

# The Freebird

VOLUME III

FEBRUARY 2007

*The Freebird is the newsletter of the Irish Fair of Minnesota (August 10 - 12, 2007 at Harriet Island in St. Paul). Its purpose is to keep us connected, provide updates, celebrate successes and share our stories, and to support the mission of the Irish Fair by promoting and cultivating Irish culture.*



## HEADLINERS NEWS-THE PERFECT STORM-AGAIN!



Lightening may never strike twice in the same place, but there will be a gale of energizing music again at the Irish Fair this year as Gaelic Storm returns for performances both Saturday and Sunday. Alternately described as “Guinness for the ears” and “reminiscent of the early Chieftains”, Gaelic Storm has sustained their renown since they whirled into fame with their appearance in the blockbuster film *Titanic*. As you would expect from a salt- of- the- earth steerage band, Gaelic Storm (whose slogan is "Irish music with thunder and lightning") is hardworking, with some 125 touring dates a year, and five albums which have topped the world music charts on a repeated basis.

Fair regular Joe Henderson has this to say: “Gaelic Storm never fails to bring a foot stompn', booty jiggin', johnny-jump-up swiggin' hooley of a time. It doesn't seem enough to say fair play to Gaelic Storm who offers nothing but excellent play at their live shows. A rag-tag bunch of deadly musicians, a bit of Irish blood, and loads of pubs and shows have created the dog's bollocks of a band. G'wan ye gobshite - don't miss 'um.”

Kathi Jones, Fair volunteer extraordinaire, succinctly summed it up: “*Holy Smokes!!!*”



In addition to the energy and playfulness in their performances, Gaelic Storm also brings a major musicality. Long-time members Patrick Murphy of Cork City, Ireland (vocals, piano, accordion, spoons, harmonica) and Steve Twigger of Coventry, England (guitar, mandolin, bouzouki, vocals) have made it a point to bring the best into the eye of the Storm. For example, percussionist Ryan Lacey, who graduated **twice** from the Los Angeles Music Academy--once for hands and once for sticks. Fiddler Ellery Klein holds a MA degree in Traditional Irish Music from the University of Limerick) and piper Peter Purvis is a Grade 1 piper who toured with the award- winning Braemar Pipe Band as well as at 2000 Sydney Olympics. For more about the band see <http://www.gaelicstorm.com>

*Stay tuned to 'The Freebird' for news about other headliners in coming editions!*

## MORE IRISH FAIR VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

*Thanks to all of you who responded to last month's call for Fair Volunteers. Fortunately for the rest of you, there are still some hot positions open. It's a great way to meet other energetic, interesting people who enjoy All Things Irish.*

- 1) Volunteer needed for each of the two St Pat's Day parades. March along with your fellow Irish Fair supporters in the St. Paul and/or MPLS St. Pat's Day Parades, help distribute literature and carry our banner. Both are on March 17th. St. Paul parade gathers at 11:30am and starts at Noon; MPLS gathers at 6pm and starts at 6:30pm.
- 2) If you prefer to stay indoors, you could staff the Irish Fair booth at the Day of Irish Dance (March 11th) and/or the Irish Celebration (March 17th). Both are at Landmark Center and run approximately 10am - 4pm each day - 2 volunteer shifts each day. Duties include distributing literature, collecting email addresses for our newsletter list and registering volunteers.

*Contact Maria Flynn Conway [celticjourneys@msn.com](mailto:celticjourneys@msn.com) for more information about these and other volunteer positions.*



*Volunteers celebrating success at the Summit Brewery after last year's Fair*

## GAELSCOIL: AN INSIDE STORY *by Killian Condon*

Is mise Killian Ó Condúin, is Éireannach mé agus 'sé seo mo scéal. I'm one of the thousands of Irish people who have been educated entirely through the Irish language, and I want to share my experiences with you. Here's my story.

My family and I lived on the north side of Cork City, on the southern tip of Ireland. From ages four to nineteen I was schooled in full immersion Irish schools. My parents choose these schools as they never had the opportunity to learn through Irish when they were young, and because of the location of the school, which was less than a mile from our house.

My memories of preschool are vague, but I remember that the teachers slowly introduced us to basic phrases, such as *an bhfuil cead agam dul go dtí an leithreas* (can I go to the toilet) and *stop ag tarraingt gruaig an chailín sin* (stop pulling that girl's hair). The school was founded by a group of teachers and a Christian Brother who saw the need for a full immersion Irish school in the area. There were 12-14 students in the first class and the classroom was in the kitchen of a hurling and football club called Na Piarasaigh, of which I'd been a member ever since I could hold a hurley in my hand. The Hurling and Football club offered the room to start up the school and would in time provide four additional rooms which were converted to classrooms. As the numbers of pupils attending the school grew plans were made to build a bigger school in the area. However, due to the government of the time and opposition from locals these plans never materialized.

I don't remember Irish being forced upon me in primary school and this is one of the main factors that encouraged many of us to continue on to a full immersion secondary school. Teachers came and went during the first few years but most of them were from County Kerry or West Cork, from Gaeltacht areas. One of my favorite teachers was one named Iarla Ó Lionáird (<http://www.iarla-o-lionaird.net>) who hailed from a mountainous Gaeltacht area in West Cork called Cúil Aodha (Coolea). He was very passionate about the language, something that is a common feature of many of teachers who have taught me.

