Kenny Cosca on bass and vocals; Dave Burnett on whistles, sax, and flute; Chris Pierce on drums and vocals; and Rob Williams on vocals and guitar – present through their instruments and voices music that captures the entire human experience, sweet and sorrowful; brave and beautiful; angry and amused. Since 1990, The Fenians have garnered an impressive list of accomplishments and honors, headlining theaters and festivals across the U. S. and Ireland, including: the House of Blues (Hollywood), The Galaxy, and the Coach House (Orange County), The Milwaukee Irish Fest, Chicago Irish Fest (Gaelic Park), the Stonehill Irish Festival (Boston), and The Quays (Galway), one of Ireland's premiere live music venues, to name but a few. In 1999, The Fenians were inducted into the Guinness Wall of Fame.



Hair of the Dog Over the past decade Hair Of The Dog has entertained thousands of fans of all ages with their unique blend of Celtic, rock, folk and bluegrass music. Their high energy sound, smooth four-part harmonies and tight instrumental attack has made them America's number one Irish folk band, and an international success as well. The band has sold thousands of their CDs, pitching them from stages shared with The Clancy Brothers, Seven Nations, Black 47, The Wolfe Tones, The Young Dubliners, Solas, The Paperboys, The Prodigals, Off-Kilter and the like. They tour Ireland annually, they've been to the Caribbean and they've appeared in concert at pubs and festivals across the US. Hair Of the Dog – which holds the distinction of being the only headline act to play all six Great American Irish Festivals – was featured as part of Project Children's 2005 compilation CD, "One Child At A Time," along with artists like U2, James Taylor, The Chieftains, The Corrs, Mary Black and Carly Simon, and in 2007 released "Donegal," their first new studio recording in ten years and their most ambitious to date. The Albany-based band is a complete evening's entertainment, balancing humor with beautiful ballads, hot picking with Irish sing-alongs. Onstage or on disc, few acts can match half the fun or the musicianship of Hair Of The Dog.



Rathkeltair Rathkeltaír, (rath-KELT-ur), consists of bagpiper Neil Anderson and drummer Nick Watson, two original members of America's ground-breaking Celtic rock supergroup Seven Nations, and guitarist Trevor Tanner, front-man for England's legendary Goth rockers The Bolshoi. Following Neil's return to the states after being called up for a tour of duty in Iraq, the band picked up where they left off - energizing Festival stages all over North America, and garnering numerous honors and awards, including Best Celtic Rock Band, Best Celtic Rock Vocalist and Best Traditional Musician awards in the Celtic MP3s Music Magazine Annual Audience Poll. Compelling original material combined with fresh, innovative arrangements of traditional Celtic music, instrumental virtuosity and a completely off-the-wall sense of humor are what set this exceptional band apart from all the rest. Simply put, you will never see a more high-energy show than Rathkeltaír.



Barleyjuice Barleyjuice's first recording – titled, strangely enough, “Barleyjuice” – was steeped in traditional bagpipe and Celtic vocal songs, but by their second album, “Another Round,” more than half of the material was original. Encouraged with numerous comparisons to Shane MacGowan and the Pogues, Tom Waits, Ronnie Drew, the Rolling Stones, even Monty Python, they continued to add their own original tunes as well as trad favorites, and the result has been phenomenal. Their tongue-in-cheek element delights audiences thoroughly, thanks in large to the musical prowess with which the witty material is presented. The six members pilot a barrage of instruments - guitar, fiddle, accordion, bagpipes, bouzouki, mandolin, harmonica, banjo, tinwhistle, piano, bass and drums. In the past year, Barleyjuice released a third album, “Six Yanks,” and stretched their avid fanbase across America and into Europe with the help of such fan sites as MySpace, and a seamless live show. Celticradio.net listeners voted “What's Up Yours?” Song of the Year for 2005. In 2006, “Six Yanks” reached #14 on Paddy Rock Radio's Top Twenty short list, and “Whiskey To The Sea” was listener-voted ShowStopper Track on CelticFolkPod.com's last show of the year.



