

# LOVELY LEITRIM IN THE BRONX

Kerri Ann O'Connor

AS THE DAUGHTER of a Leitrim immigrant here in Woodlawn, The Bronx, New York, I have very strong ties to my Mother's native County. I work here in St Barnabas Church as the Religious Education Director and part-time receptionist in the Rectory. We are the largest Irish Parish in America. There are many Leitrim natives with names such as Brady, Carty, Clark, Creegan, Dolan, Dwyer, Fox, Gill, Gilligan, McGovern, McMorrow, Redican, Winters, and Wynne. All of which are tremendously active and abundantly generous in the Parish and community. Many are successful local merchants and they strive to keep their heritage alive by generously contributing, physically and financially, to St Barnabas Church, The G A A, The Aisling Community Centre, The Emerald Isle, and the Irish Music



Schools. We host the Scór na n-Óg, which beautifully showcases the talent possessed by the local Irish and Irish American children and adult. Many events are sponsored by and held in Leitrim-owned establishments, such as Rory

*The parish clergy and staff welcoming President of Ireland Michael D Higgins and his wife Sabina. (April 2018)*



Dolan's, The Rambling House, J P Clarke's, and Behan's to name just a few. J P Clarke's recently became the official sponsor of The Leitrim Senior Men's Football Team in Ireland.

When Leitrim play in New York, Leitrim must be half empty! We witnessed that most recently in 2018 with the huge crowd that came over to support Leitrim for the Connacht Senior Football Championship Quarter-Final. Many of our relatives travelled over as

*My daughter, Kiera O'Connor, presenting Cardinal Timothy Dolan with an Aran Irish Sweater as a gift from St Barnabas Parish to keep him as he leads us down McLean Avenue. (March 2017)*





*Our family celebrating Christmas Mass at St Barnabas Church. (December 2018)*

well. We all enjoyed watching an exciting match in Gaelic Park. Many Leitrim natives also traveled home for the game to cheer on Leitrim in Croke Park this past April. On any given Sunday, you'll be sure to notice many Leitrim natives out in droves at Mass in St Barnabas, at games in Gaelic Park, and out for dinner, drinks, and traditional Irish sessions anywhere on Katonah Avenue or McLean Avenue (aka the Emerald Mile). Many young Leitrim men and women continue to immigrate to America and they seem to

settle in well here in Woodlawn as they are helped to find work and accommodations quickly through the Immigration Centres, the GAA and Leitrim natives that have come before them.

Our Parish is well led by Fr Brendan Fitzgerald, a proud Kerry man. Luckily, he can safely wear his green and gold around the town as it shows support for his native County Kerry and also shows his respect, admiration, and appreciation for the many devout and loyal Leitrim parishioners. Father Brendan states,

*"I have never had a small Leitrim wedding, wake, funeral, or fundraiser. They come out in force to support their own, as well as others. I also thought I knew what it was like to have my leg pulled or to get a rise out*

*of me, until I met the Leitrim crowd they brought it to a new level."*

I am very lucky to work and live in St Barnabas, because of my Kerry and Leitrim roots. Our Parish manager, as well as friend, Helen Winters is from Kerry and her husband Gary is from Leitrim. My paternal grandfather came from Knocknagoshel, as does Father Brendan's relations.

Recently, we were fortunate enough to have his Eminence Cardinal Timothy Dolan celebrate Mass at St Barnabas and march down the Emerald Mile as Grand Marshal of our annual St Patrick's Day Parade. We were also visited, in 2018, by President of Ireland, Michael D Higgins, his wife Sabina, and many other Irish and American dignitaries. They were all very well received here at St Barnabas and were pleasantly surprised how the Irish culture is so alive in our little corner of the world. Through our Parish and community, Irish young and old are looked after.

