

# Northampton St. Patrick's Association

## in the News

**'Toastmaster General' still making them laugh even after passing**  
BY ANDREW HORTON STAFF WRITER



William O'Connor speaks at the St. Patrick's Day breakfast in Northampton in 2003. The master of ceremonies at the event for four decades, O'Connor died Monday at the age of 90.  
GORDON DANIELS

NORTHAMPTON - William F. O'Connor, 90, died on Monday, May 7, 2007, at Cooley Dickinson Hospital in the presence of his family. He was a resident of Forbes Avenue for over 50 years.

Bill was born Feb. 12, 1917, in Holyoke and was the son of Michael O'Connor and Mary Scanlon O'Connor of County Kerry, Ireland. He was a graduate of St. Jerome's High School in Holyoke.

Soon after graduation, he joined the Civilian Conservation Corps and worked to build the Burke Mountain Ski Resort in Vermont. He also spent a few years as an elevator operator at the Empire Hotel in Manhattan, where his skills prompted his supervisor to suggest that he carry a ladder with him at all times.

After Pearl Harbor, he volunteered for the U.S. Navy and served as a medic and chief petty officer in the European theater on both the aircraft carrier USS Intrepid and the landing craft LST 54. His ship was among the first to land on Omaha Beach on D-Day and before the war ended he had crossed the English Channel more than 10 times delivering supplies and returning wounded soldiers. His stories of traveling through Europe and locating his brother John during the invasion are legendary amongst his children and grandchildren.

Bill was married for 54 years to the late Jane Balicki O'Connor, also from Holyoke. Following the war, they settled in Holyoke, where he began work as an insurance salesman for the John Hancock Co., where he delivered his first policies on a bicycle. Bill and Jane moved to Northampton in 1954, where they raised seven children. Bill started his own insurance company, which he ran successfully for many years. He was a calming presence to the many residents who showed up at his door at all hours to report their fender benders and other catastrophes.

Always active in politics, he served as sewer commissioner and civil defense director under Northampton Mayor Jim Cahillane. He served Hampshire County as assistant registrar of deeds and was elected the first Democratic county treasurer in the county's history. He was chairman of the city and county Democratic committees, Democrat of the Year, King of the Northampton Winter Festival, and president of the Massachusetts Association of Contributory Retirement Funds. As many county functions were transferred to the state, a regulation was written declaring that Bill could remain as treasurer "until he died or retired." In his words, he "chose option B" and retired at age 74.

Bill is perhaps best remembered as a public speaker and master of ceremonies. Over the years he officiated at hundreds of retirement parties, testimonials, and civic ceremonies. His humor was always topical, sharp and high-spirited. For over 40 years, he oversaw the Chamber of Commerce St. Patrick's Day breakfast, and his presence at that popular event will be missed. Local politicians would feel left out if at some point in the proceedings they were not singled out for the famous O'Connor "zing." Even if a joke was less than hilarious, he would have his audience in stitches as he laughed along at his own jokes. After all, he would remind the audience, "I've heard this one before."

Bill is predeceased by his loving wife, Jane, and his beloved first son, Billy.

He is survived by six children, Suzanne of Northboro, Jane of Goshen, James of Natick, Robert of Needham, John of Jericho, Vt., and Tom of Mount Vernon, Va.; 12 grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

Funeral services will be held Thursday, May 10, at 9 a.m. from the Ahearn Funeral Home in Northampton, with a Mass at Blessed Sacrament Church, where Bill was a communicant for over 50 years. Calling hours will be Wednesday from 3 to 8 p.m.

Contributions may be made to the Northampton St. Patrick's Parade Committee, P.O. Box 723, Northampton, MA 01061, for a scholarship program to be named in his honor.

**Lucky and charmed**  
**News and information for Monday, March 19, 2007**



Shannon Ryan, 8, step dances on the Northampton St. Patrick's Association parade committee float, themed "Mythical Ireland," as it climbs Beech Street in Holyoke during the 56th annual St. Patrick's Parade Sunday. Sitting in the front of the float are Eamon and Siobhan Powers, 7 and 8, and standing behind Shannon is Kathy Mackiewicz.

**Destination: Celtic crossroads Northampton St. Pat's team puts myths on parade**

**BY ANDREW HORTON STAFF WRITER March 17, 2007**



Tim Daley, left, of Westhampton, and Jim Coyle of Florence, members of the Northampton St. Patrick's Association, use spray paint to put finishing touches on their group's float this week at the Northampton DPW. JERREY ROBERTS  
[ Originally published on: Saturday, March 17, 2007 ]

NORTHAMPTON - The parade is old but its entrants new. Members of the Northampton St. Patrick's Association say this year's float embraces Irish myths and is unlike anything the group has done before.

It replicates a Celtic Cairn, or portal tomb, that features two large upright stones and a large Celtic cross on the front of the float. The float that will make its way along the route of the St. Patrick's Day Parade in Holyoke this Sunday is based on the Irish legend of St. Patrick blessing the stones and making the first Celtic cross.

According to member Chris Powers, the group spent about 300 hours designing and assembling the float between the fall and this week. As many as 18 people burned the midnight oil last weekend in an attempt to finish the float.

This year's 56th annual Holyoke St. Patrick's Parade kicks off at the K-Mart on Route 5 in Holyoke at noon Sunday. The parade will feature over 25,000 marchers, 250,000 spectators, and a television audience of about 700,000 viewers, according to parade officials.

The parade will be broadcast on PBS-affiliate WGBY starting Sunday at noon, with a rebroadcast scheduled for 9 p.m. Sunday.

