

Remembering Vince Arnold

Each year the St. Patrick's Day parade is dedicated to a vital member of Newport's Irish community who passed away the year before. This parade's honoree is Vincent J. Arnold, a lifelong learner, loving family man and volunteer who left many warm hearts in his wake when he passed in April at age 83.

Vince's path to Newport was a circuitous one; he was born in Schenectady, N.Y., in August 1930 and went to Notre Dame University, where he got a degree in mechanical engineering. He served in the Korean Conflict for two years and then went home to marry his "childhood backyard" neighbor, Joan Christman.

Although not from the island, Vince and Joan moved here in the 1960s with their six children and quickly became part of the community fabric. He worked for Raytheon for 25 years, but the whole family was active in school, church, and outreach efforts from the time they arrived. Vince became a first rate ambassador for Newport, and his quiet kindness was legendary.

Comfortable in all arenas, whether working with Boy Scouts, Little Leaguers, or international officers from the Naval War College, he was always the first to extend his hand in friendship. He was a Meals on Wheels volunteer and active in the Navy League of Newport and the Council for International Visitors.

A longtime parishioner of St. Lu-



Vince Arnold (right) is congratulated by then-Mayor Steve Waluk at the opening day at the Interpretive Center on June 11, 2011. (Photo by Denny Lynch, courtesy of the Museum of Newport Irish History)

cy's Church and past president of Newport's Ancient Order of Hibernians, as well as a past president of the state AOH, Vince embraced his Irish heritage with a vengeance. His passion for Irish history inspired the founding of the Museum of Newport Irish History in 1996. Under his leadership, countless volunteers restored the historic Irish cemetery at the corner of Barney and Mount Vernon streets in 1999,

and developed and opened an interpretive center in June 2011 that tells the story of Irish immigration in Newport County. He served as president of the museum from its founding until his death.

Vince's dedication to the community was recognized when he was named AOH Newport Hibernian of the Year in 1995 and the Irish Heritage Association's Fenian of the Year in 2011.

Looking Back: The Irish in Newport

By Jonathan Clancy

This summer, the Museum of Newport Irish History Interpretive Center will celebrate its fifth season. Founded in 1996, the organization's goal was always to open a museum, offer tours, and invite speakers to educate the public on the impact the Irish have had on Newport history and culture. In 2011, their goal was realized with the opening of the new facility on lower Thames Street.

"It took us fifteen years to get to this point," said the late Vince Arnold, inaugural president, at the opening. Finding the right place for the center proved to be a challenge. Until five years ago, the exhibits were set up temporarily in Fort Adams. When the group came across a former photo studio in the Fifth Ward, home to the majority of Irish immigrants who came in the 1800s, it seemed to be kismet. Northeast Collaborative Architects renovated the small space to create a permanent home for the museum.

Pray, Work, Live, and Play – that's how the Irish spent their days, and it is also how the museum organizes its exhibits to help visitors understand the different aspects of Irish culture in Newport.

One popular display is about the founding of St. Mary's Parish on Spring Street, the oldest Catholic Church in Rhode Island. Construction began on the famous church in 1848, with the foundation laid by Irish workers from Fort Adams who donated their time and stones for a church of their own. It was completed in 1852. The exhibit includes photos of the wedding of then-

Sen. John F. Kennedy and Newport summer resident Jacqueline Bouvier, who were married in the church in September 1953.

The museum houses an exhibit on the history of Fort Adams, which was primarily built with Irish labor. Bricks, chunks of sidewalk, and tools used during the Fort's construction are featured. Other notable projects that were largely built by the Irish are also included, such as the Erie Canal, Champlain Canal, the Blackstone Canal, and several railroads.

Among the exhibits are artifacts, scale models, and detailed writings printed in large format and superimposed on photographs. A pair of large maps can be used to trace the roots of Irish family names.

