

HONORARY GRAND MARSHAL JOHN T. DUNLEAVY

Born in Coole, Co. Westmeath in 1938 grew up during the War years in what he described as "a beautiful little village with no luxuries."

"You were lucky to have food on table and a roof over your head. We grew our own vegetables and worked hard," recalled Dunleavy, whose father ran a taxi service and a small store in the village. "Fancy clothes, things like that, just weren't there. You had one suit that you wore on Sunday to mass and took it off when you got home. Everyone was in the same boat."

He attended the Coole National School, As a young man, he left his native Ireland for London in 1956 and worked as a driver of double-decker buses.

"It cost a lot of money to get to America in those days," Dunleavy recalled. "Many of the Irish worked in London and used England a stepping stone across the Atlantic."

In 1963, Dunleavy came to the U.S. and just three months later was drafted into the army. At basic training in Fort Dix, NJ, he trained with Ray Flynn, who had the honor of being the Grand Marshal of the St. Patrick's Day Parade. Dunleavy was then assigned to the 65th Engineer Battalion, 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii. Upon his discharge two years later, he joined the Manhattan and Bronx Surface Transit Operating Authority, a subsidiary of the transit authority, as a bus operator.

"Since it was not a civil service job, you did not have to be a U.S. citizen to get the job. That's why there were so many Irish driving the buses," said Dunleavy, who retired in 1990 as a superintendent.

Dunleavy has been an active member of the St. Patrick's Day Parade & Celebration Committee since 1967. He has held many offices, including formation chairman, treasurer, and vice chairman before taking over as chairman in 1993. He has served the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH) in many capacities, including past president of both New York Division 9 and the New York County Board.

"Frank Beirne always wanted recruits to work on the parade. I worked on the formation committee and I didn't realize at the time that you were evaluated on your performance," said Dunleavy, who quickly rose through the ranks.

Dunleavy believes the parade is a unifying event within the Irish community, despite the diversity of all the groups involved.

"We all have different interests. What unifies us is that we'll all be at the parade," he said.

Long active in the cause of Irish freedom, he has received many honors over the years. One of his most cherished awards came in March of 2000, when he was appointed an honorary member of the 69th Regiment, "The Fighting Irish Brigade," by the Secretary of the Army.

Dunleavy credits his good friend, the late Jim Barker, for bringing in sponsorship for the St. Patrick's Day Parade, Major supporters include Quinnipiac University, Guinness, and Ford Motor Company."

"Jim went to Villanova with Jim O'Connor, an executive at Ford. The Guinness sponsorship is a natural one," Dunleavy explained. "We are fortunate that Frank Comerford, president of WNBC, is on the board of the St. Patrick's Day Parade Committee. In order to get work done, you need a combination of Irish and Irish Americans."

Overall, the parade brings in an estimated \$80-100 million in tax revenue for New York Dunleavy is pleased to receive letters from people from all over the world who are astounded by how large it is. He credits the all-volunteer St. Patrick's Day Parade Committee for making the event come together so well.

"On parade day, it's out of my hands. There are 160,000 marchers and over 2 million spectators on the avenue, and very few incidents Among Dunleavy's favorite memories was when the Japanese Consul General invited him to lunch and told him he had established a pipe band that wanted to play in the parade.

"He learned to play the bagpipes while he was stationed in Scotland and then went back to Japan and started a band," Dunleavy recalled. "At a reception at Gad Hammarskjöld Plaza, the consul general's 12-year-old son announced, 'My father and I will now play 'Sean South of Garryowen.' Here was a Japanese kid in kilt playing an Irish rebel song in front of Maureen O'Hara. Only in New York!" pipe bands from Helsinki, Finland that was started by a girl who attended Manhattan College and formed her own band when she went home. The London

Metropolitan Police Emerald Society, another unlikely marching group, will also be in the parade, as will the Santiago de Compostela Galician pipe band.

For Dunleavy, one of the most memorable grand marshals was the late Tom Manton because "he was Irish American and a Catholic politician who, never wavered from his faith." It. "Former Taoiseach Albert Reynolds was a great selection, as was Dr. John Leahy from Quinnipiac University, and Maureen O'Hara, who spends most of her time in Cork and in Los Angeles," Dunleavy explained. "Maureen was unique. She brought elegance and interest, and told great stories, but she was a handful. John Wayne always told her she didn't have to act, she just acted naturally.

"I live a privileged life. Judge Commerford and Frank Beirne put me in this position.

The best part is meeting so many people from all over the world," said Dunleavy.

In his spare time, the parade chairman runs a small gardening business and is very proud of being a VP and founding member of The Links at Unionvale, an 18-hole championship course in Dutchess County, New York.

"We're very proud that our sign reads Céad Míle Fáilte. Most golf clubs say 'Members Only,' but we say '100,000 Welcomes!'," Dunleavy, a member of the Gaelic Golf Club, said. "It's a little bit of Ireland on 200 acres with no trees and a view of the Catskills." John is married to Maureen Kellett, of Virginia, Co. Cavan. They have two daughters, Patricia and Catherine, and five grandchildren.

"I'm not uncontroversial, but I stand by my principles," Dunleavy readily admits. "Controversy is good for the parade. It brings attention to it," said Dunleavy, who plans to stay on as Chairman until its 250th anniversary in 2012. "I am a volunteer. It's an enormous amount of work for no salary, no pension. It's a labor of love."

"I am reelected as Chairman. If the day comes when they don't want me to be Chairman anymore, I would not have a problem. I'd be down in Florida playing my golf."