Holyoke St. Patrick's Parade Committee President Kathleen Krisak said a lot of the volunteer work leading up to this weekend's parade has been done by the Northampton contingency.

"They've definitely been very active in helping with the planning and coordinating of this event," Krisak said. "When Northampton comes to the parade, they usually come in great numbers."

This year's festivities will honor John F. Kennedy National Award winner and Boston Globe sports columnist Dan Shaughnessy at a dinner inside Holyoke's Log Cabin on Saturday. The parade's grand marshal will be long-time parade participant Alan Cathro.

This year's Northampton grand marshal will be life long city native James A. Coyle, who has worked extensively over the past 20 years to make Northampton's entry into the annual parade a success. Powers said Coyle's efforts to lead his team prompted his selection as this year's grand marshal.

"He's been a very important part of our showing each year, and the guys working on the float each year love him," Powers said. "He really deserves a lot of the credit for what we do."

Powers and the rest of the float-building team working at the Department of Public Works headquarters at 125 Locust St. said they received help from local businesses that donated time, energy and supplies.

"We've had businesses from Florence and Northampton help out with lumber and supplies, so the local support has been terrific," Powers said.

Powers said the association has made dozens of elaborate floats for the Holyoke St. Patrick's Day Parade over the years. And while new technologies have made the floats easier to build, Powers said the group still relies on extensive manual labor to get the job done.

"Everything you see has really been done from the ground up," Powers said. "Power tools have helped us a great deal, but the nothing beats good old-fashioned elbow grease."

Senior members of the association have been helping with other aspects of the parade.

Association Vice-President Brenda Ryan said her group has been involved in the parade's planning. It sent representatives to the Holyoke committee meetings every week so they can report on progress made.

By the time St. Patrick's Day comes along, Ryan said she feels the hard work that goes into creating the parade is worth the effort. It enables people to get together to celebrate St. Patrick's Day.

"It's a nice way to welcome in spring," Ryan said. "Everyone from all backgrounds come together for one day and have a wonderful time at the parade."

Ryan said the Northampton group's coordination with the Holyoke St. Patrick's Association doesn't end after the parade.

"All these associations have newsletters that go out to one another, and we all try to connect with each other, whether there's an event in Holyoke, an event in Westfield, or an event in Northampton," Ryan said. "We all try to stay involved."

## **'Hamp units get ready**

**Tuesday, March 13, 2007**

NORTHAMPTON - The city's St. Patrick's Association will have between 25 and 30 members marching in this year's Irish parade, according to president Paul J. Diemand.

This year's parade marshal is James A. Coyle, a Vietnam War Navy veteran. He is the physical plant supervisor at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center.

Kathleen M. Shea, the association's 2007 Brennan Award winner, will also be part of the contingent. The Smith College graduate was named teacher of the year in 2001 at the Clarke School for the Deaf.

Among her accomplishments there were helping to raise \$100,000 to revamp the mathematics curriculum.

Younger marchers will include this year's Joan Tobin Award winners, High School senior Jill Foley and Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School senior Evan Nelson. Each will receive a \$500 scholarship.

## **St. Patrick's group honors two for community service** **BY RACHAEL HANLEY STAFF WRITER March 17, 2007**

NORTHAMPTON - A budding automotive technician and aspiring business woman were honored at the city's annual St. Patrick's Breakfast Friday for their leadership and community service.



Evan Nelson, 17, a senior at the Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School, and Jill E. Foley, 17, a senior at Northampton High School, both won the Joan Tobin Citizenship Award, given each year at the breakfast to students who demonstrate qualities of good citizenship. Friday's breakfast was held at the Clarion Hotel and Conference Center, sponsored by the Northampton Chamber of Commerce and the Northampton St. Patrick's Day Association.

Each year two students, one from each high school, are chosen for the award, which includes a \$300 scholarship. To qualify, the applicants must be city residents, work to their full potential during high school and demonstrate strong citizenship qualities through their school, community or church activities.

Foley said she was surprised to receive a call in February telling her she had won the award. Her brother, Kevin, received the Tobin Award in 2004.

"I was hoping I'd win, but not at all expecting to," Foley said Thursday. "There were a lot of other good candidates and I'm sure it was a difficult decision."

A member of the Hampshire YMCA swim team since she was 9, and a recent co-captian of the Northampton High School swim team, Foley has also been a long-



time altar server at St. Mary's of the Assumption and a member of the high school student government for four years. Involvement in each activity started slowly, she said, and gradually increased into a week-long commitment, driven by her enjoyment of keeping busy.

"I am really into school spirit, really into school-types of activities," she said. "The big booster week we have at the beginning of the year - that's my favorite time of year."

Foley said she is still waiting to hear back from half of the colleges she has applied to, but is looking forward to a career in the business field.

When he applied for the award, Nelson said he turned to his long experience with the Boy Scouts for inspiration. Many of his leadership skills came from working his way from Cub Scout to Eagle Scout, he said.

"It definitely builds character," he said. "Without the Boy Scouts, I probably wouldn't be the person I am today."

As part of his Boy Scout service, Nelson recently built bookshelves and organized a book drive for the Walter Salvo House in Northampton. Nelson held a town-wide book drive and built the new shelving with other members of his troop. For the grand opening of the new library, 80 people arrived to thank him, he said.

"They were very appreciative," he said. "I got a lot of, 'We're so happy.'"

In August, Nelson plans to attend Universal Technical Institute in Norwood, Mass as he works his way towards becoming a certified Volkswagen automotive technician.

