
MOHAWK VALLEY IRISH CULTURAL EVENTS NEWSLETTER

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GAIF Weathers the Storm, Draws 20,000



For the second time in the three-year existence of the Great American Irish Festival, Mother Nature tried her best to dampen the festivities.

For the second time she failed.

Despite horrific weather, over 20,000 people turned out to catch Natalie MacMaster, Solas, Black 47, Enter the Haggis and the other world-class acts at the Great American Irish Festival, held at the Herkimer County Fairgrounds on Friday and Saturday, July 28 and 29.

Ironically, early forecasts and an afternoon deluge had festival organizers worried about the

weather for Friday, but as the gates opened on opening day, the weather was, for a change, cooperative. Armies of festival-goers came pouring through the gates at the rate of almost 1,000 people per hour.

The predicted rains never came and by the time Natalie MacMaster thrilled a packed house to close the festivities, 10,000 people had enjoyed a perfect festival day.

With the forecast for day two calling for cloudy skies and high temperatures, everything looked poised for a festival to remember for years to come.

Well, that's what happened, but not in a way anyone could have expected.

The festival was off to a rousing start. The band Greenwich Meantime had the huge crowd at a fever pitch. Two local favorites, Hair of the Dog and Andy Cooney were just taking the stage when festival officials began spreading the ominous news.

"Reports say we may have some bad weather coming our way in about a half hour," Assistant Director Kevin Dowling told stage manager Mark Sisti around 3:00. "Very bad weather. 60 mile an hour winds. Hail. Heavy thunder and lightning"

Hopes were high that it would pass, but, on cue, a little after 3:30 the sky turned dark and it was clear that the festival would catch the full brunt of the storm. Still, the GAIF had survived torrential downpours in its inaugural festival and came through unscathed, so there was no particular concern.

Then Festival Director Matt Sullivan took the microphone during Andy Cooney's set and made the announcement.

"Folks, we don't want to do this," said Sullivan. "But they've issued a tornado watch and heavy thunderstorm warning. We're going to have to shut this down. If you want to go to your cars and leave, now is the time to do so, although I hope you decide to stay and take shelter." He then added, "Hopefully it will pass and we can get it up and running again shortly."

As everyone took shelter, the storm raged. Some festivals are adding fireworks to their entertainment, but they've got nothing on the pyrotechnics on display at the fairgrounds during that electrical storm. One thunderclap in particular got everyone's attention, as one of the power poles on the grounds took a direct hit.

Things got even more frightening moments later when the announcement was made, “it’s definitely a tornado. Everybody must take shelter immediately.” The crowd in the main tent quickly made their way to one of the many permanent building on the site. It was a scenario out of a disaster movie.

But the oddest thing happened. Not only did very few people decide to leave, those who stayed to ride the storm out found themselves laughing and singing with perfect strangers and having a grand old time. The only complaints were from people who had been unable to refill their beer glasses in time.

“You can tell it’s an Irish Festival,” said one observer, “when a tornado doesn’t bother anyone, but people have a fit over an empty beer glass.”

Well, they didn’t stay empty for long. As quickly as it had come the storm passed. Tables were set back up, tents were quickly repaired, beer was flowing and, within seconds after the rain stopped, the joyful sound of Irish music was surrounding the fairgrounds once more.

Hair of the Dog and Andy Cooney picked up right where they left off, and the other acts followed in succession to hugely appreciative audiences. Once more, the Great American Irish Festival had not only survived, but thrived.

By the time it was over festival beer handlers had poured approximately 20% more beverages than last year.

“This now makes 2 out of the first 3 years that we suffered through torrential downpours and had official tornado watch warnings from the National Weather Service. While such circumstances might be fatal for some events, the GAIF continues to not only grow, but thrive,” said a proud Sullivan. “In fact, these tests have made apparent to all observers the strength of the GAIF volunteer organization.”

“Imagine what we can do with favorable weather!”

Well, hopefully we’ll get to find out next year. But fair or foul, it really won’t matter. The Great American Irish Festival has proven it can weather any storm.

