



• UNITED IRISH CULTURAL CENTER •

# Build It And They Will Come

by Liam Reidy, President, United Irish Cultural Center, (lreidy@irishcentersf.org)

WE CONTINUE TO MAKE progress in the planning of our new Irish Cultural Center. In July the architects completed their conceptual drawings for the city planning department and will present those updated plans to interested neighbors and UICC members at a meeting on August 4. As part of our due diligence, we have engaged the services of a site surveyor, soil engineers, an environmental consultant and a land use attorney for preliminary help and advice.

The UICC Board, led by Mark Burke, is currently undertaking a feasibility study to objectively uncover the strength and weaknesses of our proposed new building, its opportunities and threats, and ultimately the prospects for its success.

We had a very worthwhile tour of the Jewish Community Center and believe this was time well spent in our research. Mark and I, along with members of the rebuilding Committee, visited the Jewish Community Center (JCC) at 3200 California Street last month for a very informative behind-the-scenes tour led by Craig Salgado, Chief Operating Officer, and a 27-year JCC employee. Much of the motivation for our visit was to help us assess the practicality and sustainability of our own new 2025 building since the JCC has all the components of what we plan to incorporate and provide in the new Irish Center

(cultural programming, hospitality and office spaces, gym, and aquatics facility). During the tour we got to explore the history of the JCC and learned more about the motivation to rebuild the Jewish Community Center from the ground up between 2001-2004. The "old JCC" building was opened to the public in 1933 and demolished in 2001 to make way for the new building. By the early 1990s, the old JCC building was showing its age, had antiquated building systems, a roof that was constantly leaking, along with declining membership and community interest. The organization fell on hard times, and everybody who had a connection to the place agreed that something should be done.

Does that sound at all familiar? ... We have dealt with these same issues in the very recent past at the Irish Center; hence our motivation to ensure the UICC and its supporters and stakeholders in the community will always have a place to gather together.

Having heard Craig outline the reasons why there is a "new JCC" today, I asked him if there was any truth to the old adage "Build it and they will come." Without hesitation, he responded with just one word: "Absolutely." Prior to the new building being installed, the JCC had several hundred members, and after the new building opened its membership exploded to 8,000.

"Look around," he said,

"the place is constantly busy with people coming and going all day long." While the daily number of visitors to the JCC has not yet reached its pre-pandemic levels of an average of 4,000-5,000 people, they are slowly coming back. The sports gym at the JCC is one of its more popular programs. On average 1,800 members use the gym on a regular basis. While on the tour we could see many people arriving to drop off and pick up kids at camps, checking in to use the gym and pool, while support staff was busy in the administration offices, the security desk, and building maintenance. The JCC has a ground-floor restaurant that is leased out to an independent concessionaire.

There is a wonderful aquatics facility at the JCC (currently undergoing a renovation), with a 5-lane lap pool and a kiddie pool. The swim program is very successful and drives a large number of annual family membership plans and swim lessons. It was certainly an informative visit and I would like to thank Craig Salgado for sharing his time with us. We are certainly more aware of how a facility like this one operates and it will be useful to incorporate all this new information into our own feasibility study.

At our July Board meeting, we passed a resolution "supporting the use of union labor in the construction of the new multi-storied United Irish Cultural Center known as the Irish

Center 2025 Project, save where community volunteers or members of the 501c3 Corporation are also able to provide their time and talents to do the development and construction work in support of the Irish Center 2025."

## Important Dates to Remember:

**Wednesday, August 4th, 7:00 pm**

Public meeting open to all neighbors and UICC members. The purpose of this meeting is to present the latest conceptual designs for the proposed new Irish Center.

**Saturday August 28th, 5:30-7:30 pm**

"Project 2025 Building and Capital Campaign Launch Party" where we hope to have San Francisco Mayor London Breed present along with several other prominent local dignitaries. The evening will get underway at 5.30 pm and run until approximately 7.30 pm. Save the date—all are welcome.

## Around the Center

We had some changes in personnel at the Center recently; after 16 years of wonderful and faithful service we said goodbye to Ligia Torres, our longtime Controller. We wish Ligia the best of luck in her future endeavors. We have appointed Aileen Dulohery, a native of Mallow, County Cork, to help out with event planning and we welcome her on board.

July was another month of bustling activity around the Center. Camp Edmo continues its weekly educational camps with upwards of 50 school kids and camp leaders migrating throughout the building each day. We hosted several parties and memorials during the month, and we have also started to get bookings for weddings.

Wawona Gates had another great month and continues to attract members on Saturdays. We hosted the San Francisco GAA on July 17th. Thank you to all the volunteers who continue to be so generous with their time.

We wish our Irish Shopkeeper and Board member Josephine Brogan a wonderful and well-deserved holiday in Ireland. Just a few days before her departure we were informed by the San Francisco Bay Area Law Enforcement Emerald Society that Josephine was nominated for the 'Citizen of the Year' award for her work as a board member for the UICC and as the Public Relations Officer for the local Cooley-Keegan branch of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann. Congratulations, Josephine! Other Emerald Society nominees this year include Officer Andrew Clifford (Officer of the Year), and Sgt Joe McCloskey (Retired) who is being awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award.

Stay safe and healthy if you are traveling or on vacation—or even here at home!

## Kennelly Memorial Feis At The UICC, June 27

IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE that it's been more than two decades since the Irish Center hosted an Irish Dance Feis. Since the popularization of Irish Dance worldwide beginning in 1994 with the advent of the worldwide phenomenon "Riverdance" it has been difficult

for smaller venues to accommodate all those who wanted to participate and compete competitively. This increase in participation led to local dance schools seeking out larger venues downtown to hold their Feis. Now however, due to recent Covid-19 restrictions

across the nation, and a cap on the number of entries to Feiseanna, places like the UICC are becoming popular again as they make economic sense with smaller competitive fields. So, the UICC was delighted to be chosen by the Patricia Kennelly School of Irish Dance

to hold the long running John and Maureen Memorial Feis in late June.

Many people were delighted to be back at the Center after the long absence, as it brought back many memories for the Feis parents, who themselves competed at the Center

decades ago. The next Feis at the Center is called "Help Save the Planet Feis" and will take place on Friday and Saturday September 18 and 19, and is organized by the Michael Dillon School of Irish Dance.

Here are some photos from the June Feis.



Patricia Kennelly (Irish Dance Teacher and Feis Organizer) with Liam Reidy (UICC President), and Anne Cassidy Carew (UICC Cultural Programming Director).



There were several Bay Area Irish Dance teachers present at the Feis including: Annie McBride, Trish Feeney, Sharon Whelan McSweeney, Fidelma Keenan, Sheila Whelan Gallagher, Mary Joe Feeney, Patti Ann Ranum, Lisa Brosnan Hynes, Alisa Ranum Bellew, and Eileen McBride Parker.



Anne McBride and Mary Jo Feeney



Boys U-16 Preliminary Champion Rhys Lewis with his teacher Patricia Kennelly.



Girls U14 Preliminary Champion Paige McGrath with her teacher Patricia Kennelly.



Tanner Manning, Fintan Reidy and Aidan Pecko.