I had big plans of going to the local secondary school to play sport and have some craic with my buddies but my parents had other ideas. The school I attended for the next six years was a full Irish immersion school called Coláiste an Phiarsaigh, named after Pdraig Pearse. This school had a strong record in good grades and today it has a waiting list of five to six years to even



*Coláiste an Phiarsaigh's 1998 Hurling Team  
Killian back row, third from right*

be considered for the entrance exam to the school. This meant that all subjects were taught through Irish, apart from languages, obviously enough, and English. English comprised the poetry, plays and other topics similar to your English classes here in the U.S. I adjusted quickly but some of my classmates who came from English speaking primary schools struggled during the first year or two, or six according to a few.

In secondary *Irish only* was the Law and they who dared break the Law faced suspension. This is something I never really understood. The ones who were usually reprimanded for speaking English were the ones who were stupid enough to get caught, and the majority of the time it was these students who weren't the sharpest tools in the shed, who could have done instead with extra schooling and not less. Even though it was a full immersion Irish school, 99 percent of students spoke



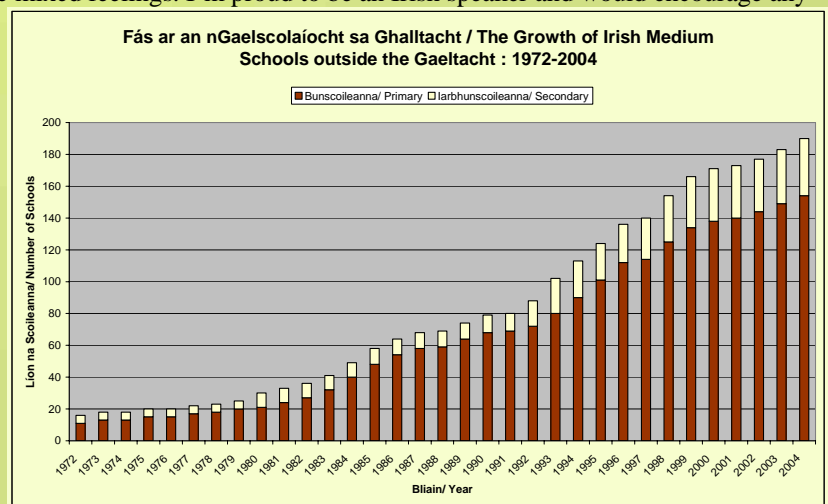
Academic excellence draws students from non-Irish-speaking backgrounds

English when conversing to each other throughout the day. Irish was only spoken when a teacher's head was seen bobbing around the halls and when you needed the key to the toilet. The teachers in this school were a mixed bunch. The older teachers were almost all from Kerry and West Cork while the younger teachers were part of a newer, trendier Irish speaking community in Ireland, many of whom were from the cities. We had a state of the art computer room, tennis courts, swimming pool, and not a single Irish language text book for the majority of subjects, such as history, physics, chemistry, geography, biology, et cetera.

One of the first teachers who taught me in school was gifted in the Irish language. Máistir Ó Céileachair was from West Cork. His Irish was flawless and it was as if English was his second language. During my first year in secondary school he would arrive in the class and announce his presence with the word, *seas* (stand). We would all have to stand to attention and when he had taken his seat he would give the order to sit. The man used to talk in rhyme most of the time, and a conversation always included a plethora of *seanfhocail* or old sayings.

When I look back on my Irish schooling now, I have mixed feelings. I'm proud to be an Irish speaker and would encourage any parents to send their child to an Irish school.

Apart from the cultural aspect of the Irish language schools, the quality of teaching is usually higher than that of their English counterparts, as well as the better teacher student ratio. However if the language is to survive, the government and the schools need to reassess the curriculum and conduct a complete overhaul of the way it's taught. It seemed as if the learning material hadn't been changed since the Free State came to be, and the cassettes we listened to were woeful. Thankfully of late I've seen some decent learning material on the market and seen really good programs on the Irish language station TG4 (available for viewing on the web at <http://www.tg4.ie/Webt/webt.htm> ).



While the practicality of Irish and its application in the working world is questionable now more than ever, I feel that as Ireland and Europe open their borders to a host of nations, more Irish people will look to the Irish language as part of their unique identity and will come back to the language.

When not on the pitch with Twin Cities Robert Emmets Hurling Club <http://www.twincitieshurling.com/>, Killian spends his Monday nights brushing up his Irish with Gaeltacht Minnesota <http://www.gaelminn.org/index.htm>. Reprinted with permission from An Gaeilgeoir



Dancers from Rince na Chroi warm hearts for KARE 11 news at the Irish Fair of Minnesota 2006

## EVENTS

### From the Stage to Your Heart Dance Concert

**Rince na Chroi**, a St. Paul-based Irish dance school, will join Five Mile Chase and The Minnesota Pipe Band for a second annual recital Saturday, March 3 at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, March 4 at 2 p.m. After an enormously successful show last year, the school is aiming to sell out two shows instead of one.

In addition to performing at the Irish Fair of Minnesota, the school has appeared at a number of Twin Cities' events KARE 11 news, Minnesota Twins and Swarm games. They have also performed with first-class Irish acts such as Gaelic Storm, Natalie MacMaster, Eileen Ivers in addition to Five Mile Chase and the Minnesota Police Pipe Band.