GAIF VOLUNTEERS ALL SET TO PARTY

Those Great American Irish Festival volunteers who fulfilled their obligations this past weekend (and up to one guest each @ \$15) are invited to a VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION PARTY at Piggy Pat's BBQ on Kellogg Rd (@ Rte 8) in Washington Mills on Sunday August 6th from 2-6 pm. In addition to great BBQ and beverages, there will be Celtic music and door prizes, to accompany the fine company and reminiscing of the 3rd GAIF with some of the finest folks ever organized in Central NY. Those who didn't join these volunteers this year might want to get in on the action next year. The time to sign up (via the website) is now! Don't be reading this item next year on the outside looking in.

...and speaking of volunteers Here’s a little human interest story that shows the caliber of the volunteer army that was so important to the success of the festival. Matt Sullivan and his committee, with volunteer coordinator Claudette Johnson, had put together a comprehensive “bible” of do’s and don’ts for those wishing to become volunteers, covering many, many aspects of the job; specifically keyed towards professionalism and courtesy. As comprehensive as that guide was – and it was – they could not possibly have anticipated the near-tornado conditions that befell the grounds, or the need for these volunteers to provide immediate care and relief to, and to ensure the safety of, over 10,000 attendees. And yet, that is exactly what they did. Afterwards, Mark Sisti related the following story: “I made a point of telling all the stage volunteers what a great job they did and one who was at the traditional stage said, “well I really didn’t do anything.” I said, “Let me tell you what you did. You stood there with a uniform on. You remained calm. You didn’t panic. By doing that you gave them the impression that we had everything under control. When people came here you cleared a space for them and you ushered them in. In short you did exactly what you were supposed to do. We weren’t asking you to stop the storm.” As he told Matt Sullivan afterwards, “I expected the reactions from the committee members, who are after all led by people who are trained to react to emergencies, but I thought the volunteers’ behavior was particularly exemplary.” Our thanks to you all!

Book Review:
“Dead I Well May Be”
Submitted by Mark Sisti

Forced to flee the Troubles in Belfast, Michael Forsythe, the protagonist of Adrian McKinty’s *Dead I Well May Be*, travels to New York to work for gangster boss Darcy White, helping save Darcy’s domain in ‘90’s Harlem and the Bronx from an invasion of Dominican gangsters. Younger, smarter and more vicious than the colorful cast of miscreants that make up Darcy’s gang, Michael soon finds himself in the boss’s good graces. However, after a botched caper makes things too hot in New York, Michael is sent to Mexico on a drug buy, and lands in a Mexican prison with his fellow mates (let’s just say sleeping with your gangster boss’s girlfriend is rarely a good idea). Escaping prison, Michael returns to New York, hardened and resolute, to exact revenge on those responsible for his incarceration.



It’s hard to explain why a reader would develop such empathy and affection for a character as thoroughly unlikable as Michael Forsythe, who seems to be totally devoid of conscience, but much of it has to do with McKinty’s use of language. Written in the first person, the language used by Michael has an Irish lilt that is humorous and sarcastic and wholly engaging. The inimitable Irish diction, with its unlikely combination of poetry and earthiness, provides the perfect vehicle for the multifaceted Michael Forsythe, and McKinty’s skillful juxtaposition of lyrical language with brutal descriptions of horrific scenes and events creates a multilayered depth seldom seen in this type of hard-boiled fiction.

The most obvious example of this is the depiction of Michael’s prison stay, where McKinty mingles vivid descriptions of the filth and oppression of the prison with feverish memories of Michael’s childhood in Belfast. The incongruous blurring of the two worlds is jarring and disturbing at first, but eventually the reader is carried back into the world of Michael’s childhood along with him.

After his escape from prison and eventful return to New York, Michael is a different person, colder yet more passionate, less than he was and at the same time more than he was, and McKinty’s writing skillfully reflects (or anticipates) the changes in Michael. The narrative voice becomes less filled with bravado, more subdued and reflective, as Michael (and the reader) faces twists and turns which are surprising but, upon reflection, have been set up perfectly.

The success of the story depends entirely on the character of Michael Forsythe, and he is as complex and, ultimately, appealing a character as you are likely to find. He is not without morals, as he appears as first, but rather operates within his own complex moral and ethical code. His story will stay with you long after the final page is turned.