## Association to award 2 humble helpers

By JAMES LOWE Staff Writer Tuesday, January 30, 2007

NORTHAMPTON - Working quietly behind the scenes, Jim Coyle and Kathleen Shea are always lending a hand, though they rarely draw attention to their work.

This weekend, others will be calling attention to their efforts when Coyle and Shea are honored at the annual awards dinner held by the Northampton St. Patrick's Association.

Coyle was selected to be this year's St. Patrick's Day parade marshal for Northampton, which means he will lead the Northampton contingent at the 56th annual Holyoke parade March 18.

Awards dinner organizer Christine Cahillane said Coyle was chosen in recognition of his contributions to the group's elaborate float-building efforts over the last several years.

"He's been helping in his own quiet way," Cahillane said. "He's kind of a behind-the-scenes guy."

Coyle is a lifetime resident of Northampton and a supervisor in the physical plant at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Leeds.

A veteran of the U.S. Navy, he served in Vietnam. Today, he is a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Michael Curtin Post 8006 in Florence, and active in the World War II Club and other veterans organizations.

Shea will receive the James Brennan Award, a recognition named after one of the association's founders and given each year to a member who goes out of his or her way to help with association events and activities.

"She's one of those people who, no matter what you ask, she's there to help out," said Mike Ahearn, a longtime member of the association and a past parade marshal.

A teacher at the Clarke School for the Deaf, Shea specializes in math instruction for hearing-impaired children. She was a finalist for the Massachusetts Christa McAuliffe Award in 2000 and honored as the Clarke teacher of the year in 2001. She was recently recognized by the school's president for 30 years of service.

Shea has been a member of the Northampton St. Patrick's Association for many years, recently co-hosting the annual Christmas Ceili fundraiser at Look Park with her husband, Dave, who was last year's parade marshal.

The awards ceremony will be held Saturday at the Northampton Lodge of Elks, 17 Spring St., Florence. A cocktail hour begins at 6 p.m., followed by dinner at 7. For more information, contact Christine Cahillane at 413-537-3829. There will be entertainment from the Tom Ingram Band.

Northampton's float for the Holyoke St. Patrick's Day Parade this year will feature mythological creatures of Ireland, Ahearn said.

The organization will also hold a St. Patrick's Day breakfast March 16.

**An Irishman walks into a St. Paddy's Day breakfast... March 18, 2006**

Good-natured political ribbing was the order of the day at the annual St. Patrick's Day breakfast Friday, since both candidates in last year's mayoral election were seated at the main table.

Much was made of the fact that Mayor Clare Higgins was positioned at the opposite end of the table from her unsuccessful challenger last November, Greater Northampton Chamber of Commerce President Richard Feldman.

During her introductory remarks at the Irish-themed event, Higgins joked that her name might have helped her get re-elected.

"In the voting booth, people would look at my name and think 'Didn't I go to St. Michael's with her?'" she said. "That's an advantage Mr. Feldman doesn't have, and I'm sorry about that. Well, I'm not that sorry about it."

Feldman took to the podium immediately after Higgins led off by saying "the last time I spoke a few minutes after the mayor, I didn't do too well then, either."

He later showed that he bore no ill will for his erstwhile opponent by suggesting that the crowd visit Tully O'Reilly's pub on Friday night and "drink a toast to one of the finest mayors in America and for having the good fortune to be in the fine city of Northampton."

The breakfast, which is co-sponsored by the Northampton St. Patrick's Association and the Greater Northampton Chamber of Commerce, serves as a kickoff each year for the Holyoke St. Patrick's Parade which is coming up on Sunday.

Higgins noted that the city to the south was well-prepared for the festivities.

"Holyoke has a parade and Holyoke also has a detox, so that's a good thing," she said.

William F. O'Connor, former longtime master of ceremonies for the event, was called upon to deliver the closing remarks. After being slowly helped up to the podium, he told the audience to laughter, "It's not as bad as it looks."

O'Connor's closing, in which he observed that essentially everything had already been said and just thanked people for coming, earned him a standing ovation.

"The way this is going, I'll have a big funeral," he quipped.

Looking out on all the attendees dressed in green, Mayor Clare Higgins noted that everyone "has one article of green clothing they try on at the beginning of February to make sure it still fits."

White said that Daley and Halligan left Ireland because it was a country where they couldn't practice their religion, own their own land, or have an education.

They were drawn to the American dream of freedom of speech, religion, and economic opportunity, but "they found that America was not so very different from the place they left."

White drew parallels to suspicion among Americans of Muslims after Sept. 11. Irish Catholics of the early 19th Century, like Muslims today, "didn't speak like us, didn't look like us, didn't act like us, they didn't even have the same religion."

The Daley and Halligan case, he noted, holds lessons for today, such as being aware of suspicions caused because someone looks different and questioning easy solutions to problems.

## Northampton float to recall tragic tale from local history

Tuesday, March 14, 2006

By **FRED CONTRADA**

**NORTHAMPTON** - Northampton will reach deep into the past on St. Patrick's Day to recall the fate of two Irishmen who were the victims of local bigotry.

A float commemorating the execution of Dominic Daley and Patrick Halligan will serve as one of the centerpieces of Northampton's contingent in the annual St. Patrick's Parade. Daley and Halligan were falsely accused of murder in 1806. After a quick trial in Northampton, they were hanged on what later became Hospital Hill. Several years later, another man confessed to the crime on his deathbed.

The float depicts the changes for the better that have occurred over the succeeding centuries. It will be part of a series of events organized by the Daley & Halligan Bicentennial Committee to mark the 200th anniversary of the hangings this year.

