



• UNITED IRISH CULTURAL CENTER •

Reflecting On Nearly Fifty Years In The Community: A Retrospective And Future Outlook

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

EXAMINING THE CONSTRUCTION timeline of the current Irish Center, as narrated in the Center's monthly bulletin from the early 1970s, it's notable that fifty years ago this month marked the commencement of the building emerging from the sand dunes at the intersection of 45th Avenue and Wawona. Progress was swift, with work proceeding at a frenetic pace. The groundbreaking ceremony had occurred just a few months prior, on Sunday, November 11, 1973. Foundations were established by early December, and by the close of the year, the side walls were already in the process of being erected.

Fundraising Efforts

In February 1973, the building committee announced the availability of the site on 45th Ave for purchase at a cost of \$100,000. The early contributions from membership sign-up fees and initial fundraising initiatives successfully raised enough funds to acquire the land and initiate the planning phase. Simultaneously, during the initial stages of construction, Tom Hayes, the Chairman of the Fundraising committee and Vice President, played a crucial role in orchestrating ticket sales to secure essential finances for the building's construction.

The estimated construction costs were projected to be \$300,000. To supplement funds, members of the local community extended loans to the Center, with an eight percent annual interest rate paid back to the respective members. This collaborative effort reflected the community's dedication and financial support in

bringing the vision of the Irish Center to fruition.

Framing Prediction

In May of 1973, while the plans for the building were progressing through the approval process at City Hall, Tim Brosnan was summoned by President Liam Spiers during a membership meeting one evening. The question posed was about the timeframe needed to frame the wooden structure. Tim responded confidently, stating that it would "take 20 carpenters 15 weeks to frame the building." This moment underscored the determination of the group, highlighting their resolve to persist until the construction of the building was successfully accomplished.

Membership Roll Challenges

Despite the building committee's persistent efforts to achieve a target of 1,000 signed-up members before commencing construction, the project proceeded with nearly 800 individuals on the membership roll. The hope was that additional people would join before the Center's anticipated opening in 1975.

Come on Down!

Once the foundation was successfully in place, a call for labor assistance at the construction site was disseminated through the monthly newsletter. Pat Brosnan, the individual overseeing daily operations, was in need of additional hands, and the bulletin emphasized that there was a role for everyone at 45th Avenue and Wawona. The message conveyed that one didn't need to be a carpenter to

contribute, and the call for volunteers was inclusive, encouraging individuals with varying amounts of time, whether it be a few hours on a Friday or Saturday, or even a spare day off during the week, to come forward and join the efforts at the Center.

Golden Anniversary 2025

With slightly more than twelve months remaining until the golden anniversary of the inauguration of the United Irish Cultural Center on March 8, 2025, we stand at the threshold of a new chapter with the 2025 Project rebuild. Spearheaded by community leaders, including Supervisors Joel Engardio and Myrna Melgar, and wholeheartedly endorsed by Mayor London Breed, Governor Gavin Newsom, and several former San Francisco Mayors, this ambitious project serves as a testament to the collective determination and shared heritage that defines our community.

Vision and Support

The envisioned 120,000 square-foot facility transcends mere architectural achievement; it stands as a vibrant amalgamation of culture, innovation, and community spirit, poised to address the diverse needs and aspirations of the Bay Area community. With a budget of \$75 million, the project mirrors meticulous financial planning and enjoys widespread support. The decision to commence construction, backed by 75 percent of the required funds, underscores our shared commitment and responsible stewardship.

Community and Collaboration

At the heart of this initiative lies the unwavering dedication of numerous volunteers and the priceless pro bono contributions that have been instrumental in shaping the project over the past two and a half years. Our robust committee structure, comprising the board, steering, building, and rising leaders, guarantees a comprehensive and inclusive approach to our endeavors.

Cultural and Technological Nexus

The new center will go beyond celebrating Irish heritage through lively cultural events such as the St Patrick's Day Parade; it also actively cultivates forward-thinking opportunities in areas like artificial intelligence and technology innovation, embodying the dynamic spirit of Silicon Valley.

Inclusive Amenities

From a top-floor restaurant and wellness facilities to dedicated spaces for education and community support, the center is meticulously designed to serve as a vibrant hub of activity, learning, and unity.

Commitment to Excellence

Our collaboration with esteemed architects and designers, notably the visionary Studio BANAA, underscores our unwavering commitment to crafting a space that is not only iconic but also enduring in its significance.

Building for the Future

In solidarity with individuals who served on the Board of Directors in 1974 and under the supportive gaze of our political and community leaders, we are not merely engaged in rebuild-

ing; rather, we are actively reinventing and reinvigorating the very essence of our community. The Irish Cultural Center is poised to become a landmark of heritage, a beacon of innovation, and a welcoming home for all, echoing the diverse and dynamic spirit of San Francisco for generations to come.

Leo T Walsh Scholarship

Applications for our annual scholarship program are now open for 8th Graders and High School Seniors entering the next level of their education. Completed applications are due on March 17.

