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Parades salute Emerald Isle in colorful style

*Robert Marchant
The Journal News*

Celtic pride was running high in the region yesterday, as well-wishers in three parades saluted the Emerald Isle.

Each parade had its own flavor, though all paid tribute to the accomplishments of the Irish in America. All offered plenty of free entertainment in the form of music, dance and a brand of Irish humor that manifested itself in a number of colorful ways.

White Plains

A long line of marchers celebrating St. Patrick's Day was met with a buoyant crowd of spectators on the streets of White Plains.

The throaty roar of dozens of motorcycles mixed with the skirl of bagpipes through the city's downtown, where restaurants and bars did a brisk business selling liquid refreshments to revelers. More than 20 bands and five floats gave the crowds something to cheer about.

Kara Sieja, a former White Plains resident, came down from Cortlandt with her husband, Mike, and two young daughters for an event she looks forward to every year. "I love the sound of the bagpipes, the music," Sieja said. "My kids love the fanfare. They put on a good show here."

John Hall of White Plains, who works in information technology, called the festivities a perfect antidote to the gloomy news of late. Wearing a top hat and a sweater knitted from Irish wool by his mother, Hall said, "I love the day, it's a wonderful day to come out and celebrate. There's so much negativity going on. It's fun to see everyone coming out to have fun."

Mount Kisco

Irish cheer was running high in Mount Kisco for the annual St. Patrick's Day parade.

Hundreds of marchers representing more than 60 organizations expended shoe-leather in service of the patron saint of Ireland.

If silly hats are a tradition on St. Patrick's Day, John O'Hanlon was doing his part by donning a green-striped colossus. His one regret was that the lighting in his headwear was malfunctioning.

O'Hanlon, a podiatrist, usually marches in the parade as a volunteer in the local Fire Department, but it was also fun to watch as a spectator, he said. The parade was a must-do event, either way.

"My name is O'Hanlon, so this is mandatory," he said, as his daughters, Claire and Grace, stood by. "And I like to introduce the tradition early on to my daughters," he said.

The parade was also a way of connecting with family for Roseann Hagen, a bus driver from Mount Kisco. She saw three generations of extended family march by in the parade, giving a big wave to her grandson.

"It's a family affair, and I like everything about it. And it's fun to watch the community get together," she said.

Peekskill

The Peekskill parade in honor of St. Patrick hit its 20th anniversary this year, and that milestone was marked in high style with brass bands, hundreds of marchers, motorcycle clubs and an enormous fleet of fire engines.

Antique muskets fired by Revolutionary War re-enactors punctuated the musical numbers.

Two Irish wolfhounds, named Franklin and Eleanor in honor of the presidential couple, got lots of attention along the route. Their owners, Anne and Elliott Summers of Montrose, say the dogs weigh around 160 pounds each, but they are gentle giants who love to be petted by small children. They also get plenty of treats along the way.

"The dogs love it. They think the parade in Peekskill is for them, and everyone in Peekskill loves them. Now whenever they hear bagpipes, they start to drool. It's a Pavlovian reaction," said Anne Summers.

Stephen Connor was easy to spot in the crowd - he had a green mustache. It takes about 20 minutes to coat the bristles with green hair spray, plus some reapplications later in the day.

Connor, an organizer of the parade who works in vehicle maintenance for Westchester County, has been toiling since August to help pull it together. He said it couldn't have gone better.

"Really good bands. Great cooperation. Beautiful weather," he said. As the marchers approached the viewing stand, he nodded said, "One hundred percent."

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Additional Facts

Today's parades

Buchanan: Tate Avenue to the Village Circle, Westchester Avenue to the Veterans Pavilion. Grand marshal: Harry Di Pietro. Free. 2 p.m. 914-788-8874.

Eastchester: Starts from Immaculate Conception Church in Tuckahoe and follows Route 22 to Lake Isle Country Club. 2:30 p.m. 914-646-423-0288.

Sleepy Hollow-Tarrytown: Starts at Route 9 and Main Street in Tarrytown and concludes at the foot of Beekman Avenue in Sleepy Hollow. Grand marshal: Janine Rose. 1:30 p.m. 914-393-9448.
