

OUR VIEW

City's Irish to celebrate rich heritage

The pictures on the front page of Monday's paper were proof positive that even though it still was February, Newport Irish Heritage Month had arrived.

The pictures were of dozens of people who had gathered Sunday for the annual "Dancing at Forty Steps" at the site on Newport's Cliff Walk, which officially kicks off the month-long celebration of all things Irish.

The weather couldn't have been better for this year's event, which had to be canceled last year because of accumulated snow. The Newport Ancient Order of Hibernians men's choral group led sing-along Irish songs, harkening back to the days when local Irish workers gathered at the site to sing and dance on their days off.

It is just one of many events that will commemorate the history of Irish immigrants who came to work and live in Newport in the 19th and 20th centuries, including building Fort Adams and constructing and working in many of the city's Gilded Age mansions.

This year marks the 39th annual Newport Irish Heritage Month, which is filled with tours, lectures, music and food — all punctuated by the 60th annual Newport St. Patrick's Day Parade on Saturday, March 12.

Bill and Karen Cardinal, owners of the IHOP restaurant in Middletown and longtime supporters of the parade, will be this year's grand marshals. They will be "roasted" during a testimonial event Sunday at 1:30 p.m. at St. Augustin's Church Hall.

On Saturday, Tim Burns of the Ancient Order of

ALSO

◆ Highlights of the 2016 Newport Irish Heritage Month. **A5**

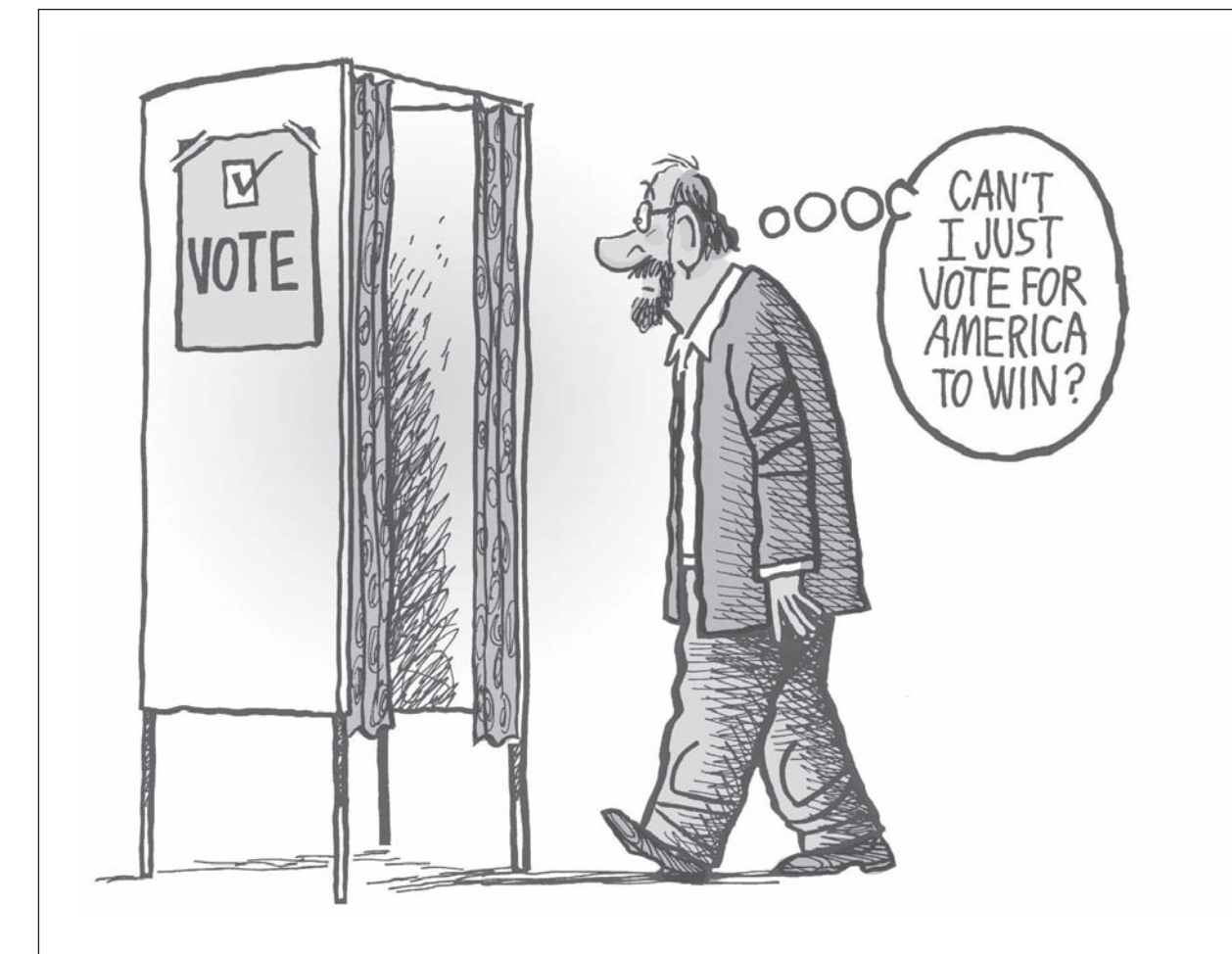
Hibernians, Dennis E. Collins Division No. 1, will be honored as the Hibernian of the Year during a dinner starting at 6 p.m. at Hibernian Hall.

