

## CHAT ROOM



KATHIE O'DONOHUE

## Irish feast has American twist

Growing up Irish-American, my family and I enjoyed the "wearing of the green" each March 17th, yet interestingly, many of the traditions associated with this day in the United States are absent in Ireland. There, St. Patrick's Day is a national holiday, a day which typically begins with religious services. While here corned beef and cabbage is usual fare, in Ireland a more likely feast would include roasted lamb and potatoes or cabbage and bacon. Green beer is something unique to the States also; any self-respecting Irishman would pull a pint of Guinness, dark to be sure, but never green.

Most people this side of the Atlantic probably don't realize that Ireland's patron saint, St. Patrick, was not Irish. Incredibly, this Roman-born youth had been kidnapped and sold into slavery in Ireland. He subsequently escaped but eventually returned to the Emerald Isle in 432 A.D. as a missionary who set about converting the many pagan natives to Christianity. Ireland's well known symbol, the shamrock, was used by St. Patrick to illustrate for new converts the "trinity" concept embraced by Christians, each petal of the clover representing one of the triad identities of deity: God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Legend also attributes to this bishop responsibility for driving snakes from Ireland, though I've heard it said there still exist plenty of two-legged ones!

## Blarney stone

Visitors to the land of "forty shades of green" enjoy kissing the Blarney stone, which is said to bestow a rejoicing tongue upon those who perform this ritual. Yet, any Irishman worth his weight in gold is born with the gift of blarney, the amazing - even poetic - application of flattery. Many an acquaintance has scratched his head after a close encounter of the Irish kind, wondering if he received an insult or blessing!

The Irish are a people of fascinating contrasts: well known for their wit, they often demonstrate equal parts melancholy and levity. Frequently recognized for their uncanny friendliness and charm, they also bear the reputation of being as rugged and unyielding as rock-laden Caughnawaga, an Irish version of the badlands in the West Central region of Ireland.

So often possessing a spirit of whimsy, they are at the same time a people of steadfast faith and deep sorrows. A people of simple but delicious cuisine whose staple food, the potato, has profound respect. In 1846 the potato crop was destroyed through disease, resulting in the starvation deaths of hundreds of thousands.

The Irish are an amazing people with a sad ballad rooted in the heart, all somehow forever sharing within the soul a deep connection to the potato famine, the troubles, the sadness still part of Northern Ireland. Their history is one of bearing triumph and triumph, oppression and bravery. Perhaps they are best characterized by their delicately beautiful though surprisingly sturdy Beleck porcelain and Waterford crystal, both known and loved worldwide.

A typical Irishman will have a poem in his heart, a story at his fingertips, a sparkle in the eye, and an old saying or two in his pocket. Many an Irishman simultaneously embodies the soul of a poet and the hide of a fighter.

## Coffin ship voyage

Though she died two years ago at age 98, my maternal grandmother left behind a rich history. As a young teen, Grandma and several of her siblings left Ireland aboard a "coffin ship," so dubbed in the pre-World War I era when many passengers fell ill on filthy, disease-laden ships, some dying and never reaching the United States. Before her journey, my grandma received the "Last Rites" of the Catholic Church - a sacrament administered to the gravely ill or those in danger of death.

While pubs and pints often predominate when the topic turns to Irish drink, my experience has involved a bit of tea, several cups and yet again more tea. Grandma kept the cups full when you thought you were done, and

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BY MARY RODRIQUE  
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Years ago when a new family moved into the neighborhood, the Welcome Wagon lady soon appeared bearing gifts.

Welcome Wagon International, the nation's largest new homeowner welcoming program, has changed with the times. Because nearly 80 percent of households today are two income earners, and most homes are empty during the day, Welcome Wagon greets new arrivals by mail.

Just bought a house in Farmington Hills? Look for a brightly colored package to arrive by mail with the happy house Welcome Wagon logo. It will include an address book with the names and addresses of local businesses, everything from the best place to fix your faulty brakes to a trusted pediatrician who's taking new patients. Tucked inside the box is a packet of coupons redeemable for a variety of free goods, from a pound of ground beef at the local butcher shop to a free pizza at the corner pizzeria.

"Welcome Wagon has reached 50 million households," said Sharon DeVore, a regional manager for southeast Michigan.

## Deep roots

Founded in 1928, it has local address books in 3,100 communities across America, and has greeted such illustrious households as those of presidents Kennedy and Nixon.

"Our purpose is to recommend businesses to families moving into town with no established habits. We use many resources to get those welcoming packages into their hands ASAP," said DeVore, who lives in Farmington Hills and has been with the company almost 10 years.

Address books are customized for each community. The Farmington area is divided into three zones, insuring that businesses being promoted are indeed local. Welcome Wagon operates in 250 Michigan cities and in 45 states.

"Nobody brings cookies anymore," said Laura Stirrett, account executive whose territory includes Farmington and Farmington Hills. "Even if you're



Welcoming: Linda St. Denis (foreground), Laura Stirrett and Sharon DeVore with the Welcome Wagon logo. They work to connect new families to the Farmington area with local businesses.

home, you're hesitant to open the door to a stranger.