Pogey For the last 5 years, Pogey has been bringing audiences to their feet all over Canada and the United States with their unique blend of traditional and contemporary music. Pogey's six members combine fiddle, mandolin, acoustic guitar and banjo with electric guitar, bass, drums and four part vocal harmonies to produce their trademark “Nova Scotia Sound.” Pogey's high octane and fully interactive stage shows have kept the band in high demand at major festivals, conferences and top clubs. Pogey's newest and self titled CD is a mix of original songs and guitar driven instrumentals. The band, currently working on their new CD, is steadily building a name with their high-energy main stage performances at Celtic festivals in Kansas City, Pittsburgh, Newport, Fairfield and now the Great American Irish Festival.



Shannon Quinn Shannon Quinn is an Irish-Canadian living on the East Coast of Canada. She comes from a family tree of musicians and is surrounded with the musical culture of Atlantic Canada. Shannon has been performing on the fiddle from a very young age. Born and raised in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Shannon plays many styles of music, but has a deep connection to traditional Irish music her ancestors enjoyed and her sound is authentically Irish. In 2006 Shannon was a feature performer in the Charlottetown Festival, and was the youngest performer to ever work with the Festival Young Company. In 2008 she completed her solo recording entitled “The Irwin Lake Sessions.” She now attends Humber College in Toronto, studying violin in the Music Degree program. She is also an Irish dancer and has performed with The Chieftains and Cirque De Soliel as well as with many of the most visible and popular artists in Atlantic Canada. She is accompanied by her father Tony Quinn on guitar.



Seamus Kennedy Singer? Instrumentalist? Comedian? Perhaps the only word that adequately describes Seamus Kennedy is “entertainer.” Originally from Belfast, Northern Ireland, Seamus has been entertaining audiences all over the United States for the past 32 years. With a ready wit and a vast store of songs, he travels from Alaska to Florida, Maryland to California, performing for audiences which range from Popes and presidents to bartenders and bricklayers, from college students to kindergartners. In concert or festival, in pub or club, in colleges or high schools, Seamus Kennedy has the repertoire and the ability to make folks forget their cares for a while, to relax and enjoy themselves as he encourages the crowd to sing along to silly lyrics and daft ditties or act out the choruses of children’s songs. Mixing his endless supply of jokes, stories and one liners with traditional Irish tunes and the occasional ballad, Seamus never fails to please.





Pat Kane Pat Kane is a seasoned showman, having performed as a singer, dancer, actor, and instrumentalist since childhood. On his farm in the hill country of the Canisteo River, he was raised in the traditions of the Grange and of his Irish family. Pat's cousins still run the family farm in West Clare, Ireland, which Pat visits often; hence, the name of the band, and his company, West o'Clare. Performing as a soloist or with his band West O' Clare, Pat Kane may entertain for hours without a break or repeat. On fiddle, guitar, and bodhran, he plays jigs, reels, square dances, and hundreds of ballads from Ireland and America. He has twice won first place for singing at the NYC Fleadh Cheoil and hosts a weekly radio show in Elmira, New York.

Vince Colgan The term is often too easily and inappropriately applied, but Vince Colgan is a true legend in central New York Irish Music circles and beyond. A master storyteller as well as a consummate balladeer, Vince has entertained generations of Central New Yorkers and is now working on the next generation. Vince has recently released his first CD, appropriately called "Irish Balladeer." The Great American Irish Festival is honored to welcome him back to its stages.



The Blarney Rebel Band The Blarney Rebel Band is group of musicians from the Celtic hotbed of Central New York performing all types of traditional Irish music, from rollicking pub songs to traditional folk fare, from rousing sea songs to moving ballads, from stirring rebel songs to hand-clapping jigs and reels. It's all on display by a group of talented musicians boasting virtuoso musicianship and perfectly blended harmonies, sure to please old and young alike. The Blarney Rebel Band is always ready to help raise a pint, whether at a festival, party or a night at the local pub! The Blarney Rebel Band, which consists of Mark Sisti - banjo, mandolin, mandola, pennywhistle, concertina, accordion, flute, vocals; Al Sisti - bass guitar, vocals; Dan



Sisti – guitar, vocals; Amanda Straney, fiddle, vocals; Jessica Voce - bodhran, tambourine, percussion, has recently released its second CD, "Buy My Soul" to follow up the band's debut recording, "Live at Piggy Pat's."

