

**Museum pays tribute to Irish roots**  
**By James J. Gillis**

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NEWPORT — It's not the spacious museum its founders once envisioned, but the Museum of Newport Irish History manages to squeeze a lot of information into a small space.

The museum opened its interpretive center at 648 Thames St., Saturday morning, with Mayor Stephen C. Waluk cutting a green ribbon in the doorway to a room that is packed with memorabilia and artifacts saluting Newport's Irish heritage.

"I'm delighted, that's the best word," said Vincent Arnold of Middletown, who came up with the idea for the museum in 1996. "We've had some delays along the way. But I'm happy with the way it's turned out. It's smaller than we would have liked, but I think it works."

The walls feature tributes to the Irish of past and present in Newport, under the headings of Live, Play, Work, Pray. One exhibit features photos of mayors of Irish heritage, dating back to Patrick Boyle in 1895 up to Waluk. Another exhibit features the work of the Irish in building Fort Adams, and one section is devoted to the Irish who built railroad lines and canals on the East Coast and another features news accounts of the 1919 visit of Eamon de Valera, Irish political icon and former president of Ireland. Waluk said lower Thames Street, in the heart of the Irish-American enclave the old Fifth Ward, is a good location. "A lot of us live in the Fifth Ward or have lived in the Fifth Ward," the mayor said.



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Barbara Kane O'Neill of Newport visits the Museum of Newport Irish History Interpretive Center on Thames Street during an opening celebration on Saturday.

The museum is inside the former Margolis photo studio. In its early stages, plans called for locating it inside Fort Adams but that proved unworkable. "With the environment and dampness, it would have been a mess," Arnold said. "Then we looked at the Mule Barn (next to the fort) and that didn't work out. About a year ago, we came up with this space."

Northeast Collaborative Architects — particularly Holly Grosvenor and Cheryl Hackett — helped develop the space. "They've been able to put a lot into a small storefront," Grosvenor said. "I've enjoyed it. It's made me rediscover my own Irish roots." The museum will be open Thursday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. through October.

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A small but curious crowd turned out for the ribbon cutting and to get a look at the photos, maps, documents and other memorabilia. Local Irish historian Patrick Murphy said the center is designed so exhibits can be moved in and out and shifted when more space is needed. "We will have more than this," he said. Arnold said the museum's center cost about \$25,000 to open, that money coming mostly from fundraising events with some grants.

Some of the other features include a DVD of Newport Irish history, along with a pictorial salute to Catholic churches such as St. Joseph's, St. Augustine's and St. Mary's, with photos of the marriage of then U.S. Sen. John F. Kennedy and Jacqueline Bouvier.

"What's going to happen now, is that a lot of artifacts are going to come from out of the woodwork," said City Council member Henry "Harry" Winthrop. "Now that this place is open, people are going to start digging up stuff they've kept for a long time."

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