## Free gift lure

"But everyone likes to receive a gift in the mail. It's fun and exciting. You moved. You have to establish all new habits. The whole idea behind Welcome Wagon, it gives businesses in the community an opportunity to say 'Come and see us.' It gives them a chance to gain new customers."

"We enclose a follow-up survey card in the package asking which businesses (homeowner) has visited," added Stirrett, who joined the company last July. "We get about 20 percent feedback. We take those comments into participating businesses and they're so

glad to see the effectiveness of the program."

It is local businesses who sponsor the program, paying for inclusion in the directory for a minimum one-year commitment.

"Every type of business has the opportunity to be part of our program," added Stirrett. "But just one of each type of business, so it's based on availability. We ask sponsors to recommend other businesses, we get some ideas from local chambers of commerce."

Linda St. Dennis, a senior vice president for Welcome Wagon with an office in Novi, is excited about yet another new venture for the company.

"We're a new member of Homestore.com, a leading provider of

information for the real estate industry," she said.

Homestore.com is a comprehensive network of Web sites devoted exclusively to home and real estate related products and services. In addition, Welcome Wagon sponsors are listed on the Web site of sister company, move.com, which offers downloadable coupons from sponsors at www.move.com.

"Now we're a community service they can tap into whenever they want," said St. Dennis, who has been with Welcome Wagon for 15 years.

For more information on Welcome Wagon, call Linda St. Dennis at 248-390-7334.

# Community focal point for 125 years



Masonic Temple: Celebrating 125 years.

BY RUTH MOEHLMAN  
SPECIAL WRITER

A focal point for downtown Farmington is the 1876 Victorian style Masonic Temple building on the northwest corner of Farmington Road and Grand River. To the west is Monument Park on a triangular shaped site.

The building was designed and built by Johnson Prall. Prall designed numerous buildings in Pontiac and outstate, including the Opera House in Calumet, an outstanding Victorian building.

Prall was born in Fleming, N.Y., on July 27, 1817. His father was a builder and Johnson learned the trade from him. He in turn taught his sons.

Johnson Prall was married three times. His first wife lived only a few years. In 1840 he married Sarah M. Melcher who was the mother of his children. Eventually, there were seven sons and three daughters. The family came to Pontiac in 1851.

All the Prall sons were builders. When the Township Hall was constructed, Johnson Prall was assisted by his brother, David, and sons Justice and Mark. Johnson was active in Pontiac city government; he served as an alderman. In 1860, a street was named after him in Pontiac.

## Elaborate details

Prall also owned a wood turning business. There were many of the elaborate details manufactured that were incorporated into his buildings. Sarah Prall, his second wife, died in 1867. He remarried.

Johnson lived almost 90 years more in Pontiac. He died on Sept. 16, 1892.

The Township Hall, or Masonic Temple building, was built because of a local disaster. The summer and fall of 1872 was very dry. A fire started in the back of a local dry goods store on Oct. 9, 1872. Because the Grand River stores were wood, including the roof, and very dry, the fire spread down the block from one building to the next.

Numerous shops were burned as well as the township clerk's office and the Masonic Hall which was located over one of the stores. A bucket brigade was formed from two nearby wells. Volunteers, both men and women, helped. There was no fire department in 1872.

A hotel, the Owen House, was saved from destruction by the water from the buckets, as reported by Nathan Power in an article many years later. At the time, Nate Power was only 9, he remembered the fire well. He recalled how Chauncy Green, who had a farm on Nine Mile, took command and the townspeople under his direction attached ropes to a building in the path of the fire. They pulled the building down

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# Musical scholarship auditions judging Saturday

Five judges will decide the annual scholarship auditions sponsored by Farmington Musicale on Saturday, March 17 at Nardin Park United Methodist Church.

Piano students will perform for Bruce Sininger. He studied piano and voice at Eastman School in New York and earned post graduate degrees at the Conservatory of Music in Cincinnati. He taught piano, voice, and theory at Wayne State University and is currently teaching privately and is music director for Christ the King Lutheran Church in Grosse Pointe.

Violinist Velda Kelly will judge string participants. She has been teaching and performing in metro Detroit since 1983. Kelly holds degrees in music performance from Boston Uni-

versity and the University of Cincinnati Conservatory of Music. She is a member of the Michigan Opera Theater and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, and co-artistic director of Chamber Music at the Scarab Club. She has private students and has been on faculty of the Center for Creative Studies.

Vocalists will sing for Carolyn Grimes, a lyric coloratura soprano. She holds a bachelor of music degree from Cornell and a master's degree in voice performance from the University of Michigan. She has taught on the faculties of several universities and is a soloist with Old Christ Church in Detroit.

Judge Paul DeRubeis will hear the wind, brass and percussion students. A graduate of Wayne State, he is a mem-

ber of the Music Educators National Conference, and the American and Michigan School Band Directors Association. He is currently teaching elementary band in the Bloomfield Hills School district and plays with the St. Mary's of the Hills Brass Quintet.

Brian Nutting will also judge wind, brass and percussion participants.

All Farmington area schools will be represented in this competition. Cash awards will be presented to the winning students at a recital Sunday, April 1. The Strey McCallum Piano award will be presented at that time for outstanding piano performer.



Velda Kelly



Paul DeRubeis



Carolyn Grimes