My family and I have such pride in



*Left: Father Brendan Fitzgerald, Former Irish Consul General of New York Barbara Jones, and Cardinal Timothy Dolan (left to right) on the steps of St Barnabas Rectory before celebrating Mass to kick off our annual St Patrick's Day Parade. (March 2017)*

*Right: First Holy Communion at St Barnabas. Our grandmother, Bridget Dolan (nee Fox), of Manorhamilton in the center and our mother, Mary O'Connor (nee Dolan), of Manorhamilton in the upper left. (May 1978)*





*President of Ireland, Michael D Higgins with Leitrim's, Frank Brady, representing Scor na nOg outside St Barnabas Church. (April 2018)*

We treasure our relationship with them, and through their love and kindness Lovely Leitrim will always be our second home!

So, at the end of the day, we here at St Barnabas in Woodlawn will always wear our green and gold with pride. We will always be well aware of where we come from and how lucky we are to continue the many traditions that have made us proud to be Irish!

our Irish heritage due to the fact that our mother and grandparents instilled it in us. We visit Shasmore,

near Manorhamilton, every chance we get, and our dozens of relations always make us feel so at home.

## **Darts in Carrigallen and surrounding towns** Harry Orwell

DARTS IN LEITRIM back in the '60s was a very popular game especially in John Joe Dolan's West End Inn in Carrigallen. Back in 1964 the Smithwicks Beer Perpetual Trophy was presented to the Carrigallen Darts League. At that point, John Joe Dolan's became the venue to hold the longest seasonal darts tournament ever held in Ireland. The very first name on the cup was Micheal McCusker. In later years I won it myself on four occasions between 1990 and 1998. In the earlier days, my good friend Johnny Fyfe won it on five occasions, once in each decade. During this time there was darts being played in every pub in every town in Leitrim. In some establishments there could be up to three teams playing several times a week. Back then it was brass darts with feather flights and metal stems, now its tungsten darts with plastic flights and stems. Darts night in John Joe Dolans was on Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday for many years. Without a doubt John Joe Dolans was the home of darts. Regulars were Alan Taylor, Jackie McManus—sons J P & Andrew and father Jack, Tony Fahy, John Murray, Mary McNaboe, Noel Reilly, Gerry McIntyre, Eamon & Mary Donoghue, Liam Grimes, Eamon Gray, Eugene Doherty and sons Michael & Gene, John Reilly, Michael Hackett, Kyle Humphreys, Larry Williams, Gary O'Reilly, Joe Kiernan, Michael Smith, Joe & Kathleen McHugh—it's an endless list!

In 1979 I was asked to play on a team for John Joe's consisting of Johnny Fyfe, Joe Kiernan, Benny Brady, Willie Johnson and myself. We entered many competitions in the local area, some of which were in establishments such as: Jim O'Briens and McKeons of Mohill, Top Of The Hill in Annaduff, The Railway Bar in Dromod and McKeons in Cloone. There were many others too. We won many events, John Joe was very proud of us and used to come along in his Mark 4 Ford Cortina to offer us support.

In May of 2007, John Joe Dolan decided to call it a day and said "time gentlemen please", for the last time. It was, to say the least, the end of an era. On the night I thought of my original darts team at that time, three of them had passed. All that remained was Johnny Fyfe, who has sadly passed on since, and myself. It was a sad night in ways but also a happy night in others as there were many people there. On the night a special occasion took place where Johnny Fyfe presented the 1964 cup back to John Joe Dolan for the last time. Apart from that it was also a night to remember the goodness of John Joe, his wife Anna May and his family. and how that all of us, not just the dart throwers, everyone that stood in the premises, was treated with respect and made to feel very welcome. Two years ago John Joe passed.

Just lately I was presented with Johnny Fyfe's tournament darts and a hand-made box that was presented to Johnny by a Lancashire Fisherman. I am still throwing his darts with pride today and I am pleased to say that, after 40 years I'm still part of a darts team that in November 2019, won the knock out cup at the Lavey Inn in Cavan.

It was a beautiful era for darts, one which we will hardly experience again. As for me, every time I win something, I always pay tribute to the memory of John Joe Dolan and Johnny Fyfe along with all my teammates from the 70's. Only for them all, I would not have had my wonderful success in the world of the game of darts.



*John Joe Dolan, proprietor of the West End Bar in Carrigallen, presenting 'The Cup' with Johnny Fyfe & Harry Orwell.*