On a lighter note, Northampton's contingent will also feature the usual mix of bands and politicians. Mayor Mary Clare Higgins is scheduled to march along with members of the City Council. Northampton High School's Blue Devils Marching Band will provide music while Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School will honor the Future Farmers of America with a horse-drawn wagon.

Serving as Northampton's parade marshal this year is Dr. B. David Shea, who has ties to both the local medical community and Clarke School for the Deaf. A fifth generation Irish-American, Shea, 50, was born in Maine but has lived in Northampton for the past 32

years. He came to the area to attend the University of Massachusetts and began working at Clarke School during that time. Shea eventually became the school's director of audiology and went on to teach at Smith College and in China.

In 1994, Shea went back to school to fulfill his dream of becoming a physician. He graduated with honors from St. George's University School of Medicine and did his internship and residency at Berkshire Medical Center. Shea presently works at Holyoke Medical Center, where he was recruited to start a program in hospital-based medicine. He will be joined in the parade by his wife, Kathi (Kelleher) Shea, who teaches at Clarke School.

Shea said being named parade marshal is the honor of a lifetime.

"One can not help feel a tremendous sense of pride when thinking of the outstanding Irish-Americans whose names adorn the Northampton Marshal's Blackthorn walking stick and being fortunate enough to be considered among them," he said. "I will lead Northampton and carry the Blackthorn on parade day in honor of my family and all my Irish ancestors, including my mother, as no one would have enjoyed this day more than she."

## **Parading justice and tolerance – March 2006**

**BY MATTHEW PILON**

Hampshire County towns have unique plans this year for Sunday's 55th annual Holyoke St. Patrick's Parade.

To commemorate the bicentennial anniversary of the deaths of two Irish immigrants wrongly convicted and hanged for murder in 1806, the Northampton St. Patrick's Association is building a Daley and Halligan float. The association is working in conjunction with the local Daley & Halligan Bicentennial Committee.

According to association member Beth Connly, the float will display themes of justice and tolerance.

'We wanted to get involved with this anniversary,' she said. 'It involves pretty much everything we stand for.'

The Opa Opa Steakhouse and Brewery in Southampton will also enter a float, a first for the greater Easthampton-Southampton area. Appearing on the float will be 2006 Greater Easthampton Junior Miss, Nicole DeMagistris.

Opa Opa owner Themis Rizos said that after the parade there will be an Irish-themed party at his restaurant with live music.

'Everything will be Irish that day,' he said.

To celebrate its 125th anniversary, the Emily Williston Library in Easthampton will perform its 'bookcart drillteam' formations during the parade.

'We have uniforms, and the carts are decorated,' said director Becky Plimpton, adding that the team of eight has been practicing once or twice a week since January.

The South Hadley parade committee is putting the finishing touches on its 'Leprechaun Smiling Over Holyoke' float, said committee member Jackie Reardon.

'This is a first for the town,' she said. 'We had some willing and able individuals who were more than glad to put in some time and effort and make it a reality.'

Island X-1 of the Seabee Veterans of America has entered its float, a one-sixteenth replica of the USS Constitution. X-1 covers the Greater Pioneer Valley.

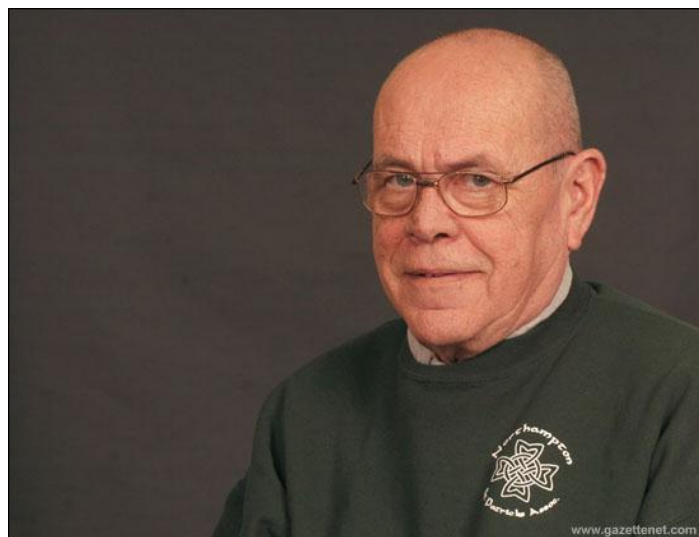
According to X-1 member Stephen Olbris, the float was built in conjunction with Island X-6, of Wilmington, and the Department of Massachusetts Seabee Veterans of America as well.

'It's the first float that Island X-1 has put in (this parade),' Olbris said.

#### IF YOU GO

The parade begins at noon Sunday. The route is 2.6 miles long, beginning on Northampton Street and ending on Hampden Street in Holyoke.

**I.D. - James A. Coyle - March 17, 2006**



For the last several years, the ID column has had something of an informal tradition: featuring the marshal from Northampton's contingent at the annual St. Patrick's Parade in Holyoke. This year a potential snag loomed, as the 2006 marshal, David Shea, had appeared in the ID column in 2003. But Jim Coyle, who also plays a key role for Northampton's St. Patrick's Association in the parade, stepped up to the plate in Shea's place.

Coyle, a lifetime city resident, is a veteran of the U.S. Navy and served in Vietnam. He has long been active with the Florence VFW chapter, Northampton's World War II Club and other veterans organizations. He's also been a key contributor in building the Northampton floats for the parade. A supervisor in the physical plant at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Leeds, Coyle has considerable mechanical expertise. Still, he emphasizes that float construction is very much a team effort.

