
MOHAWK VALLEY IRISH CULTURAL EVENTS NEWSLETTER

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Local Paper Takes the Low Road as Parade Hits Genesee Street *Observer-Dispatch Hits "Snooze" Button in the Face of Public Wake-up Call*

Last April, we printed an article (see right) in which we lamented the pervasive feeling among the general public that St. Patrick's Day is synonymous with binge drinking, bad behavior and debauchery, and that, somehow, it's still an acceptable practice to caricaturize those of Irish descent in ways that would be simply (and rightly) unfathomable for any other ethnicity. We implored people to come to their senses, and to treat the Irish with the same respect that is guaranteed for all ethnicities in a civil society, and, once and for all, to at least understand the dignity and reverence with which we of Irish descent celebrate this day... a wake up call, in other words.

A no-brainer, right? Well, that's exactly what the Observer-Dispatch and their reporters, editors and publishers appear to have applied in the days and weeks heading into the holiday and the parade. Not a day went by without some disparaging piece or headline (and if someone from the O-D is having this read to him/her, here's something you might have missed in sensitivity training: "St. Paddy's Day" is not interchangeable with "St. Patrick's Day." The difference, writes AOH National Historian Michael McCormack, "...is the same as the difference between the office Christmas Party and Midnight Mass").

So maybe that was just ignorance...maybe. But what of their electing not to cover the moving ceremony and proclamation read by Mayor Roefaro, and the raising of the Irish flag over City Hall for the first time ever? They gave excuses, but it was inexcusable. And their anti-Irish bias didn't end there. Most disturbing was reporter Cassandra Baber's repeat of last year's offensive "Guide to Drinking" on parade day; this time describing, hour by hour and stumble by stumble, how the "Irish for a day" revelers could most effectively lose both consciousness and dignity, with a special section for "boozers" at each time step. Once again the O-D, in condoning that piece, has shown a brazen indifference to the public and personal appeals that this intolerance must stop. It flies in the face of journalistic integrity – which they should have learned in college – and of common human decency – which they should have learned long before that.

It's April, and the busiest month for an Irish-American has drawn to a close. Also gone is another year of trying to educate the populus – and, alas, the media – that St. Patrick's Day is not a day of excesses, leprechauns, green plastic derbies or "Kiss Me, I'm Irish" pins; that instead it is meant to be a day in which true Irishmen celebrate, with nobility and reverence, the memory and legacy of the patron saint of Ireland. While it's true that we no longer have to suffer, as our ancestors did, the indignities of "No Irish Need Apply" signs or stereotypical caricaturing, it's still a sad fact – well, let's call it a "widely-held contention" – that as long as we are presented with features in the media that promote drinking, fighting and "comical" costumes, and as long as it is appropriate to have our proposed Irish Cultural Center described as a "beer hall," and as long as there is no outcry against TV and radio promotions that feature "Lucky Charms accents," the fight is far from over.

But we are a patient lot, and as driven as we are patient. We know the education process is far from over, but we're here for the long haul, and we're perfectly willing to start changing the world one small piece at a time. As a prime example, the committee in charge of this year's Utica St. Patrick's Day Parade (let's, for the moment, separate it from the Parade Day events that happen throughout the day) placed a major emphasis on adherence to a "no alcohol" policy by anyone involved in the parade; meaning no alcohol in the setup areas, nor on the way to the setup areas, and most certainly, not on a float or marching/riding along the parade route. And without discussion or a "day in court," if you violated the policy, you were removed from the parade, with your parade future to be considered during the off-season. Now, that policy probably went unnoticed by most of the public and the media covering the event, but it's a great example of how serious the local Irish community is about changing the image of Utica's parade, and shattering the perceived nexus of Irish people and alcohol. To that end, we here at the newsletter would like to thank parade organizers Charley Thomas, Ray Durso, Matt Sullivan, Kevin Dowling and their team for taking the high road; and for the quiet but firm way they set a "family-friendly" tone for years to come. And yet, the need for education continues. Another year has passed, and once again the messages of cultural tolerance and civil integrity have been imparted. But teaching only represents half of the education process. We can only hope that the "students" have both the wisdom to comprehend the lessons, and the class to adopt them.

