



• UNITED IRISH CULTURAL CENTER •

Irish Culture Showcase Event Hits a Home Run!

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

APRIL MAY SIGNAL THE start of baseball season nationwide but pride of place this month in the community goes to the local Cooley Keegan branch of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (C.C.E.) based here in the San Francisco area.

Last month, the local Comhaltas branch hosted over 300 national and international visitors for a wonderful Irish culture immersive weekend over four days (April 21-24) as part of the 2022 North American Comhaltas Convention.

Although C.C.E. is headquartered in Dublin, Ireland, there are more than 400 branches worldwide, in the Republic of Ireland, the United Kingdom, throughout the United States of America, Canada, Mexico, France, Spain, Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg, Russia, Australia and New Zealand. It is the largest non-profit organization involved in the preservation and promotion of Irish traditional music, song, dance and storytelling worldwide.

2022 Convention

Postponed in 2020, and delayed in 2021 due to the global pandemic, the host committee were able to finally execute on plans developed well over three years ago by hosting this year's event. Co-chaired by Josephine Brennan and Joannie O'Leary, the event was a huge success held across the spacious surroundings at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Foster City.

Having had plenty of

personal experience in running and hosting one day events at the UICC (concerts, shows, classes), I can only imagine the amount of human energy that went into making this "continuous and always on" four day event a success. I enquired to Comhaltas volunteer and attendee Dan McAuliffe about the source of the wooden dance floor for the Céilí dances. He answered, "all the way from Florida, shipped especially for the event." Wow, I thought, enough said. These organizers left no stone unturned for the dancers.

As I wandered around the hotel during my visit to the convention over the weekend, the sound of Irish music emanated from all corners: hallways, foyer, hospitality suites, workshop and Céilí rooms. My mind wandered off to thinking that down the road when the new Irish Center is built that such a convention could easily be held in the new facility. We certainly will have the space and rooms to make that accommodate a Comhaltas convention.

The Irish Center made information available about our 2025 Project building to the convention attendees during the weekend and many expressed excitement at the possibility of such a facility on the west coast.

Comhaltas in Ireland

I spoke at length with National PRO for Comhaltas in Ireland, Pat Flanagan, about all

the various efforts undertaken by Comhaltas (celebrating 70 years in 2022) in the promotion of Irish culture all across the Emerald Isle. He said "It is an ongoing effort by an army of people who help organize an incredible array of events during the year."

For example Comhaltas organizes 1,500 music classes across every county in Ireland each week for adults and kids, maintains a music competition framework leading to the All-Ireland Fleadh Cheoil finals and also helps produce and promote 44 Fleadhanna Ceoil (cultural festivals) throughout the year.

Flanagan continued "All this helps maintain the success of the wonderful rich musical heritage and traditions in Ireland. That heritage is a proud resource that belongs to Irish people everywhere, young and old alike."

Close to Home, Small World

Presently, Pat is domiciled in Roscrea, County Tipperary, with his wife and family, but he has strong Limerick connections—he was born and raised only a couple of miles from my own home in west Limerick. Although we went to the same National School in the village of Broadford, Pat lived in the neighboring parish of Feohanagh, and so he did not play Gaelic games with the blood and bandage (red and white) colors of Broadford as a youngster. Pat's brother Johnny

Flanagan was a dominant figure in the Limerick hurling teams of the 1980s. There are strict rules around parish boundaries in rural Ireland when it comes to Gaelic games, and players that once may have played on school teams together could be arch enemies in the west Limerick championships when they played opposite each other for their parish clubs. Sometimes a recipe for skin and hair flying during a game along with teak tough defending! It was great to connect with Pat over the weekend and catch up about all the characters we knew from our (áit dúchais) native place.

Boxing Nite Success

The Center and Fire in the Ring Boxing Gym in Brisbane teamed up for a wonderful evening to showcase amateur boxing on April 16th. Thanks to Jimmy Ford and his team for a great night for the community.