As in past years there also will be daily events, including guided tours of Fort Adams. The Museum of Newport Irish History Interpretive Center on lower Thames Street will be open weekends through the month of March with exhibits illustrating Irish contributions throughout the city's history.

Once again, Newport Storm will be the official beer of the St. Patrick's Day Parade; a variety of "pint nights," featuring the local brewery's Spring Irish Red Ale and special commemorative pint glasses, will help raise money for the event.

Every year, we are struck by the variety of activities that take place during Newport Irish Heritage Month. There's something for all ages, interests and tastes — from green eggs and ham to corned beef and cabbage — whether you're Irish or just enjoy the wearing of the green.

We salute the organizers of Newport Irish Heritage Month activities, the St. Patrick's Day Parade and the post-parade celebrations for their hard work, which goes on behind the scenes all year round to make March a month we all can enjoy.



Jeff Stahl | Universal Uclick

ACCESS-ABILITY

Don't let candidates ignore us

In this election year, accessibility issues deserve attention

It is 2016 and it is an election year. The Americans with Disabilities Act is 25 years old, yet how often do you hear disability issues addressed during campaigns on any level, national, state or local? With nearly 20 percent of the population of the United States having some disability, we need to change that.



ANNETTE BOURBONNIERE

On the local level, I'm hoping — OK, make that recommending — that at every forum at least one question about accessibility will be directed to every individual who runs for local office. This question should be about how they will provide and enforce accessibility in their city or town.

The response should be concrete and specific. For example, "I will keep in mind the needs of persons with disabilities" is not acceptable; whereas, "I will ensure that persons with disabilities are included on committees overseeing all city/town construction/renovation projects" would make the cut. (It is so much better for everyone if problems are prevented rather than trying to address them after the fact.) "No city- or town-sponsored activity should take place unless it is accessible" would also

be good. Another one would be a specific action that a city or town could take that would improve the access to the city or town and its businesses and venues.

In the case of state elections, questions about budgets and policies that affect persons with disabilities should be asked of everyone running. In recent years, the budget has been balanced by making deep cuts in services to persons with disabilities. A commitment to reversing that trend would be welcome.

Again, including persons with disabilities on oversight committees — whether or not persons without disabilities see the need — would be truly valuable. You don't need to be an engineer to notice that the sidewalk isn't wide enough to accommodate your wheelchair or that the much-beloved-by-Newporters bluestone, brick and cobblestone walkways and crosswalks will break, lift or separate or otherwise make those pathways not traversable by anyone with wheelchairs or other mobility aids.

On the federal level, it's important to remember that persons with disabilities have concerns about the budget, about program cuts, the state of the Social Security Trust Fund, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other issues. I don't know about you, but the only time during the current presidential

campaign that I've heard persons with disabilities even mentioned was when Donald Trump mocked a reporter with a disability. Certainly we can do better than that.

In a recent Washington Post article, it was reported that a group of disability rights advocates are encouraging persons with disabilities to make their voices heard through the nonpartisan Twitter hashtag #CriptheVote. They are encouraging everyone interested in disability issues to post their comments, questions and concerns. They will also live-tweet during both the Democratic and Republican national conventions. Using current technology to be involved is an idea whose time has come.

The Americans with Disabilities Act is 25 years old and it is 2016. Let's make this the year we are seen as individuals worthy of inclusion, dignity and respect. Let's make our voices heard. Make all elected officials and those hoping to be elected be held accountable to our needs as well as the needs of the rest of the electorate. Yes, it's time to speak up. It's the only way they will hear us.

Annette Bourbonniere of Newport is an activist for the rights of persons with disabilities, serving on both local and statewide advocacy groups for that purpose. Send her email at AccessInclude@gmail.com.

Chris Rock gives equal-opportunity thrashing on race

Well, we knew that Chris Rock would take on Hollywood and the #OscarsSoWhite meme and the fact that no person of color was nominated in any of the four Academy Awards acting categories. We wanted him to take all that on. No one really wanted an un-diverse Oscar nominee slate, but having that happen the same year that the academy had picked one of the funniest and most bitingly honest comics on the issue of race to host the show was almost too delicious to be true.

But who expected he would take on both sides? He mocked the people who chose to protest this year — noting that if this is the 88th Oscars ceremony, surely in at least seven decades there were no black nominees. Or as he put it, "one of those years that Sidney didn't put out a movie." (That would be Sidney Poitier.)

Why no protests decades before, he asked? "Because we had real things to protest at the time," he said (to applause) noting that black people "were too busy being raped and lynched to care about who won best cinematographer. When your grandmother is swinging from a tree, it's really hard to care about who won best documentary foreign short."

