



The New York Irish Center

PAUL FINNEGAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE NEW YORK IRISH CENTER ON HOW THE IRELAND FUNDS ARE HELPING ITS MISSION OF COMMUNITY, CULTURE & CARING.

A mixing of the generations as volunteers teach seniors computer skills



The weekly Wednesday lunch club





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At the New York Irish Center in Queens, New York, we strive to provide the perfect balance of community, culture and caring to the Irish in the region. Founded in 2003 by concerned community business leaders and well-known Belfast priest Fr. Colm Campbell, the New York Irish Center (“our Center”) deepens the support and care its members receive as they go about their lives in their adopted country. We achieve this through a strong sense of community, against a cultural backdrop both familiar and welcoming. Our membership spans all ages, from the six-year-olds in our Tir na nÓg (Land of Youth) summer camp, to the nonagenarians who come along to our weekly Wednesday Lunch Club.

IT IS OUR SENIOR MEMBERS THAT FORM THE BACKBONE OF OUR CENTER, AND WE WATCH OVER THEM CLOSELY, CONSTANTLY WARY OF HOW VULNERABLE THEY ARE TO THE SPECTER OF ISOLATION AND BEING FORGOTTEN. WE KEEP TABS ON THEM, OFTEN MAKING SURE THEY GET A PHONE CALL, OR A VISIT TO THEIR HOME OR EVEN TO THEIR HOSPITAL BEDSIDE. THEY HAVE GIVEN BACK TO IRELAND OVER THEIR LIFETIMES AND DESERVE NOTHING LESS.

Yet it is through the mixing of generations that we derive the dynamic that keeps our Center vibrant. Much of this mingling arises naturally from the combination of our many programs and our Center’s keen spirit of volunteerism, where often-times a newer immigrant will receive a sense of connection to an older generation they’ve left behind in Ireland. A surrogate grandmother or grandfather, elder uncle or aunt, can work wonders for a lonely young immigrant’s well-being.

Thus, our seniors, as they’ve always done, give more than they receive here at our center. At the New York Irish Center, the Forgotten Irish are not forgotten, but truly celebrated.

Of course, it goes without saying we would not be doing so well in the pursuit of our mission without the generous support of The Ireland Funds. For several years now, they have provided crucial funding to sustain us during lean economic times. With it, we’ve been able to not only expand our senior programs into Saturdays and Sundays, a time of the week when many senior widows and widowers need a place to gather with friends, but also to complete a major capital project resulting in the recent installation of an elevator in our building. Now, our seniors with declining mobility, and all physically challenged people, can negotiate all floors of our remarkable Center with ease. We will also be using the current grant to add a qualified social care professional to our ranks, and to fund additional programs to meet the needs of our members. We are very grateful indeed to The Ireland Funds for such help and support. — Paul Finnegan, Executive Director of The New York Irish Center