Leo Walsh Scholarship Awards

We are looking forward to disbursing the Leo Walsh educational scholarships to successful graduating eight graders and college bound high school seniors this month. We host the donors and awardees in person on Sunday afternoon, May 15th.

Save the Planet Feis

The Michael Dillon school of Irish dancing hosts a two day Feis on May 20th and 21st at the UICC. All are welcome.

Kids Irish Camp Sign Up

We have about 36 kids

signed up for the second Annual Irish camp which takes place at the Center from June 13 through July 1. The camp culminates in a variety concert at the Center starring all the campers.

Irish Veterans Global

On Sunday May 29th the Irish Veterans Global will Commission the Admiral Daniel Callaghan San Francisco Chapter at the Center between 3-6pm. From Memorial Day (May 30th) weekend through Flag Day (June 14th), the Dowling Library will host an exhibit honoring Irish-Americans who have received the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Steps of Freedom Movie

The Center is partnering with the Brava theatre in the Mission in presenting the Documentary "Steps of Freedom—The Story of Irish Dance" on May 13th as part of the 2022 San Francisco Dance Film Festival. UICC members can avail of discounted tickets at the IrishCenterSF.org website. The screening of the movie will conclude with a live performance by dancers from the Boyle Irish Dance Academy of San Francisco.

Music classes

Music, drama, and singing classes for kids are back in action after the Easter break. It's never too late to sign up.

Mothers Day Blessings

A happy Mothers Day (May 8th) to all the Moms in the community from all of us here at the Irish Center.

Boxing Event Is A Knock Out Success!

A capacity crowd filled the St. Patrick's room for the long awaited return of amateur boxing on Easter Saturday, April 16th last. The fight night was the first at the Center since July 2019, as boxing fans have been starved of opportunities to come out and watch live boxing during the

pandemic. Boxing fans voted strongly with their feet by selling out the Fight Nite early in April. The UICC partnered with the long established Fire in the Ring (FITR) boxing club in Brisbane headed up by San Francisco native Jimmy Ford. FITR worked tirelessly in the background on event logistics

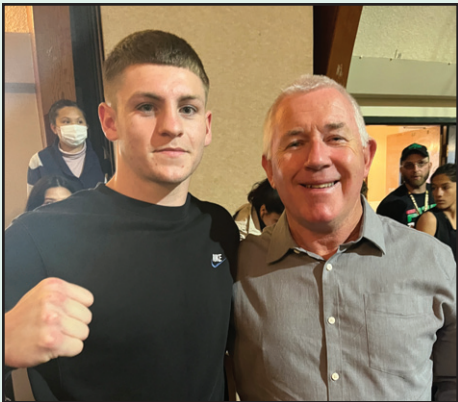
and bout card, so hats off to all those from the Brisbane gym for the great support.

Summer Boxing at the Center

This summer we hope to host Cork City native Callum Walsh, a professional boxer at the Junior middleweight division (2-0), currently resid-

ing and training with Freddie Roach (Wild Card Boxing Club) in Riverside, CA. Freddie Roach is the former coach of eight-division world champion Manny Pacquiao, along with a host of other well known boxing pros including Julio César Chávez Jr., Miguel Cotto and James Toney.

Currently based in Riverside, CA, Callum flew up to our Amateur fight nite on April 16th, and was introduced to the capacity crowd during a break in proceedings. We wish him the best of luck in his bout with Luis Garcia on Thursday, May 12th at Quiet Canyon, Montebello, CA.



Pro-Boxer Callum Walsh with Mark Gorman, UICC Board member.



Robert Fernandez (Boxing Match Maker) and Jimmy Ford, Fire in the Ring Boxing Gym. (Photo Credit: Jimi Crowley).



Callum Walsh, Ciarán Saunders (MMA - Amateur) and Charlie Sheehy.



Laura Satir (Third Street Boxing) defeated Andrea Sitton (Teamwork Boxing).