'I've enjoyed working with a great group of people,' he says. 'It can, and usually does, get hectic as parade day approaches, but everyone pulls together and gets the job done. The group effort makes the job more enjoyable, and it's amazing what we've been able to accomplish over the last 15 years. I salute all the workers who volunteer their time and talent to make it happen.'

Full name: James A. Coyle

People know you as: Jim

Date and place of birth: Feb. 20, 1950, Northampton

Address: Northampton

Job: Supervisor of the electric shop and boiler plant at the VA Medical Center in Leeds

Who lives under the same roof as you? My wife, Brenda

Children: Maggie, 25; Mike, 23; Matt, 21

Education: Northampton High School, 1967

Book you'd recommend to a friend: 'The Way Things Work,' by David Macaulay

Favorite movie: 'Ben-Hur'

Favorite television show: The History Channel

Favorite group: The Dubliners

What do you waste your money on? Tools, fishing

Guilty pleasure: Jameson Irish whiskey

Life-changing experience: Joining and serving in the U.S. Navy from 1968 to 1972

Funniest memory: Skiing Mount Rainier with a crazy group of guys from the South who had never seen snow before

Strangest job you ever held: Smashing blocks of caramel with a sledgehammer at the Welch Candy Co. in Cambridge

Bumper-sticker statement? Support Our Troops

A little-known fact about you: I have a sense of humor

Dumbest thing you ever did: Sing at karaoke

One product, trend or fashion you'd like to see return: '57 Chevys

What really sets you off? People using cell phones while driving

Celebrity encounters? Gen. William Westmoreland, head of U.S. forces in Vietnam in the 1960s

Favorite Web site: [www.rte.ie](http://www.rte.ie) ' Ireland's public service broadcaster

One thing you would change about yourself: Be more tolerant and patient with the mechanically inept

People who knew you in high school thought you were: Doomed

Whom do you most admire? Franklin Delano Roosevelt, for his perseverance

Parting shot: Live till you die

Compiled by Steve Pfarrer

**Award goes to two civic-minded students    March 7, 2006**

**NORTHAMPTON** - The Joan Tobin Citizenship Award, given out annually at the city's St. Patrick's Day festivities, goes this year to Northampton High School students Leah Drabek and Michelle Walsh.

The award is designed to be given annually to one senior from Northampton High School and one from Smith Vocational High School, who are city residents, have worked to their full potential, and demonstrated strong characteristics of citizenship through participation in school and community activities.



There were no applicants from Smith Vocational this year.

The award winners will be honored at the annual St. Patrick's Day breakfast Friday, March 17 at 7:30 a.m. at the Clarion Hotel and Conference Center.

The breakfast is sponsored jointly by the Northampton Chamber of Commerce and the Northampton St. Patrick's Association.

Walsh, the daughter of Jeffrey and Melissa Walsh, 91 Greenleaf Drive in Florence, is a member of the National Honor Society, active in field hockey, basketball, lacrosse and will be participating in the Massachusetts Baystate Games on the lacrosse team.

She has volunteered at the Northampton Survival Center, Cooley Dickinson Hospital, and for Dollars for Scholars. She has served as a coach for girls youth bantam lacrosse team and field hockey team, and worked as a peer tutor in the high school resource room.

Drabek, the daughter of Edward and Paula Drabek, 69 Woodland Drive in Florence, is a member of the Pioneer Valley Ballet Company and has participated in many benefit performances.

She is also a leader in the NHS student government and is Student Council secretary and has been class secretary for the past four years. She is one of the co-founders of the Esangweni Hope Foundation, which is a charity project which gives aid toward the education and the lives of South African students and AIDS orphans at the Lihlthemba Secondary School in Verulam, South Africa.

She volunteers at the Ryan Road School tutoring, reading, and teaching. Leah is a member of the varsity swim team and is manager of the boys varsity soccer team.

**It's top o' the mornin' at annual Irish breakfast**  
**BY SUNSHINE DEWITT STAFF WRITER**  
**March 17, 2005**



At the annual St. Patrick's Day breakfast held this morning at the Clarion Hotel, author Kevin O'Hara, who wrote 'Last of the Donkey Pilgrims,' a memoir about his trip through Ireland in 1979 was the guest speaker. Next to him are Judge W. Michael Ryan, parade marshall for the Northampton contingent and Michael Ahearn, master of ceremonies for the breakfast. GORDON DANIELS

**NORTHAMPTON** - The luck of the Irish was with the organizers of today's St. Patrick's Day Breakfast, with a full to capacity crowd and a guest speaker who kept the laughs coming.

About 330 area business people, politicians, and city officials attended the breakfast, an annual event held at the Clarion Hotel and Conference Center and co-sponsored by the Northampton St. Patrick's Association and the Greater Northampton Chamber of Commerce.

Among those honored at the event were Ben Cox and Elizabeth Heston, Northampton High School students and recipients of the Joan Tobin Citizenship Award.

City resident Jean Bryant received the 2005 Brennan Award for her efforts to contribute to the success of the Northampton St. Patrick's Association.

Northampton District Court Judge W. Michael Ryan was also introduced as this year's St. Patrick's Parade marshal. He will lead the Northampton contingent in the March 20 Holyoke St. Patrick's Parade on Sunday.

Kevin O'Hara, a Pittsfield resident, Berkshire Eagle columnist and author, told stories of his 1979 journey along the coast of Ireland - which he did entirely on foot with a donkey by his side, in the manner of religious pilgrims of days gone by.

The result, 25 years later, is a memoir, "The Last of the Donkey Pilgrims: One man's journey through Ireland."