Cassidy/McCale Cassidy/McCale is an acoustic Celtic duo from Syracuse, NY. The band's name comes from the surnames of two grandfathers, Millard Cassidy and Raymond McCale. Formed in December 2005, they play a variety of Irish and Scottish pub songs, rebel tunes and sea chanteys. The band – whose performances have been described as energetic and crowd pleasing – consists of Bryan Watson (guitar, vocals) and Matthew Douglas (guitar, vocals, bodhran). Influences include The Clancy Brothers, the Dubliners, regional favorite Pat Kane and Canadian import The Town Pants. Relative newcomers, Cassidy/McCale hope to become a regular part of the growing Celtic folk scene in Syracuse and Central New York.



Rattlin' Bog Long-time veterans of the local Irish Music scene, Rattlin' Bog is made up of tenor Rick Kincaid and baritone Joe Rowlands applying their tight vocal harmonies to Irish folk music and accompanying themselves on various acoustic instruments, including six and 12 string guitars, banjo, accordion, melodica, penny whistles and harmonicas. Hailing from the Utica area, Rattlin' Bog encourages audience participation with its catchy musical performance and its irreverent good humor.

The Stoutmen For 10 years The Stoutmen have been belting out Irish and Scottish folk songs in and around the Binghamton area of Upstate New York. Their love of big harmonies really shows as they work to keep alive a style of singing made famous by the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem. You'll hear well-known and a few obscure songs that cover the breadth of the Irish and Scottish experience, including songs of drinking, rebellion, sailing, and humor. Consisting of Tim Lynch (vocals, guitar, octave mandolin, bodhran), Sean Walsh (vocals, guitar, pennywhistle, bodhran), Bob White (vocals, 12-string guitar, banjo), and Roy Bartram (vocals, bass, pennywhistle), the band has crafted a finely balanced show that really grabs an audience's attention.



The Flyin' Column The Syracuse based Flyin' Column Irish Show Band has been entertaining groups of all ages in Central New York for over 35 years. Whatever the occasion -- fancy ball, rowdy pub or outside summer festival -- the band is noted for its ability to show all a good time. They have been regulars for many years in the region's summer concert programs, as well as the International Pavilion of the Great New York State Fair. They have appeared throughout Upstate New York, Northern Pennsylvania and Ontario, Canada. They appear regularly at Coleman's Authentic Irish Pub on Syracuse's Tipperary Hill. Over the years The Column has recorded three CD's.



Utica St. Patrick's Day Parade – Irish Pride, Family Fun

On Saturday, March 14th, downtown Utica will once again be the site of one of the Mohawk Valley's most fun-filled family traditions: the annual St. Patrick's Day Parade. Presented for the second straight year by the Great American Irish Festival, the parade starts at 10:00 a.m. at Oneida Square and continues down Genesee St. to Columbia St.; with the Reviewing Stand once again located at the Stanley Theater.

Parade Committee Chairman Kevin Dowling is pleased with the progress being made thus far, but still is looking for volunteers, sponsors and participants for this year's parade. For organizations, businesses or individuals interested in being part of the parade, categories include float, marching unit, vehicle, band, restaurant/tavern and best school entry. Sponsorship is also needed at all levels, and provides a great opportunity for area businesses to get their names connected with a prestigious and fun community event.

The St. Patrick's Day parade is one of Utica's oldest and grandest celebrations, originated in 1836 by Utica's first mayor and pre-eminent Irishman, John C. Devereux. After a few years of inactivity, the parade was revived as a short parade down Varick St. It was moved to Genesee St. shortly after the "Cable Cares Club" began hosting the parade. In 2007 the Great American Irish Festival took over the reins and it now holds the distinction of being one of the largest St. Patrick's Day parades in New York State.

For many people, there has been a misconception that the parade is an afternoon of drunken revelry on a par with Bourbon Street during Mardi Gras, but this is a perception that Dowling and his committee are looking to change. "The public consumption of alcohol at the Parade was left unaddressed in the past. It will no longer be tolerated or ignored," promises Dowling. "Anyone who believes it's OK to stand on Genesee St. at 10 am on Parade Day and drink alcohol with young children watching has chosen to ignore the true reason for the celebration of St Patrick's Day. The time has come for this event to become the regional family event it was meant to be; a celebration of our Irish culture and heritage, and the coming of new life with the onset of spring."