Referee Charles Douglas with Byron Argueta (Solis Boxing) with Jeremiah Valerio (Aloha Boxing).



Gabe Manzanares defeated Manny Velasquez, Osorio Training center, with referee Dave Hartman.



Winner Brandon Villatuya (FITR) and Jose Sanchez after their bout on April 16, with referee Patrick McTiernan.



Garrett Saunders, Gary Cantney, and Kieran Muldowney.

• UNITED IRISH CULTURAL CENTER •

Comhaltas Convention 2022

By Liam Reidy

OVER 300 ATTENDED THE 2022 Comhaltas Convention from Ireland, England, Canada and from all across the US including a large contingent from New York, Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Atlanta, New Mexico and New Jersey. Four energetic Céilí's featuring the John Whelan, Pearl River (NY), Sourdough and Golden Gate Céilí bands kept the set dancers going

until well after the expected end time!

A full line up of workshops some featuring local artists included singing (Vince Keehan), Irish language (Imelda White), concertina (Autumn Rhodes), recitation and storytelling (Mícheál Minihane), banjo, fiddle (Darcy Noonan), uilleann pipes (Tim Hill), sean-nós and set dancing, bodhrán (Cormac Gannon).



Jim Sullivan, Cathy Mibach, Josephine Brennan, Co-Chairperson, Cooley-Keegan Comhaltas, and Laurence Nugent, Chicago.



Stephanie Reidy with Cathy Jones at the Convention.



Josephine Brogan, Kenny Sommerville and Maureen Brady.



National Comhaltas PRO, Pat Flanagan with UICC President, Liam Reidy.

Annie Holland: Children Of The Free State Photographic Exhibition

THE LONG AWAITED EXHIBITION of the participatory arts project by Irish artist Annie Holland finally made its debut at the United Irish Cultural Center in March. Postponed twice due to the pandemic, the photographic exhibition focuses on a group of elderly neighbors from her own community in rural County Laois (Ireland) born before or just after 1922 when the Irish Free State was established.

Using photography and video, Annie focuses on the process of documentation and storytelling in creating this body of work. The final outcomes preserve a synopsis of the rural narrative and oral history of each of the 13 participants through their own eyes and experiences. The portraits of the subjects are a snapshot of the conversations about their past and recent life. The exhibition also incorporates old family photos, dating back generations, in an effort to bridge the past with the present.

This latest work by Holland brings together a vast storehouse of local stories and traditions from the people who lived a spartan experience since the establishment of the Irish Free State. The central theme throughout many of the photo-

graphic portraits is one of loss—the death of a spouse in the prime of their life, the disappearance of the formerly simple farming life, and the loss of security in recent years, as doors have to be bolted shut at night. The greatest sense of loss was expressed by those who have lived the longest and who feel all alone in life, as all the friends and family they grew up with are all gone. While some have adapted to the march of time better than others by embracing the improvements that came with it (washing and milking machines) and advancements (technology and smart phones) others shy away from modern gadgets. Old ways were just simply the best ways. Some of the elders offer cautionary advice to the younger generation and there is also a deep concern among the elders about the role of technology in the world today.

Upon the closing of the exhibition, Annie Holland donated the entire collection to the Dowling Library archives, and it is hoped to one day exhibit them again in the new Irish Center when built.

Below are some of the attendees from Opening Night. The exhibition was made possible in part by funding from Culture Ireland.



Jack and Theresa Kavanagh, Margaret O'Neill and Sophia Eggert.



Richard and Ann O'Neill.



UICC Librarian Jennifer Drennan, Jamie O'Keefe and Randy Dodson.



Kathleen Manning and Valerie McGrew.



Sophia and Karen Eggert with their cousin Irish Artist Annie Holland.



Caroline Slacik, Anne Cassidy Carew and Kathleen McDonough.



Jimmy and Julie O'Keefe.



Maureen Barry and Breda Courtney.



Ann Torres and Meta Baxter.