Of his success as an author, O'Hara said, "The nuns at St. Charles School in Pittsfield would be surprised."

O'Hara, who speaks with a slight Irish lilt, read from the book and told stories from his 1,800-mile, eight-month journey through Ireland.

In doing so, he painted a picture of a varied, poverty-soaked yet humor-filled culture during that time period, telling tales that drew appreciative laughter and enthralled the audience.

In one, a red-headed vagabond girl nearly got away with robbing him of 80 pounds simply by playing on the sympathy of onlookers. In another, a grandmother told a bawdy joke about a priest whose donkey keeps winning races, and the newspapers continually run such headlines as: "Local priest ass shows," and "Priest ass outshines them all."

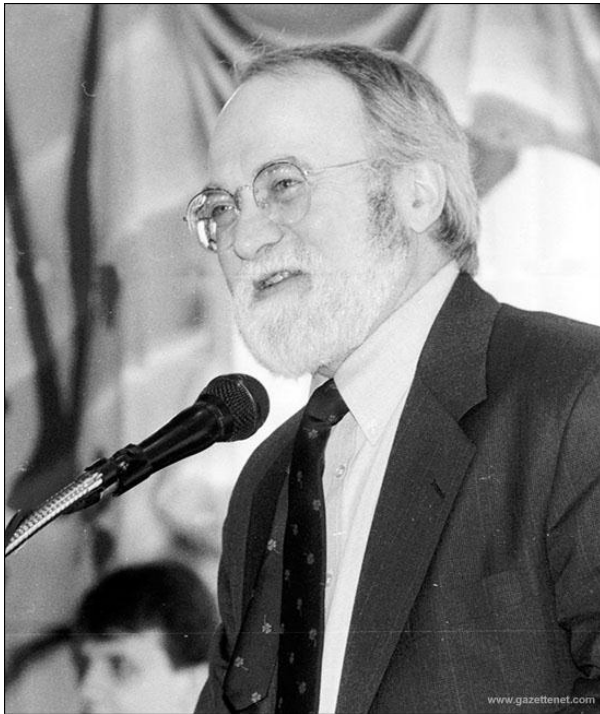
And finally, an anxious American woman demanded to know why the ladies room in a pub has no lock, to which the Irish bartender answered that in the 25 years the lock has been missing, there "hasn't been a thing stolen out of it yet."

## Ryan to be honored at reception

BY KIMBERLY ASHTON STAFF WRITER

January 29, 2005

**NORTHAMPTON** - District Court Judge W. Michael Ryan, a lifelong city resident who is marshal of Northampton St. Patrick's Association in this year's parade in Holyoke, will be honored at a reception this weekend.



Ryan will be feted Saturday night at an awards ceremony held at the Elks Lodge on Spring Street in Florence. As marshal, Ryan will head the Northampton contingent of the March 20 parade.

He said today that he was thrilled and honored when he heard that he had been named marshal; he had no idea he was in the running.

"It's a unique honor in itself and it's a great honor because of the company of people it puts me in, people I grew up admiring," Ryan said. "When I was a kid growing up it was like being the pope."

One member of that company is his father, former mayor and district court judge Luke Ryan, who served as marshal in 1976.

The Northampton St. Patrick's Association works to keep Irish culture alive through book donations to local libraries, support for the parade and an annual citizenship award to two high school seniors.

The group will also recognize Jean Bryant, its secretary, with the James Brennan Award for her longtime dedication to the organization. Brennan was an association founder and a past marshal.

Ryan, a district court judge who has practiced law in Northampton since 1976, grew up in the city and attended local schools.

He was instrumental, according to members of the association, in getting a pardon for two Irishmen who were wrongly convicted of a crime and hanged in Northampton.

Last year, Michael Ahearn, co-owner of the Ahearn Funeral Home on Bridge Road in Northampton, served as marshal.

The association's highest honor is given annually to a resident of Northampton distinguished by substantial civic, family and career contributions.

### **Winning floats cited - June 10, 2004**

**NORTHAMPTON** - Due to time constraints that led to calculation errors Sunday, the official announcement of the award-winning floats in the 350th Anniversary Parade was delayed. Organizers met Tuesday to do some quick recalculations.

Parade committee chairman Mike Flynn said three float judges were not prepared for the number of ties that resulted.



The judging of the floats before the parade Sunday also took longer than expected, Flynn said. He said extra trophies will be purchased by the parade committee and will be presented to winners who did not receive one the day of the parade.

The top prize for a float in the business/industry category went to Northampton Elks Lodge 997's

Here are the final results:

Agricultural: 1st, Northampton Three County Fair - Hampshire, Franklin & Hampden "Agriculture in Nature"; 2nd, Town of Hadley - Agricultural; 3rd, Haydenville Rod & Gun Club

Business/Industry: 1st, Elks Lodge #997 "Dedication to our Community"; 2nd, Zawalick Sugarhouse "Sugaring Operation"; 3rd, Herrell's Ice Cream; 3rd, Holyoke Community College

Historical: 1st, Chesterfield, "The Early Days"; 2nd, St. Michael's Class of 1954 Alumni, "Memories of St. Mike's"; 2nd, St. John Cantius, "100th Anniversary"; 3rd, Daughters of American Revolution, "Colonial Days"

Open: 1st, Holyoke Medical Center, "Riverboat"; 2nd, Heart of the Valley Barbershop Chorus, "Harmonize the World"; 2nd, Look Memorial Park, "Multi-Attractions"; 3rd, Red Cross, "Servicing the Communities"

Patriotic: 1st, St. Patrick's Association, "D-Day + 60 Years"; 2nd, 9th Massachusetts Light Battery; 2nd, VFW Post 8006 - DAV 92, Florence, Mass.; 3rd, Cummington, "Washington Monument"

Youth: 1st, Smith Vocational High School Students, projects from all vocational programs in school; 2nd, Boy Scouts of America, Troop #103; 3rd, Clarke School for the Deaf, "Turn-of-the-Century Classroom"; 3rd, Bridge Street School, "Coolidge Bridge"

Holyoke hosts 53rd wearin' o' the green  
BY TOM MARSHALL STAFF WRITER  
March 22, 2004

HOLYOKE - A wild mix of weather didn't deter thousands from turning out Sunday for the 53rd annual Holyoke St. Patrick's Parade, the region's largest celebration of green pride.