Thousands Enjoy Utica's St. Patrick's Day Parade

On Saturday, March 14th, downtown Utica was aglow with brilliant sunshine, which was only surpassed by the smiles of beaming Irishmen, as tens of thousands of people enjoyed one of the Mohawk Valley's most fun-filled family traditions: the annual St. Patrick's Day Parade. Presented by the Great American Irish Festival and dozens of volunteers and sponsors, the parade – with over 150 units, it's the largest and longest Utica has ever seen -- ran from Oneida Square and continued down Genesee St. to Columbia St., with each unit pausing in front of the Reviewing Stand located at the Stanley Theater. The parade was led by this year's Grand Marshal, **Jim O'Looney**, who was joined by almost two dozen of his immediate family, including some visiting from his beloved Ireland.



Photo by Nancy L. Ford

2009 Parade Winners

The Great American Irish Festival, in association with the Genesis Group, is pleased to announce the following 2009 Utica St. Patrick's Day parade winners – with a tip of the hat too to the parade judges:

Bagpipes

1. Maloney Memorial Pipe Band
2. Syracuse Scottish Marching Band
3. Mohawk Valley Frasers



Float

1. Goggin Family
2. Men's AOH/St. Patrick
3. Mohawk Ltd.

Fire Dept.

1. Maynard Volunteer
2. Clinton
3. New Hartford

Taverns

1. Shorty's
2. Black Cat
3. Nail Creek

Vehicles

1. Oneida County Historical Society
2. Safety First Chimney Sweeps
3. Pepsi Bottling Company

Best Saluting Unit

1. Utica Fire Department
2. New Hartford Legion Post 1376



Marching Units

1. New York Army National Guard
2. Butler-Sheehan Academy of Irish Dance
3. Johnston School of Irish Dance

2009 Irish festival uses MVCC student's artwork

Knowing a good thing when they see it, the Great American Irish Festival once again turned to the talented students in MVCC Professor Robert Clarke's Professional Practice in Graphic Design Program for its 2009 festival poster. The design, which will be used on posters, t-shirts, signage and banners to promote the event throughout the Mohawk Valley, was the brainchild of 2007 graduate, Robert Montecalvo. Rob, currently a junior at SUNY IT, says he drew his inspiration from "...experiences traveling abroad and having a feel for the beauty of a country, its people, and its culture." His poster shows the natural beauty of the Irish countryside, with the American flag lightly hinted over the Irish flag above the mountains. "I also wanted my festival poster to give a feeling of pride to their rich Irish heritage," remarked Rob. Look for Rob's handiwork at the 2009 Great American Irish Festival, which takes place from July 24-26 at the Herkimer County Fairgrounds in Frankfort.



“Remembering the Irish Famine” Food Drive Helps the Area’s Hungry

“There is a story about a man who left this earth and was taken on a tour of the inner realms. He was shown a room where he saw a large group of hungry people trying to eat dinner, but because the spoons they were trying to eat with were longer than their arms, they remained frustrated. “This,” his guide told him, “is Hell.” “That’s terrible!” exclaimed the man; “Please show me Heaven!” “Very well,” agreed the guide, and on they went. When they opened Heaven’s door, the man was perplexed to see what looked very much like the same scene: there was a group of people with spoons longer than their arms. As he looked more closely, however, he saw happy faces and full tummies, for there was one important difference: the people in Heaven had learned to feed each other.” -- Alan Cohen, “The Dragon Doesn’t Live Here Anymore”

This year, as a way of giving back to the community, and in remembrance of one of the most horrific and defining periods in Irish history, the St. Patrick's Day Parade Committee spearheaded a food drive appropriately called “Remembering the Irish Famine.” St. Patrick's Day Parade attendees and marchers were asked to bring non-perishable food items to the parade, to be collected and turned over to Mother Marianne’s West Side Kitchen at the St. Joseph-St. Patrick Parish Center.

