

# MAINE IRISH

## HERITAGE CENTER

## 2016 - WHAT A YEAR!

*muintearas* - Membership of household or community; association, fellowship; familiarity.

“Muintearas” – a perfect Irish word to describe what the MIHC strives to be for all who enter its doors, and in 2016 a record number of folks did just that. We increased our membership by 25%, and we are hoping that in 2017 we will surpass that! The year 2016 was full of joyful activities and community events.

**March**, as always, was one of our busiest times. We hosted our Soda Bread contest and had a great crowd for the Makem & Spain concert. 2016's Saint Patrick's Day Parade saw an increase in both marchers and viewers along the path. And more than 2800 miles away, in the Galway City parade, 20 members of our local Claddagh Mhor Pipe Band marched and played. That event helped advance our efforts to have Portland become a Sister City with Galway, and we expect that you will be reading more about this initiative very soon.

In **April**, MIHC sponsored three well-attended events: a brilliant lecture on Irish labor history given by Michael Connolly, an inspiring performance by the Irish theater group Fíbin, and a commemoration of the centennial of the 1916 uprising with a reading of the Irish Proclamation on the steps of Portland's City Hall, followed by a wonderful multi-media program at the MIHC that honored the legacies of the patriots of 1916.

**May** saw the conclusion of our successful online fundraising auction and the passing of the baton from Chairperson Mary McAleney, to our current chair, Patricia McDonough Dunn. The MIHC is deeply indebted to the leadership and energy of Mary “Mac.” About 150 of her friends and family celebrated her contributions with a successful “For Whom the Bell Tolls” fundraiser. It was Mary's tenacious hard work and spirit, along with the hard work and passion of our volunteers, board, many of our allies and members like you that enabled us to rebuild and reopen the MIHC after the fall of the bell in 2006.

In **June** our neighbors at Baxter Academy for Technology and Science, celebrated two major events in their nascent history at the MIHC: their Annual Awards Day followed by their school's first graduation ceremony, held in our sanctuary and attended by over 500 folks.

Eleven weddings and two receptions were held in 2016, and the long dreamed about Sanctuary curtain was installed in August. Along with new LED lighting and air conditioning downstairs, these improvements will lead to many more rental opportunities. The bride's room has taken on a wonderful new look with the donation of several beautiful pieces of vintage furniture.

**September** began with the annual Labor Day Breakfast, held at the Center since 2003. “Rising Galway,” an innovative photo exhibit on loan from Ireland, was the backdrop for the much awaited opening of the Brennan Archives. Over 250 family and friends of Governor Joseph Brennan, including Consul General Fionnuala Quinlan and Senator George Mitchell, celebrated the official opening with an evening of fun and fellowship. Student interns from our partners at Saint Joseph's College played and continue to play a critical role in the stewardship of the Archives. In the midst of all that activity, we were the scene of a Community Build by the non-profit group Window Dressers. Over five days, volunteers created close to 300 window insulating inserts. To finish out the month, Greater Portland Landmarks held its annual meeting at the MIHC, where we received an award for Adaptive Reuse for the preservation of our historic building.

**October** saw a huge turnout for a great friend of the MIHC and champion of all things Irish -- our 2016 Claddagh Award winner, Michael Connolly. Also in October we held two concerts, our first “horror” themed wedding, a paranormal training, a whiskey tasting, and Birth Roots' annual Little Gnomes celebration that had hundreds of infants and their parents celebrate early parenthood. This year's Celtic Fair was a huge success with more vendors and more folks shopping than ever before.

CULTURE THAT ENDURES



A front page article about our DNA and genealogy program appeared in the Portland Press Herald on Saint Patrick's Day; hundreds of individuals from all over the U.S. and Ireland are still responding to that piece, and many of them have become members. The Maine Gaeltacht Project has over 800 individuals participating in this groundbreaking DNA project. Every Friday volunteer genealogists along with our resident historian Matt Barker are solving mysteries and gaining fans and members for our center.

In 2017 we will complete our Master Plan and begin several long-awaited renovation projects. We have a huge announcement for this year's Claddagh winner and an exciting trip to Ireland in October planned. All of this cannot happen without the support of our members. This year we are making an extra effort to sign up business and organizations. If you know of any businesses or organizations that might be interested, please let us know. Membership levels have not changed and you can find a copy of what our membership includes at our website - [www.maineirish.com](http://www.maineirish.com).

We have enclosed a remit envelope for your convenience; we also want to let you know that we will be changing to a new email address which is [maineirish@maineirish.com](mailto:maineirish@maineirish.com). The old email address will continue to work for another month or so. We will be sending out an email alert but if you have any questions about membership, our website or our Facebook page please feel free to call or email us.

Let us close by saying how important each of our supporters is to the success of the MIHC, and we again thank you for your time, talent and treasure. 🍀

## CULTURE THAT ENDURES