Sun, sleet, wind, and a sprinkling of rain all made appearances during the three-hour parade, which ran 2.9 miles to the reviewing stand in front of City Hall.

Among the 19 floats and 32 bands, the Northampton St. Patrick's Association won second prize in the "patriotic theme" category for its float commemorating the 60th anniversary of the D-Day invasion.

The group's float was designed to resemble a naval landing craft, and was accompanied by around a dozen members of the Army's 82nd Airborne dressed in vintage World War II battle dress.

Holyoke Police Capt. Alan G. Fletcher said that about 245,000 people attended the parade on Sunday.

An estimated 20,000 people marched, rode on floats and played in bands along the route. The Holyoke parade is reportedly the second-largest St. Patrick's event after that of New York City.

The Holyoke Police Department and auxiliary officers were out in force this year, following a shooting incident after last year's parade. But the department reported no problems or arrests this time.

For many in the crowd, watching the parade was the second act in a morning-long festival that resembled a Yankee Mardi Gras.

The dress code leaned toward green hair, oversized green hats, and green-and-white feather boas. Children chased each other through the crowd and munched green cotton candy, while adults sipped beer and visited at tailgate parties.

"It could be a little warmer," said Todd Helems of Southampton, who sported a green beard.

Four people lounged in a steaming hot tub by the parade route, tossing beads at the marchers and offering Jell-O shots to passing firefighters, who cheered back.

"None of us are Irish, either!" shouted Dean Cipriani of Agawam, owner of the tub.

Anne Rohan, 80, of Holyoke, was bundled up in a fancy Irish sweater against the chill breeze. She said she'd missed only one parade in the entire history of the event, due to a sick child. "I'm a full-blooded Irishman. I wouldn't miss it!"

Among the participants from Hampshire County were the 10th Massachusetts Volunteer Militia of Florence; the Florence Veterans of Foreign Wars color guard and ladies' auxiliary; the South Hadley American Legion; the Northampton High School Blue Devils marching band; the Future Farmers of America chapter from Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School; and the Easthampton High School marching band.

Notables included congressmen Richard Neal and John Olver; city council members, officials, and police from Northampton, Easthampton, and South Hadley; Easthampton Junior Miss Stacy Waxler; and Northampton Parade Marshal Michael T. Ahearn.

Bringing up the rear of the Hampshire County contingent was the award-winning South Hadley High School marching band, anchored by sophomore Alex Tremblay of South Hadley on the big bass drum.

For 2.9 miles they never stopped playing. As the band passed Holyoke High School and neared downtown, onlookers could be seen nodding their heads and dancing with the drum corps, keeping time with Tremblay. Band mother Camille Tucker of South Hadley squirted water into his mouth as he kept the group moving.

When it was all done, Tremblay reflected on his first St. Patrick's Parade.

"It feels good," he said, pausing to shift the drum on his shoulders. "It feels heavy."

## **I.D. - Michael Ahearn March 19, 2004**

It's that time of year again ' time for the wearing of the green, and Michael Ahearn is ready. Ahearn, of Northampton, will try not to freeze as he marches in Holyoke's St. Patrick's Parade on Sunday, where he'll serve as this year's marshal for the Northampton contingent of the annual parade.

Ahearn, co-owner of the Ahearn Funeral Home on Bridge Road in Northampton, is a longtime member and past president of the city's St. Patrick's Day Association, which works to keep Irish culture alive through book donations to local libraries, support for the parade and an annual citizenship award to two high school seniors.

Ahearn also sits on the Holyoke Parade Committee, is active in the Elks Lodge, and has coached youth soccer and baseball. "I've always been involved in community things," he says. "I've spent my whole life in Northampton, and it's been a great place to live, so I like to give something back."

Full name: Michael T. Ahearn

People know you as: Hearnzy, Mic

Date and place of birth: Feb. 9, 1965, Northampton



Address: Northampton

Job: Co-owner of Ahearn Funeral Home, Northampton

Who lives under the same roof as you? Janet L. (Ryan) Ahearn

Education: Northampton High School, 1983; New England Institute of Applied Arts & Sciences, degree in funeral services, 1986

Book you'd recommend to a friend: In the words of Chauncey Gardner, "I like to watch TV"

Favorite movies: "Braveheart," "It's a Wonderful Life"

Favorite television shows: "CSI," "Friday Night Standup" and college basketball games

Favorite singer or group: U2. Also a big fan of the songs "Four Green Fields" and "Summer Wind"

What do you waste your money on? I absolutely love golf

Guilty pleasure: Probably a really nice, dry martini ' and it has to be made with Grey Goose vodka

Formative experience: Growing up on Fort Street with my brothers. There was a bunch of kids in the neighborhood, so there was always activity. Our parents would call us in at lunch and dinner