Celtic Weekend at Sterling Renaissance Festival

Back by popular demand, August 5th and 6th will be the dates for this year’s Celtic Weekend at the Sterling Renaissance Festival. Enjoy a mix of Irish and Scottish Events! For the Irish lovers...Irish Session will once again be joining us with their traditional Celtic Music and Irish Stepdancing. For the Scottish lovers...listen for the stirring sounds of a Scottish pipeband. For all...Enjoy Specialty Ales at the pubs throughout the Shire! As an added temptation, how would you like to be able to visit the Festival every day for FREE in 2007! This weekend only, enter to win a Season Pass for the 2007 Season! [from their web site, <http://www.sterlingfestival.com/renfest/>]

Cortland Celtic Festival to Take Place on Aug 26th

Cortland Celtic Festival

Mark your calendars now for the 6th annual Cortland Celtic Festival, Saturday, August 26 at the Cortland County Fairgrounds. This year's fest promises to be the best one yet! This fun filled event offers something for everyone, from toddlers who will enjoy seeing the Celtic breeds of cattle, sheep, dogs and horses, to grandparents who will enjoy hearing the traditional music of their childhood. A day of everything Celtic: food, music, dance, exhibits and demonstrations. Why there's even a Celtic Run to start the morning off at 8:00am, sponsored by the Cortland YMCA (kilts are optional)! Why not pick up your tickets today at one of the various ticket outlets: Sheridan's Jewelry, Jodi's Hallmark, Cortland Youth Bureau, Back to Basics, the Tompkins Trust Company on the Commons in Ithaca and Kitty Hoynes, Syracuse. Find out what everyone is talking about, be there, Saturday, August 26th at the Cortland Celtic Festival. And, yes, Enter the Haggis will be back for their 5th straight festival appearance, along with a tremendous line up of top-flight Celtic entertainers. For a complete listing, visit the official Celtic Fest web site at www.cortlandcelticfestival.org. While you're on the site, why not buy your tickets and save time and money! The Cortland Celtic Festival is sponsored by the Cortland Celtic Cultural Association, the City and County of Cortland, Price Chopper and the Cortland Regional Sports Council. Contact Person: *[Submitted by Cecile Scott , 753-3021 ext 26]*

RANDOM RAMBLINGS

☘ The Central New York Scottish Games committee invites you to attend the CNY Scottish Games and Celtic Festival at Long Branch Park in Liverpool, NY for an experience you will never forget! Come to Syracuse, NY area and join us in the wee morning hours Saturday, August 12 and allow us to bring Scotland to you. The aroma of Scottish and American Food, the skirl of pipes, the cadence of the drums, the awe of massed bands, the beauty and form of the dancers, the strength of the athletes and the feeling of clanship all contribute to hours of nostalgia and pure enjoyment! Schedule is 9:00 to 6:00 on Saturday the 12th. *[from their web site, <http://www.cnyscots.com/frame.html>]*

☘ **Looking ahead** Mark your calendars now for the **Syracuse Guinness Irish Festival** (Sept 8-9), **Irish 2000** (Sept 16), **Old Blind Dogs** at the Earlville Opera House (Sept 30), **Great Big Sea** at the Egg (Oct 11), **Black 47** at Munson Williams (Dec 6), and much more... look for more details next month.

Celtic Club Calendar Finally, here's the Irish Musical and Cultural calendar for August:

Aug 4	Blarney Rebel Band	Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub	Washington Mills	5-8:30 PM	Free
Aug 5	Donal O'Shaughnessy	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	9:00 PM	Free
Aug 5, 6	Celtic Weekend	Sterling Renaissance Festival	Sterling NY	10 AM – 7 PM	\$20
Aug 11	Cliudan	Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub	Washington Mills	5-8:30 PM	Free
Aug 11	Causeway Giants	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	9:00 PM	Free
Aug 12	Old Friends	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	9:00 PM	Free
Aug 13	Natalie MacMaster	The Egg	Albany	7:30 PM	\$26
Aug 18	Rattlin' Bog	Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub	Washington Mills	5-8:00 PM	Free
Aug 18	Old Friends	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	9:00 PM	Free
Aug 19	Gerry Dixon	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	9:00 PM	Free
Aug 25	TownPants	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	9:00 PM	Free
Aug 25	Donal O'Shaughnessy	Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub	Washington Mills	5-8:30 PM	Free
Aug 26	Cortland Celtic Festival	Cortland County Fairgrounds	Cortland NY	10 AM to 10 PM	\$18, \$13 adv

That wraps it up for this month. If you have anything you want to add, feel free to contact us at sistia@rl.af.mil, bloftis@adelphia.net or marksisti@adelphia.net.