

Families Gather to Raise Money for St. Patrick's Day Parade

By Donna Marks

ON A RECENT SUNNY SUNDAY, as a major snow melt produced soggy, moisture-laden conditions, about 100 people streamed in to a smallish bar in the heart of Gaithersburg to support a cause. Every year at this time, Quincy's hosts a fundraiser for the annual Gaithersburg St. Patrick's Day Parade, the only one held in Montgomery County. "Fifteen percent of all the day's proceeds goes to the fundraising group," explained bar owner Alexis Magill.

The Harp and Shamrock Society of Gaithersburg has been running this fundraiser for 15 years, the last three at Quincy's. According to chairperson, Mary Gray, "I'm mostly Scottish, but it doesn't matter, as long as you're taking part in the parade. It's okay, even if you're green from Pluto."

Young, tiara-coiffed heads bobbed up and down in a corner of the dining area—dancers practicing their steps before their performance.

Lauren sat near the entrance. Her daughter was one of the beginner dancers that afternoon. "One of the first things I looked for when we moved here was an Irish dance studio. We were lucky to find one here that's a nice school. Good, but not competitive."

The bustling brood of families seemed almost relieved to be out and about, after enduring a full day of relentless snow the day before. They shared food and libations and laughter and the sounds of children punctuated the music of the guitar trio.

At a high table in the middle of the dining room, Brigid and Rob also were feeling the lucky streak as they listened to The Expanding Waistlines and Friends, a guitar trio that provided the musical entertainment along with some lukewarm attempts at being DJs. "We saw the same group at Dogfish by chance two years ago. I remember we bought our wool hats with the shamrocks there. We were laughing 'cause it's a coincidence that we came here by chance and here they are again. And we don't hardly go to bars very often," he

added, as Brigid sported a Cheshire cat grin in the background.

"Have you ever been to a St. Patrick's Day parade," asked Bill, a small man with a full-gray beard and a fine voice, as he stopped to chat. "You should go. It's wonderful!" He disappeared into the crowd, like a leprechaun on a mission.

Mary Gray brought Louise Carr over to say hello to the group. "I was exported from Ireland here years ago," Carr offered. "I've watched the parade grow. It started out as hard work, now it propels itself, because the City's helping us out more."

The Duffy School of Irish Dance students soon began their performance, and the audience squealed when a few of them were introduced as finalists in the upcoming state and national competitions. Proud dad Sean ("That's S-E-A-N," he was quick to clarify): "That's Meghan (M-E-G-H-A-N). This is her first time dancing in hard shoes, and I want to make sure she doesn't need any help. My 5-year-old is sitting over there with her mom. She's having some stage fright today."

Cathy [O]'Coyle (she thought it would be cute to add the O, just for the occasion): "I love this group. I volunteer with them every year."

Michael Goldberg: "The amount of participation we've been getting is off the charts!" "It's about community. The Harp and Shamrock Society has made it into a beautiful family/community thing."

Cathy Gallagher: "I'm a leprechaun ...been doing this for years, starting when my daughter was a dancer. You have no idea how much we've grown. We've moved to The Rio because we've grown so much. Now I think we're getting too big for even that venue."

At a nearby table, Marshall Peterson explained, "My wife and I have been running a concession stand at the parade every year, selling hats and buttons and other things like that. We met at one of the parades, it was a match made in heaven."

“One side of my family came over on The Mayflower. On the other side, my grandfather was Swedish and my grandmother was Norwegian. My wife, on the other hand, is Texas Irish, and her maiden name was Guire. The family joke is they lost the first half of their name in a poker game.”

“It doesn’t matter what you are, everyone has such a good time every year,” added Jay Rowse.

Over at the bar, Jeff Karn had just stopped by with friends “for happy hour, after working all day digging out some seniors in Lincoln Park.” He leaned against the wall as he waited for his drink.

“I’m Scottish/Irish/German, and my family’s been here since the 1880s.”

His friend Tammy chimed in. “This is really cute. They should come around by the bar with their donation buckets. We’ve been waiting to give them some money, but they won’t come over here.

As if heeding the call, Rebecca came sauntering over selling raffle tickets for the fundraiser. Her bright green cardigan seemed to glow like a beacon propelled by her huge chest. “You get half of whatever we raise,” she said. “So, if we collect \$300, you get \$150. And you can keep it!”

“Tell everyone to come back to Quincy’s after the parade,” Alexis Magill chirped, as she brought an order of drinks over to a table in the dining room. ■