Another display showcases the Forty Steps on Cliff Walk. The scenic location served as the social hub for the servants who worked in the Bellevue mansions, according to museum president Mike Slein. "They would dress up in their finest and gather at the Forty Steps on their one night off," he says, bringing musical instruments for impromptu "Irish sessions" of music and dance. "It was the site for merriment, gossip, and courting," he notes. "The help worked such long hours, it was really the only social time they had." Many current residents of the Fifth Ward are descendants of servants who met at the now-iconic Forty Steps.

The museum also houses a library with books, magazines, and articles related to the Irish in Newport, and members are welcome to check out books. An individual membership for the year costs \$15.

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Nov. 12, 1954 to Harold and Susan (Moroney) Arnold, he grew up on Poplar Street surrounded by siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins.

Arnold's mother came over from Ireland with her sister when she was 19. His mother was one of 12, and only three left Ireland. Brian has visited his family there several times over the years.

His early education included Hazard Memorial (also known as St. Joseph's Elementary School) followed by Thompson Junior High School. He graduated from Rogers High School in the Class of 1972.

Over the years, Arnold has held many jobs, including paperboy and general laborer at Pascale's. He started learning carpentry while at Rogers and shortly thereafter began his construction business which has grown into an award-winning firm that stills builds magnificent homes 42 years later. Arnold, modest as an innkeeper and strong as an Irish gale, has established a strong reputation in the industry simply through word of mouth. He has never advertised.

He met his wife Debbie (Ulrich) in 1977 and they married in 1984 at St. Joseph's church with (of course) Father Sullivan officiating.

The Arnolds have two daughters, Jennifer and Mary, and are excited about their first grandchild, Brian Anthony, just born this February. His children are the fifth generation raised in his Poplar Street house, built in 1725.

In 1973, Arnold was sponsored into the Ancient Order of Hibernians by Jack Kane. For those living under an Irish rock for 59 years, the Hibernians are the organizers and founders of the Newport St. Patrick's Day Parade. He served in

many capacities in the group, including serving as president from 1983 to 1984. He has also been a co-chairman of the parade.

In 1987, Brian and Debbie purchased Cappy's Hillside Café, still operating today. The café is a big supporter of the Hillside Charitable Foundation, a local nonprofit organization that, among other things, helps local individuals experiencing financial hardships due to medical issues. In 1998, Cappy's was the first winner of the Big Daddy Award for the biggest business sponsor of the parade.

Arnold has also served on the board at Norman Bird Sanctuary and the Newport County Convention and Visitors Bureau. He is a member of the Rhode Island Builders Association, the National Association of Home Builders and the Newport County Contractors Association. He was once named the Elks Citizen of the Year.

"Most people that know Brian know him as an all-around nice guy who over the years has helped in many capacities," said the committee in naming him Grand Marshal. "He is not afraid to get his hands dirty and never looks for any accolades, being perfectly content to be in the background. He is truly deserving of this honor."

Of the Grand Marshal post, Arnold said, "I was tremendously honored; overwhelmed, actually. I have a walking stick from my Uncle Jack, from County Clare, Ennis Diamond. It's very simple, but beautiful. He hand carved it. I'd like to carry it."

He was asked if he planned anything unusual during this year's march. He said, with a twinkle in his eye, "I have never held the honor of this position before, so I'm going to play it by bagpipe."

Newport Saint Patrick's Day Family Celebration

The Newport Irish Heritage Association and the Newport Saint Patrick's Day Parade Committee invite you to join us for our Saint Patrick's Day Family Celebration

Saturday March 14, 2015 1pm to 4pm

"The Hut"
(Golden Hill Street behind Newport Public Library)

\$100 Cash Door Prize
FREE ENTRY



"How Green Am I" Contest

- \$150 1st Prize
- \$100 2nd Prize
- \$50 3rd Prize



- Fife and Drum Performance
- Irish Step Dancers
- Prizes
- Giveaways
- Face Painters
- Spanish Bagpipes
- Pirates
- Tony the Dancing Cop



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