Chris Hoke, chairperson of the 2009 drive, reports “With the enthusiastic help of the Adorino Construction employees and their families, plus the Holland Patent High School Honor Society, the first-ever St Patrick's Day Parade food drive was a great success! With green, white and orange boxes, green wheelbarrows and three vans supplied by Adorino Construction, over 500 pounds of food was collected from parade attendees and participants. Volunteers hustled along the parade route, filing the boxes and wheelbarrows and then transferring the food items into the vans, while other



students had containers in which to collect monetary donations. All told, over 500 pounds of food items and more than \$600 were raised for the Mother Marianne West Side Soup Kitchen located at St Joseph/St. Patrick's Church in West Utica, which, according to Deacon Gil Nadeau, would help feed hundreds of people in the west side neighborhood.” Many thanks go to Chris for heading up this successful drive, to Adorino Construction for some major support, to Carol Moseman and her charges from the Holland Patent Honor Society, and to the many parade attendees and participants who so selflessly “turned their spoons to others.”

Utica Mayor Proclaims March “Irish Heritage Month”

For the first time in Utica's storied history, an Irish flag flew at City Hall. On March 5th, 2009, Mayor David Roefaro, flanked by Irish supporters from both the public sector and from a proud local Irish community, read a proclamation honoring the Irish in the Mohawk Valley. At its conclusion, and three days after President Obama did so at the national level, Mayor Roefaro officially declared March to be “Irish Heritage Month.” The proclamation, a fitting finish to a touching ceremony that also included a reading of an essay citing the many contributions made by the area’s early Irish settlers, acknowledged the Great American Irish Festival, Utica’s St. Patrick's Day parade and the future Irish Cultural Center of the Mohawk Valley.



2009 St. Patrick’s Day Parade Grand Marshal Jim O’Looney was on hand for the ceremony and helped raise the Irish flag with the mayor. “I’ve been here 50 years now, a beautiful place,” he said. “And I know the Irish have contributed quite a bit over the years. Certainly to have this honor of having the Irish flag flying on City Hall is unique.”

Book Review:
“The Price of Blood”
By Mark Sisti

One of the most enjoyable aspects of stumbling onto a talented writer’s first book, particular when that book is intended to be part of a series, comes from watching the growth of the writer, the development of the main character and the evolution of the series. Declan Hughes’ debut novel, “The Wrong Kind of Blood” (reviewed in this newsletter in the September 2006 issue; go ahead, I’ll wait) showed great promise, and the return of protagonist private detective Ed Loy in “The Color of Blood” (reviewed in the January ‘08 issue of this newsletter; go ahead, you won’t miss anything while you’re gone) seemed to build on that promise. With the third installment, “The Price of Blood,” consider it a promise fulfilled. It’s far and away the best of a very good series, with the same crackling dialogue, memorable characters and plot twists we’ve come to expect from Hughes. This time around, however, the twists are not merely plot devices but make sense in the context of the intricate storyline, which is complicated but not (as in the first two Loy novels) convoluted.

This time around, Loy is hired by Father Vincent Tyrrell to find a missing jockey, Patrick Hutton, who disappeared several years before. Low on funds, Loy agrees to take the case. The problem is that the only thing Father Tyrrell can offer to Loy is \$5,000 and a name. Still, \$5,000 is \$5,000. Although he has very little to go on, Ed Loy is nothing if not resourceful, and before long he finds himself in a familiar situation, beaten, harried, totally confused and in the middle of dead bodies and decades-old family secrets. But still on the trail.

He wouldn’t be Ed Loy if he didn’t have far too many items on his proverbial plate, and it wouldn’t be Declan Hughes if all the disparate threads didn’t come together at the end. While searching for the missing jockey, Loy is also helping out on what seems to be a simple vandalism case. Simple, that is, until Loy discovers the body of a man who is linked to Father Tyrrell’s brother, wealthy businessman and horserace mogul F.X. Tyrell. At the same time, Loy is pursued by the Halligan family, who holds him culpable for the incarceration of one of their own. And, oh, while we’re at it, there may be a crazed serial killer at work.