For more information on how you can become involved, contact Kevin Dowling at assistant-director@gaif.us or visit the parade web site at www.gaif.us/parade.

Jim O’Looney Chosen St. Patrick’s Parade Grand Marshal

When Jim O’Looney emigrated to the United States a half a century ago he had no idea where his journey would lead, but he certainly did not expect this latest path on that journey. Jim was chosen from among a list of worthy nominees to serve as Grand Marshal of the 2009 Utica St. Patrick’s Day Parade. Jim was the overwhelming choice, named on over half of the record 59 submissions received for the honor. In fact, it seems the only person who wouldn’t find Jim O’Looney a worthy choice is Mr. O’Looney himself.



“I was dumbfounded with some of the letters,” said Jim when told of the honor and shown the submissions made on his behalf. “So many people are more deserving.”

Parade Director Kevin Dowling would not agree.

“The nominations describing Jim and his wife are without question 100% accurate,” said Dowling. “You will have to go far and wide to meet a man of his integrity and kindness.”

Born May 11, 1932 in Killarney, County Kerry, Ireland, Jim attended elementary school there and, at the age of 15, began a seven-year apprenticeship at the Killarney Printing Works. About this time, he learned to play the accordion and spent much of his time learning Scottish and Irish tunes. Since then, Irish music has been at the center of his life. In 1954, he became the youngest member of the Lough Lein Band, the only ceili band in County Kerry at the time. They played for ceilis and Irish step dancers at the International Hotel. Many tourists came to these performances and at one of these he met his future wife, Utican Diana Coupe, who was on vacation in Ireland. They were married June 30, 1955 at St. Mary’s Cathedral in Killarney.

In 1958, with his wife and his two children, Jim came to the United States and got a job as a linotype operator at the Observer Dispatch where he worked nights for 17 years. He received his high school equivalency diploma at Utica Free Academy, attended Mohawk Valley Community College and earned a BPS degree from Empire State College. Later he received a Masters degree from SUNY College of Technology at Utica/Rome.

Jim taught graphic arts part-time at Mohawk Valley Community College for 12 years and was hired as a full time instructor in the Advertising Design and Production Department in 1975. He continued to teach there for 21 years, receiving the Mohawk Valley Community College Award for Excellence in teaching in 1992, followed a year later by the SUNY Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in teaching. Also, in 1993, he received an Excellence Award from the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development - (NISOD) at the University of Texas. He retired as a full professor in 1996. In October of 2000, he was inducted into the Mohawk Valley Community College Hall of Fame and has an MVCC Scholarship named in his honor. He is also a published author with his look back at his life in Ireland and his emigration to the states, “A Time To Reflect” (reviewed in this issue).

Recognized as an accomplished button accordion player, in 1997 Jim became chairman of the Craobh Dugan branch of Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann, an international Irish musicians organization dedicated to the promotion of Irish culture and, in March 2006 he was named to the Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann Northeast Region Hall of Fame. In addition to performing at countless benefits for many worthy causes, Jim and the rest of the local Comhaltas musicians generously give of their time at many local nursing homes to cheer up the residents whenever invited, and he has given free music lessons for over 30 years in his tireless efforts to support and encourage the playing of Irish music.

Jim became a U.S. citizen on July 4, 1986. He and his wife are the proud parents of seven children, Mary, Katie, Siobhan, Nora, Ellen, Michael, and Roisin, and have eleven grandchildren.

Bill Curtis Named GAIF 2008 Volunteer of the Year

There are some who would say an Irish Festival wouldn't be the same without its beer. If that's true, then perhaps it could be said that the Great American Irish Festival could not have gotten where it is without Bill Curtis. Curtis, who has worked almost every hour of the festival's five years, was chosen the 2008 GAIF Volunteer of the Year.