Funniest memory: There are a few, like my sophomore year of high school when I was playing soccer. Coach Dubiel told me to get into the game, so I pulled down my sweatpants, and my shorts went with them. I thought my mom and Mrs. Keefe would never stop laughing

Strangest job you ever held: I was a "litter critter" one summer with my brother. We would clean roadsides throughout the area

Dumbest thing you ever did: It's hard to pick one example, since there have been so many. But I guess it would probably be the time I was walking home for lunch from the old South Street Elementary School with a bunch of other kids. It was the middle of a snowstorm, so we started a snowball fight, and I hit Mrs. Deck, the fourth-grade teacher, in the back of the head. I think I got detention till about eighth grade

One product, trend or fashion you'd like to see return: (1) Checkout clerks who will actually talk to you and not their co-workers; (2) corduroy suits (green if possible)

What really sets you off? There isn't enough room for this one

Celebrity encounters? I met Lee Trevino once when I was driving a limousine he rode in; also met Burt Reynolds after going to Boston Garden to see the Celtics

Favorite Web site: [www.RedSox.com](http://www.RedSox.com) and [www.sonsofsamhorn.com](http://www.sonsofsamhorn.com)

People who knew you in high school thought you were: A skinny, loud guy who was at the head of the class ' alphabetically speaking, of course

Whom do you most admire? My wife, Janet. She has the ability to keep me grounded and focused when I need it the most (which is a full-time job). She's also done an amazing job making the transition from working for years in the corporate world to developing her own business in reflexology

Parting shot: It's better to try and fail than not try at all.

Compiled by Steve Pfarrer

**Laughs abound at St. Pat's breakfast - March 17, 2004**  
**BY RYAN DAVIS STAFF WRITER**

**NORTHAMPTON** - Despite the snowstorm that blanketed the area in white on the day most closely associated with green, the city's 24th annual St. Patrick's Day breakfast this morning drew hundreds of people to the Clarion Hotel.

We've never canceled this breakfast, even it was only four of us at the Blue Bonnet, said longtime master of ceremonies William F. O'Connor of Northampton. "Everything else was canceled today. I actually think they might have canceled this, but we've got nowhere else to go."

The messy weather was the topic of just as many jokes as Irish culture at the breakfast, which is co-sponsored by the Northampton St. Patrick's Association and the Greater Northampton Chamber of Commerce.

O'Connor shared host duties this year with his son Thomas F. O'Connor, a city native and FBI agent who recently returned from four months in Iraq. He marveled that so many people braved the snow for the event.

"There's not an empty seat in the place," he said. "You people are crazy."

The breakfast serves as a kickoff each year for the Holyoke St. Patrick's Parade held the following Sunday. Michael Ahearn, owner of Ahearn Funeral Home, was introduced as the marshal for the Northampton contingent this year.

Chamber of Commerce President John Ebbets joked that Ahearn was lucky to make it to the breakfast because "he took his wife to the movies up in Northfield this winter and almost froze to death waiting to see 'Closed For the Season.'"

Ahearn called his selection as marshal "a tremendous honor" and said that "I'm so looking forward to Sunday, it could rain cats and dogs, I don't care."

In her remarks, Mayor Clare Higgins made reference to a proposed two-day rock concert she recently decided could not be held in the city.

"I came here to personally apologize for not offering a permit for the Warped Tour. I know you were all devastated," she told attendees, who broke out in laughter.

With jokes the order of the day, Higgins also noted that she is excited about the upcoming parade, which she called "that 2.6-mile forced march through Holyoke," because "that's my exercise for the year."

Father Eugene Honan of St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Northampton praised the spirit of St. Patrick, and noted that his holiday falls only a few days before the official beginning of spring.

"Irish or not, Catholic or not, we all dance a merry jig on this, his feast day," Honan said. "Four days from now, our old friend winter will lose his lease on life...we hope."

Former city resident Thomas O'Connor, standing, with his father, William O'Connor, seated next to him, share master of ceremonies duties at this morning's annual St. Patrick's Day Breakfast. To their left are Michael Ahearn, parade marshal for the Northampton contingent of the Holyoke St. Patrick's Parade Sunday, and John Ebbets, president of the Northampton Chamber of Commerce.



### **Tobin awards go to 2 students - March 16, 2004**

**NORTHAMPTON** - The Joan Tobin Citizenship Award is being given this year at the annual St. Patrick's Day Breakfast to Kevin Foley from Northampton High School and Jessica Welch from Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School.

The breakfast, sponsored jointly by the Northampton Chamber of Commerce and the Northampton St. Patrick's Association, is set for Wednesday at the Clarion Conference Center on Atwood Drive at 7:30 a.m.



The award is given annually to two seniors, one from Northampton High School and one from Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School.

A senior who applies for the award must be a resident of the city of Northampton and a strong student, and must have demonstrated strong characteristics of citizenship through participation in school, community and/or church activities.

Foley, son of Nancy and Thomas Foley, is involved in Student Council and plays lacrosse, golf and winter track. He also serves on the Mayor's Youth Commission.

Welch, daughter of Doris and Thomas Welch, has been a member of the National Honor Society, was involved in Student Government and has been active in volunteer work in the community and school activities.

### **City marshal selected for St. Patrick's parade - December 22, 2003**

Michael T. Ahearn of 783 Bridge Road, Northampton has been chosen as the 2004 parade marshal representing Northampton in the Holyoke St. Patrick's Parade.

The Northampton St. Patrick's Association's highest honor is given annually to a resident of Northampton distinguished by substantial civic, family and career contributions.

The traditional passing of the marshal's walking stick will take place at a reception in Ahearn's honor on Saturday, Feb. 7.

The parade will be held March 21.