Summer Camp Registration

Registration is now open for the Annual Summer Camp taking place between June 10 and June 28 at the Center. Sign up by March 17th for the Early Bird Pricing. www.irishcentersf.org/irish-camp/

Community Benefit A Success

Congratulations to UICC member Cormac Gannon for orchestrating a fantastic evening of Irish music on January 13 in support of the humanitarian charity MECA, dedicated to the Children of Gaza. Well done on contributing to such a meaningful cause! A special shout out to The Hooks, who also made the night memorable.

Don't Miss Musical Events

I hope to see many of you at our special live music events this month including Aoife Scott, and Derek Warfield and the Young Wolfe Tones!

Annual NICCoNA Meeting NYC 2024

THE ANNUAL NATIONAL IRISH CULTURAL CENTERS OF NORTH AMERICA meeting took place in New York City from January 11-13. Over the course of two days, attendees participated in receptions, meetings, and artistic showcases, with events hosted at both the Irish Consulate Offices on Park Avenue and the New York Irish Arts Center theatre on 11th Avenue. Engaging in conversations with leaders from Irish Centers across the country provided valuable advice and guidance, offering insights that will contribute to the growth and development of our own Center.

NYC Irish Consulate Reception

The NICCoNA convention in New York was hosted at the Irish Consul General's Offices on Park Avenue in NYC on January 11. Pictured top left opposite is Liam Reidy (UICC), Paul Keating (New Jersey), and Pat Fitzgibbon (Milwaukee Irish Festival).

Annual NICCoNA Meet Up

The annual National Irish Cultural Centers of North America meet up took place in New York City between January 11-13. Pictured top right: The Bay Area was well represented by Dan McGovern, (Danville), Catherine Barry (SFArts) and Liam Reidy (UICC).

Podcaster and Black 47 Singer

Below left: New York residents Martin Nutty (Irish Stew Podcast), and Larry Kirwan (Musician and Writer) with Liam Reidy (UICC) at the Irish Consulates Office, NYC during the NICCoNA Annual Meeting.

2024 Culture Ireland Artist Showcase

The best of contemporary Irish theatre productions was showcased at the Irish Arts Center in New York on Saturday, January 13, 2024. UICC President Liam Reidy attended and was able to review a number of tour ready theatre productions which will be making their US debut this year.

While we look forward to hosting a number of smaller productions at the Center later this year and we look forward to the day when we will have our own state of the art black box theatre housed in our new building. Having our own purpose built small theatre will accommodate a greater variety of touring Irish and US-based Irish theater productions.

Pictured below right: Shannon Barry, Director of Culture Ireland with UICC President Liam Reidy.



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John & Maureen Kennelly Memorial Feis 2024

Over 250 Irish Step dancers participated in the January Feis held in honor of John and Maureen Kennelly by their daughter Patricia Kennelly (TCRG). The two day (January 13-14) event drew dancers from throughout the state with a strong representation from southern California. Here are some photos of the dancers from the weekend.



Rowan Mitchelson (Kennelly). Cailin Keegan, Maddie Donnelly (Kennelly). Anneka Houghton (Murphy).



Scarlett Bounds and Kathy Kindberg (Kennelly). U-17 and Over Preliminary, Treble Reel Champion; Kelly Couyer (McGrath). U12 Isla Forde (Whelan) and Gemma Oh (McBride).



Sami Dale, Kailyn McCarthy, Megan Dale, and Hannah Havermeier (Rohan Murphy). U-18 Girls: Maren Galvin, Emma Wong-Woo and Amelia Donovan (McGrath School).

Line dancing Nashville Style!
Line dancing enthusiasts continue to pack the St Patrick's room on Thursday nights. Here are some of the attendees on Thursday January 25 at the Center. Line dancing returns on February 8 and February 29.



Michaela Spillane, Eileen McHugh and Ann Marie Carr. Michelle Clarke, Aisling Hanley, Jenny O'Donnell, Madison Beard.

Feis Visitors Happy Birthday Sally!



Peggy O'Donnell and Timmy Manning were spotted at the Kennelly Feis at the Center. Happy Birthday to Sally Mulkerrins who recently celebrated her 89th Birthday in January. Sally is pictured here with her sons Michael and John Mulkerrins.

UNITED IRISH CULTURAL CENTER
AOIFE SCOTT
in Concert
2.16.24
DOORS @ 7 PM
EMERALD PUB
at the UICC
2700 45th Ave, SF
DETAILS/TICKETS:
www.irishcentersf.org

2 SHOWS in 2024 at the UICC!

SAT. FEB 17 @ 8 PM
Doors @ 7 pm | Show @ 8 pm
in St. Patrick's Room
SUN. FEB 18 @ 4 PM
Doors @ 3 pm downstairs in Emerald
Pub—intimate show starts at 4!
DETAILS/TICKETS:
www.irishcentersf.org
2700 45th Ave San Francisco, CA 94116

@IrishCenterSF

THE BLACK BROTHERS
Félim Egan and Eamonn Flynn
FRIDAY 3.8.24
DOORS @ 6:30
EMERALD PUB
www.irishcentersf.org
IRISH CENTER SF | 2700 45TH AVE.