Bill worked in the Security Detail in 2004 and for the past four years has volunteered in the beer pouring area. In his five years of volunteering he has become an invaluable member of the beer pouring team, keeping the beer flowing by tapping and moving kegs from the storage areas to the two other pouring areas, and the past two years he secured sponsorship from *Clinton Tractor and Implement* for the use of two tractors to make the transfer of kegs safer and easier for all those involved. And with the amount of Guinness and Saranac products consumed by nearly 50,000 fest goers, this is no small task.



“With the quality of all our volunteers, who now number over 700, this is probably the toughest decision we have to make every year,” said Festival Director Matthew Sullivan. “We couldn't ask Bill to do any more than what he does for the event, and all without any desire for recognition. That's what makes a ‘Volunteer of the Year.’”

Dublin Philharmonic Launches New US Tour

On Friday, February 13, the Dublin Philharmonic Orchestra will be coming to Proctor's Theater in Schenectady NY for one of their first dates on their 49-city US tour, with their new program, “**Celtic Spectacular: An Evening of Celtic/Traditional and Contemporary Irish Music.**” In a dazzling display of orchestral virtuosity, the Dublin Philharmonic will be performing original works and unique arrangements by Irish composers for symphony orchestra, including works especially commissioned and arranged by leading Irish composers for the occasion. Featuring traditional Irish instrumentalists, virtuoso vocalists, Music Director and Chief Conductor Derek Gleeson and Principal Guest Conductor, Colman Pearce, this concert represents “...the perfect platform upon which to introduce and present Irish symphonic music abroad.” Tickets for the 8 PM show range from \$20 to \$49. There will also be a TheatreTalk held at 6:30pm in Robb Alley, where audience members are encouraged to ask questions about the artists, repertoire and performance. Proctor's Theater is located at 432 State Street in Schenectady. For more information, including a copy of the program to be presented, visit <http://www.proctors.org/events/2310>.

Scotland's Tannahill Weavers Hit Upstate New York...Twice

If you can't wait until July to hear the legendary Tannahill Weavers play at the Great American Irish Festival, you now have another chance. Scotland's premiere traditional band (see biography above) will be bringing their potent mixture of traditional ballads and fiery instrumentals to Saratoga Springs, at **Caffè Lena**; a legendary place in its own right. Caffè Lena -- recognized as the oldest continuously operating coffeehouse in the United States and recently named Best Small Venue in North America by the International Folk Alliance -- was an early stomping grounds for some guy named... Bob Dylan. But the times they are a-changing, and on Sunday, February 22nd, the stage will belong to the Tannies for a very special 7 PM show. Tickets are \$22 and \$25. Caffè Lena is located at 47 Phila St., Saratoga Springs, NY. Call (518) 583-0022 or visit <http://www.caffelena.org/> for more information.

Book Review:
“A Time To Reflect”
By Mark Sisti

We all have one. You know, that favorite aunt or uncle, the one who'll keep us rapt at the kitchen table regaling us with one story after another. It's not a flashy kind of storytelling, it's usually just a retelling of episodes as they happened in their lives. But the funny thing is, even though they're stories of scattered moments, by the time all the tales are through they have formed an unbroken thread, and we know more about the teller's life than if they had recited their biography from the time of their birth.

That's the feeling you get when you read Jim O'Looney's "A Time to Reflect." The preface says that the book was written at the urging of his wife, Diana, "so that our children and grandchildren would have a better knowledge of what it was like growing up in a small farm in Co. Kerry, Ireland" and the book does accomplish that. The early chapters in the book are a fairly straightforward description of life in rural Ireland for a young boy, and are full of delightful slice-of-life stories. We also meet his family, his neighbors, his childhood friends, his school teachers, and the stories he tells of these times paint a wonderful, nostalgic picture that creates a real sense to the readers of being there.

But the book becomes more than a simple retelling of the life of an Irish farm boy. Jim describes his gaining employment at the Killarney Printing Works, and, in his typical modest fashion, attributes it to the efforts of his former elementary school principal and later senator, Mr. O'Donoghue, who told him of the opening for an apprentice and, it may be assumed, put in a good word for him. What is not mentioned, of course, is that O'Donoghue must have met hundreds, if not thousands, of young men in his time as elementary school principal and senator, and there must have been something about Mr. O'Looney that stood out to the point where, when years later he heard of the opening at the printers, his first thought was of Jim.