Hughes builds his story around three important dates in the Catholic calendar, Advent, Christmas and St Stephen’s Day, which happens to be the day of a major horserace at Leopardstown. The technique works brilliantly, not just because it gives the novel a cogent structure, but because it constantly calls to mind and keeps in the forefront the Catholic Church and its ever-pervasive presence in the framework of Ireland’s past and present. The story moves at a furious pace toward its startling conclusion at the climatic horserace, where past secrets are revealed, past debts are paid and past sins are redeemed. By the end, it all comes together and it all works, with nothing feeling forced or out of place.

As always, going through a plot of a Declan Hughes novel doesn’t do it justice. What sets this book apart is the dialogue, the sense of place Hughes conveys and, most of all, the characters. All too many writers in this genre forget that, while we are interested in the main character’s flaws, the story doesn’t resonate with us unless we care what happens to that character. We like Ed Loy, we like his Everyman aspect, we appreciate his moral compass, we recognize his sense of morality and loyalty. The secondary characters come off equally well, from Father Vincent Tyrell, with the unfathomable depth of despair of a dying man tortured by secrets he is bound to keep, to Tommy Owens, a quirky and interesting character in the first two books who becomes multidimensional and fascinating in this one.

From its deceptively simple beginning to its gripping conclusion, “The Price of Blood” never lets up and never lets go. It is a sometimes brutal, sometimes profane, but always absorbing and intelligent exploration of the dark depths beneath the surface and the ramifications of secrets long buried. Incidentally, The Mystery Writers of America seem to agree, as “The Price of Blood” has been nominated for its 2009 Novel of the Year award.

Glengarry Bhoys Added to 2009 GAIF Lineup

When the lineup for the 2009 Great American Irish Festival was announced in January, amidst all the excitement, one minor note of disappointment was heard by some: “What, no Glengarry Bhoys?” Well, not to worry. The Bhoys are back! One of the most popular Celtic bands of all time, the Glengarry Bhoys will return to the Great American Irish festival again in 2009. “Hard-rocking” and “bagpipes” are not two terms generally heard in the same sentence, but with the Glengarry Bhoys, it’s appropriate. The Glengarry Bhoys have established themselves as one of the top draws on the Irish festival and club circuit, including appearances at every Great American Irish Festival since its inception, and, after a brief hiatus, they’re touring again and sound better than ever. The Bhoys have their roots in Glengarry, Ontario and their music draws on the unique blend of the French and Scottish musical heritage indigenous to the area. Their blend of traditional music, fused with the multicultural sounds of modern and contemporary Celtic music, has brought them international acclaim. Fiery guitar and bass, intense percussion and fiddle, teamed with pipes and vocals, make for a memorable performance.

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

This month’s recipe – “**Irish Herb Scones**”

INGREDIENTS:

1/2 lb Mealy potatoes	1/2 tsp Dried dill
4 tbl Flour	1/4 tsp Savory
1/4 tsp Salt	1/4 tsp Marjoram
4 tbl Oil	1/4 tsp Powdered sage
2 tbl Chopped parsley	Oil for frying

METHOD

Boil or bake the potatoes, then pass through a foodmill. Mix the flour, salt, oil and herbs with the potatoes. On a floured board, roll this dough to a thickness of about 1/4 inch. Cut into triangles 3 or 4 inches wide. Fry in very hot oil on both sides until light golden. Serves 4.

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

✿ **Ireland Vacation Winners Announced** The Committee for the Restoration and Preservation of St Mary’s Church in Florence New York is pleased to announce that sisters Phyllis Stoker of Munnsville NY, and Carmel Lehr of Morrisville, NY, are the lucky recipients of the 2009 Ireland Vacation Giveaway. They come from a family of seven with an Irish mother and an English father, and all five of the sisters are going to go along with “several husbands.”