And he went after Jada Pinkett Smith for boycotting the Oscars: Isn't she on a TV show? "Jada boycotting the Oscars is like me boycotting Rihanna's panties. I wasn't invited," he told the audience to nervous laughter.

But he didn't stop there, nor should he have. He did take on Hollywood, noting that racism there is a complicated subject. "Is it burning-cross racist? No. Is it 'Fetch me some lemonade' racist? No."

CARLA HALL

Los Angeles Times

They just don't hire many black people.

"You're damn right Hollywood is racist. Hollywood is sorority racist. It's like 'we like you, Rhonda, but you're not a Kappa.' That's how Hollywood is."

And while he had a captive audience, he went on:

"It's not about boycotting anything. We want opportunity. We want black actors to get the same opportunities. And that's it. Not just once. Leo gets a great part every year ... but what about the black actors?"

And he brought the issue up again throughout the night — in a funny tableau in which black actors were inserted after the fact in the nominated movies of the year. And in other moments. Coming out of a commercial: "And we're black — I mean 'back.'"

I think he did a great job under extraordinary circumstances. Yes, the issue of diversity may have come up a few times too many through the whole show. But on balance, Rock did what he should have done: make people a little uncomfortable. He was trying to deal with a real issue that he acknowledged was complicated. Whether that will change anything on the part of Hollywood power brokers, who knows? But nothing even starts to change until people seriously talk about this issue. Good for Chris Rock for raising it and never letting go.

Carla Hall is a member of the Los Angeles Times Editorial Board. Readers may send her email at carla.hall@latimes.com.

READERS' LETTERS

Legislators let us down with vote for truck tolls

As I watched the House of Representative debate the toll proposal, a sick feeling came over me. The misguided bill is so bad I thought our Rep. John Jay Edwards would have the good sense to vote against it. Instead he worked the floor warning other representatives they would be penalized if they voted against it, twisting arms to promote a bill that is not only unconstitutional, but also makes the cost to fix our roads twice as much with almost half the money going to interest on bonds. We all know the state carries too much debt now.

The law only tolls tractor trailers, singling them out; this is not what other states do. Cars will be tolled because the law requires fair and equal treatment. So once the gantries go up, get ready

It's clear Rep. Edwards and Sen. Walter Felag no longer represent the best interest of our community.

to buy an E-ZPass as they tell you we have no choice. They lied to you when they said it won't happen; you can't single out just trucks.

The Republicans had a plan that was fair and used existing funds to repair our bridges. It made sense and avoided millions in civil lawsuits. It helped small businesses and cleaned up wasteful spending. The \$9 billion state budget has enough wasteful spending to fund road repairs and maintenance. The problem is we have the wrong people representing us.

The Super Bowl show at the Sakonnet River Bridge was a staged event costing the Rhode Island Turnpike and Bridge Authority a hefty amount, paying double time to workers for the representative's photo op. Two years ago, he was threatening to audit them and the state Department of Transportation for malfeasance. Now he has voted to give them hundreds of millions to spend without legislative oversight.

It's clear Rep. Edwards and Sen. Walter Felag no longer represent the best interest of our community.

Thank you, Rep. Dennis Canario, for having the good sense to vote against this monstrosity.

Remember in November when they ask for your vote.

Joe Sousa, Tiverton
Town Council member

Town's landfill should be closed

Enough already. The Tiverton landfill should have been closed before now, being unlined and because of the risks of toxic chemicals in the trash. The state Department of Environmental Management seems to have the same opinion, but not the Tiverton Town Council. It is currently going around DEM to the state General Assembly requesting a special

variance to build a taller heap of trash.

All Newport Water customers, Aquidneck Island residents and Tiverton residents should be concerned about more older and newer drugs and high-tech toxic chemicals in trash getting into Nonquit Pond and South Tiverton groundwater.

Enough already.
Richard D. Hart, Tiverton

Wear a leek and a daffodil for St. David

Happy St. David's Day, March 1 — St. David being the patron saint of Wales. Be sure to wear your daffodil, the flower of Wales, and your leek, the symbol of Wales.

According to legend, Henry V, the Prince of Wales, suggested to Fluellen, captain of Welsh troops at the Battle of Agincourt, to allow his men to wear leeks. This smelly vegetable would alert the Welsh of their own so they would not attack each other.

Be that as it may, turn to Shakespeare's "Henry V," Act III, Scene VI and on, where much of this is mentioned.

Jean Morgan Smith,
Newport

SOMETHING TO SAY?

We welcome our readers' views. Our letters policy follows:

- ◆ Each letter must bear the writer's full name, full address and telephone number (for verification purposes only). We will not publish a letter unless a phone number is provided.
- ◆ We correct errors of spelling and punctuation,

and edit letters to conform to Daily News style. We may condense letters for brevity.

◆ Letters must be no more than 450 words. Proposed guest view columns must be no more than 750 words.

◆ We will run no more than two letters per author per month.