In addition to making himself an invaluable employee at the Printing Works, Mr. O'Looney learns to play the accordion and joins a local ceili, or dance, band. They perform a regular gig at the International Hotel and at one of these dances, an event occurs that sets a story in motion that would have been rejected as unbelievable if it were written in a Hollywood script. Among the crowd at the International this particular night is a group of American tourists, including a young woman with whom Jim strikes up an acquaintance. I won't spoil the rest of the story for you, but suffice to say, it will provide ample ammunition for those who believe in fate and predestination.

The rest of the book traces O'Looney's amazing journey from an Irish immigrant without a high school diploma to a career as a college professor and a member of the Mohawk Valley Community College Hall of Fame with an MVCC Scholarship named in his honor. Every step along the journey is interesting and, with each step, we learn more about Jim O'Looney, as much from the things he doesn't say as from the things he says. It would be difficult to write an autobiography listing the achievements and accomplishments reached by Mr. O'Looney and still manage to come off as humble, but Jim manages to pull off that feat. When he writes of his numerous successes, he always does so in a manner that conveys his belief that he was simply in the right place at the right time, or that his success was due to the influence of others. But this is not the case. It's clear from a between-the-lines reading that everything that has come his way was hard-earned. The perfect example is his description of how he learned to operate a linotype machine. After being told he could not learn to operate the complicated linotype machine until the third year of his apprenticeship, Jim took measurements of the actual machine and built himself a training keyboard, which he used to practice in secret so that, when the time came, he would be ready. One can imagine this same dedication, resourcefulness and perseverance at the heart of all of Mr. O'Looney's accomplishments.

He opens the book by describing his grandfather, called "Dadden." He portrays him as a master storyteller, and one wonders whether Mr. O'Looney realizes that, in writing this book, he is continuing the "Seanache" tradition passed down to him from his grandfather to Jim and, in all probability, from Jim to his grandchildren.

Irish Festival Officials to Take Part in Chili Challenge

Ah, the smells of those fine traditional Irish foods, bangers, Irish stew, shepherd's pie, chili. Wait a minute, chili?

That's right, Great American Irish Festival Hospitality Chair Diane O'Donnell and GAIF Gaelic Mass Chairman Jim Sullivan will be teaming up to vie for the amateur division title at this year's American Red Cross 7th Annual Chili Challenge to be held on February 8, 2009. Sullivan and O'Donnell will be serving up "O'Chili" and promise that their entry will be worth the price of admission.

"Helping out the American Red Cross this way, by serving up some chili, is a pleasure and honor. Diane and I have come up with a prize winning recipe that will assure your votes," said Sullivan, coming dangerously close to guaranteeing a victory. "Be sure to save the date and your appetite because this chili event will be one to remember." His partner will be putting aside her Red Cross Blood Service Coordinator hat for the day to don a chef's cap and represent the Great American Irish Festival in the annual event.

"The Chili Challenge is a fun and delicious fundraising event in the Mohawk Valley," said O'Donnell. "As Hospitality Chair for the Great American Irish Fest, my job is to ensure a fresh and wonderful variety of food for sponsors, band members and committee members during the entire weekend of the festival. If we win the Chili Challenge we'll proudly serve up "O'Chili" in the hospitality venue this summer and add some 'spice' to the Irish Fest." The Chili Challenge will take place at the Herkimer VFW, 131 Mohawk Street, from Noon until 3 p.m. Admission is \$10. All proceeds are for local use at The American Red Cross of the Mohawk Valley.