✿ **Clean and Green Program** The Genesis Group is spearheading a Clean and Green program locally on Saturday, April 25th, as one of thousands of Earth Day events being held around the globe, and a national initiative called “Keep America Beautiful.” Presumably because there’s nothing to do now that the Parade is over and the Festival is still 4 months out, Kevin Dowling has thrown out a challenge to the great family of volunteers he’s worked with in these events, and he thinks we could fairly easily put together a GAIF Clean and Green Team to help out on the 25th. If you are interested in getting involved – up to and including being the overall GAIF Clean and Green Coordinator -- please contact Kevin at Assistant-Director@gaif.us, or any of us at the addresses found at the end of this newsletter.

✚ **They're He-e-e-re!** The lasses at Accents of Ireland Gift Shoppe are happy to announce the arrival of two long-awaited CDs they can add – momentarily – to their impressive stock of Irish/Celtic music. That's right, we're talking about **"Gael Day"** from Kansas City's favorite sons, the Elders, and **"Gutter Anthems"** from Toronto's Enter the Haggis. And take it from us: they were worth the wait!

✚ **You Can Help Spread the Word** Kate Barefoot, Special Events Coordinator for the Great American Irish Festival, writes: "Folks... if you are planning on attending any of the events on the Calendar, please be sure to either take handouts about the GAIF with you or at least talk up the Festival with others when you are there! Especially events that are out of town. We would love to use any Irish related event to promote the Great American Irish Festival. Our target audience is others like us who appreciate our Irish Heritage, but might not have heard about our FANTASTIC Festival!! Please contact me if you want something to bring along! We will be getting our brochures ready soon and ready for distribution. As soon as we do, we will let you know. THANKS!! Kate Flanagan Barefoot - email: kfbare@yahoo.com."

✚ **An Irish Homecoming** On Sunday April 5th, the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall welcomes Cherish the Ladies with their guests Maura O'Connell, Liz Carroll & John Doyle, plus an award winning ensemble of Irish step dancers, and special appearance of the Irish supergroup bohola. Maura O'Connell joins the all female Celtic ensemble, Cherish the Ladies, led by Grammy award-wining flutist and whistle player Joanie Madden. Guest musicians and an all-star dance ensemble featuring champion dancers and former dance ensemble members of Riverdance and The Chieftains make this a must-see event. Tickets for the 7 PM show range from \$29-\$32; \$15 for students. For more information, check www.troymusichall.org or call (518) 273-0038.

✚ **Enter Shamrock Holmes** New reader JoAnn (joanncw76ny@yahoo.com) wrote us to ask "Is there an Irish organization in the Mohawk Valley to meet those of Irish ancestry and join in a social setting to learn more about Ireland?" Well? Does someone want to start the ball rolling?

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

Apr 3	Donal O'Shaughnessy	Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub	Washington Mills	6-9 PM	Free
Apr 3-4	Hair of the Dog	The Parting Glass	Saratoga Springs	8 PM	\$13; resv. req.
Apr 4	Pat Kane	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	8 PM	Free
Apr 5	"An Irish Homecoming" w/Cherish the Ladies and others	Troy Savings Bank Music Hall	Troy	7 PM	\$29-32
Apr 5	Syracuse Irish Session	Wayside Irish Pub	Elbridge NY	4-7 PM	Free
Apr 5	Pat Kane	Coleman's Irish Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Apr 8	Pat O'Connor & Eoghan O'Sullivan	Old Songs Concert Series	Voorheesville	8 PM	\$15
Apr 10	Blarney Rebel Band	Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub	Washington Mills	6-9 PM	Free
Apr 19	Syracuse Irish Session	Johnston's Bally Bay Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Apr 24	Blarney Rebel Band	Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub	Washington Mills	6-9 PM	Free
Apr 24	Donal O'Shaughnessy	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	9 PM	Free
Apr 24-25	Hair of the Dog	The Parting Glass	Saratoga Springs	8 PM	\$13; resv. req.
Apr 26	Flyin' Column	Coleman's Irish Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free

That wraps it up for this month. If you have anything you want to contribute, 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.