From the Irish Kitchen (*recipes suitable for clipping*)

This month's recipe – **"Chocolate-Orange Guinness Cake"**

INGREDIENTS:

1/4 cup butter, softened	4 eggs
1-1/2 cups dark brown sugar	1/2 cup Guinness Stout (or strong beer)
2 cups self-rising flour	
1-1/2 teaspoons baking powder	<u>Icing Recipe:</u>
1/4 teaspoon salt	1/4 cup butter, softened
2 tablespoons cocoa powder	1-3/4 cups powdered sugar
zest of 1 orange	zest and juice of 1 orange

METHOD

Preheat oven to 375F. Grease two 8-9-inch cake pans. Cream the butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Sift the flour, baking powder, salt and cocoa into a bowl. Add the orange rind to the creamed butter and beat in the eggs, one at a time, including a spoonful of the measured flour mixture with each one, and beating well between additions. Gently mix in the Guinness, a tablespoonful at a time, including another spoonful of flour with each addition. If there's any flour left over, fold it in gently to mix; blend thoroughly without over-beating. Divide the mixture between the tins, smooth down, and put the cakes into the center of the preheated oven. Reduce the heat to moderate (350F) and bake for 35-40 minutes, or until the cakes are springy to the touch and shrinking slightly in the pans. Turn out and cool on a wire rack. Icing Instructions - Cream butter and sugar. Blend in orange juice and zest. Ice bottom layer with 1/3 cup icing. Place second layer on top. Ice sides with half remaining icing. Use the rest of the icing on the top. Store cake in an airtight container.

If you try this recipe, feel free to share your experience with all of us; and of course, if you have a recipe you'd like to share, please contact Beth Loftis at bloftis@verizon.net.

RANDOM RAMBLINGS

- **Blarney Rebel Band Unplugged at the Nail Creek Pub** Central New York's own Blarney Rebel Band and local establishment the Nail Creek Pub will be joining forces on January 31st, in what promises to be a very interesting night of Irish and Celtic traditional music, maybe as you've never heard it. Befitting the homey atmosphere of this popular Varick Street pub, the band will be performing in an intimate sit-down, nearly-unplugged, setting; reminiscent of the nighttime music session scene that marks nearly every city and town throughout Ireland. The show – well, more a get-together than a show – starts at 8 PM and will end at 11; maybe longer, if the patrons, musicians and owners are still enjoying the “craic.”
- ✚ **Hair of the Dog Plays AOH Benefit Show** GAIF veterans Hair of the Dog will be giving a concert on Friday, February 6th, at the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH) hall in Albany. This 8:30 PM show is a benefit for Albany AOH candidates who are running for statewide office. Admission is \$20, and reservations for tables of ten are available through advance purchase. For more information and/or table reservations, contact Liam McNabb at 489-1752, or via e-mail at liammcnabb@hotmail.com.
- **In the Coming Months...** Although these concerts and events don't occur in February, you may wish to get us tickets before the general public learns about them. Here is a brief list of what's coming up, and of course, we'll have more specifics as the dates draw near:
 - ✚ **The Irish Rovers** – March 1st, The Palace Theater, Albany. The “international ambassadors of Irish music” in a special 3 PM show. Tickets are \$25 for adults. Call (518) 465-3335 ext. 103.
 - ✚ **Celtic Woman** – March 6th, Proctor's Theater, Schenectady. Come join the girls of Celtic Women – Chloe, Lisa, Alex, Lynn, Mairead and Lurleen. Okay, I'm kidding with the last one; just checking to see if you really read this stuff. Tickets range from \$65.75 to \$67.75; visit <http://www.proctors.org/>.
 - ✚ **Enter the Haggis** - March 6th, MVCC. You love 'em, we love 'em, and now we've got 'em. Full details will be in next month's issue of MVICE, but if you can't wait until then, contact Kate Barefoot at kfbare@yahoo.com.
 - ✚ **The Irish Tenors** – March 7th, Stanley Theatre, Utica. That's right: The Irish Tenors -- Finbar Wright, Anthony Kearns and Karl Scully -- are coming to Utica. Tickets for the 8 PM show range from \$30-\$60. For more info, visit <http://www.stanleytheatre.net/tickets/index.php?id=45>.
 - ✚ **Dropkick Murphys** – March 10th, Northern Lights in Clifton Park, NY. Tickets for the 7:30 show are \$27; \$25 in advance. For more information, visit <http://www.northernlightslive.com/>.
 - ✚ **Flogging Molly** – March 12th, Water Street Music Hall, Rochester. The original date – the 11th – quickly sold out, but they were able to add a second date, March 12th. Tickets for the 8 PM show, which are going quickly, are \$25 in advance, and can be purchased at all Ticketmaster locations, or by phone at 1-800-745-3000. For more details, go to <http://www.waterstreetmusic.com>.
 - ✚ **Líadan** – March 12th, Old Songs Concert Series, Voorheesville, NY. Líadan, [pronounced 'LEE-a-dun'] weaves traditional Irish music and Irish song to form a unique blend of old and new. Tickets for the 8 PM show are \$20. Visit www.oldsongs.org or call 518-765-2815.
 - ✚ **Grada** – March 14th, Center for the Arts in Homer, NY. Sing Out Magazine says “If this talented quintet appears anywhere within 100 miles of you, hie thee hence!” They do, so hie thusly. Tickets are \$10 to \$20; details at http://www.center4art.org/2009Spring/Grada_tickets_page.html.
 - ✚ **Ronan Tynan** – March 26th, Massrey Center, College of St. Rose in Albany. Unfortunately for Mr. Tynan and his legions of fans, his December 11th concert had to be cancelled because of the weather. Fortunately for us, it's been rescheduled... and now you know about it. Tickets for the 7 PM show are \$40. For tickets contact Stephanie Lamphere at 518-458-5391.
 - ✚ **Gaelic Storm** – April 4th, Munson Williams Proctor Institute, Utica. Tickets for this 8 PM show are \$30, and can be purchased on-line via <http://mwpai.org/>, or by calling (315)797-0000. Seriously, don't put it off; word is trickling out.
 - ✚ **Lord of the Dance** – May 8th, Rochester Auditorium Theater. Michael Flatley's spectacular visual and musical creation is a must-see. Tickets go from \$30-\$55; see www.rbt1.org for details.
 - ✚ **Natalie Macmaster** – May 16th, The Egg, Albany. The fiddle and dance sensation from Cape Breton returns with her electrifying show. Tickets are \$28, available at <http://www.theegg.org/>.

Celtic Club Calendar Finally, here's the Irish Musical and Cultural calendar for February.

Jan 31	Eileen Ivers and Immigrant Soul	Center for the Arts	Homer NY	8 PM	\$25; \$20 seniors; Students & 14 and under free
Jan 31	Blarney Rebel Band	Nail Creek Pub	Utica	8-11 PM	Free
Feb 1	Syracuse Irish Session	Wayside Irish Pub	Elbridge NY	4-7 PM	Free
Feb 6	Blarney Rebel Band	Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub	Washington Mills	6-9 PM	Free
Feb 6	Pat Kane	The Blarney Stone	Auburn	8:30-11:30	Free
Feb 6	Hair of the Dog	Albany AOH	Albany	8:30 PM	\$20
Feb 7	The McKrells	The Parting Glass	Saratoga Springs	9 PM	\$8
Feb 8	Donal O'Shaughnessy	Coleman's Irish Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Feb 8	Red Cross "Chili Challenge"	Herkimer VFW	Herkimer	Noon-3 PM	\$10
Feb 13	Dublin Philharmonic Orchestra's "Celtic Spectacular"	Proctor's Theater	Schenectady	8 PM	\$20-\$49
Feb 14	Traditional Irish Session	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	2:00-5 PM	Free
Feb 15	Syracuse Irish Session	Johnston's Bally Bay Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Feb 20	Donal O'Shaughnessy	Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub	Washington Mills	6-9 PM	Free
Feb 22	Tannahill Weavers	Caffe Lena	Saratoga Springs	7 PM	\$25-\$27
Feb 22	Flyin' Column	Coleman's Irish Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Feb 26	Craobh Dugan Open Session	Cafe Domenico	Utica	7:30-10:00 pm	Free
Feb 27-28	Hair of the Dog	The Parting Glass	Saratoga Springs	8 PM	\$13; resv. req.
Feb 28	Traditional Irish Session	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	2:00-5 PM	Free

That wraps it up for this month. If you have a book you'd like Mark to review, or a recipe to share, or a festival, concert or CD review of your own, feel free to contact us at sistia@roadrunner.com, bloftis@verizon.net or marksisti@roadrunner.com. As always, while we try to get things – prices, places, times, etc., -- as accurate as we can, sometimes we make mistakes. It always makes sense to call ahead to confirm some of these further-out trips.