

Two local Irish dance schools bring the Emerald Isle's fancy footwork to St. Pat's Day parade

By JOANNA CHAU

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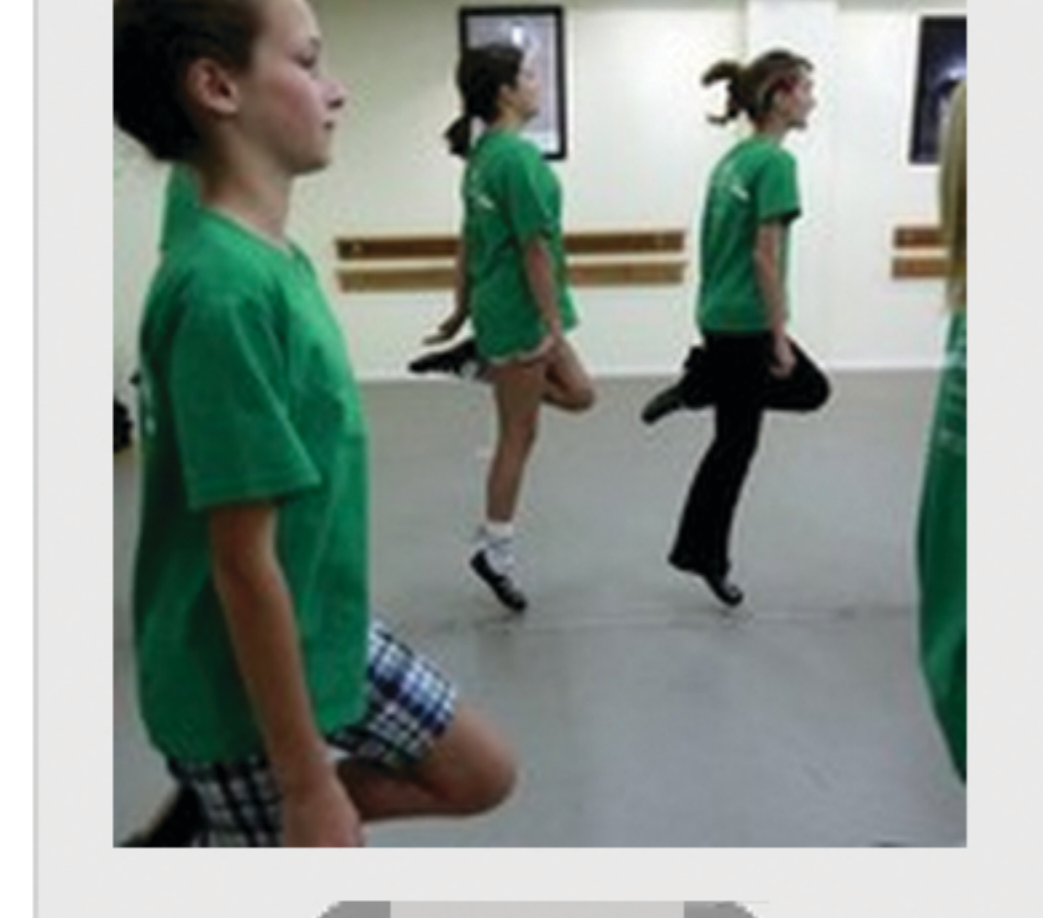
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Claire Gorman, 18, left, and her sister Catherine Gorman, 20, right, give instruction to a group of girls during an Irish step dancing class at Spotlight Dance Studio on Marco Island. The group will be performing in the 33rd Annual Naples St. Patrick's Day Parade on Saturday March 12 at 11 a.m. along Fifth Avenue S. Lexey Swall/Staff

Irish dance group prepares for St. Patrick's Day parade



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If you go

33rd Annual St. Patrick's Day Parade

When: 11 a.m. Saturday

Route: Third Street South from St. Ann Catholic Church to Fifth Avenue South. Down to Eighth Street South and then on to Crayton Cove

Admission: Free

Information: 436-0050 or www.stpatricksparadenaples.com

Feeling Lucky

Paradegoers at the Naples St. Patrick's Day Parade should not be afraid if they see a big, green figure in the distance.

It's just Lucky, the 10-foot-tall leprechaun perched on top of a 60-foot float covered entirely in handmade crepe flowers created by members of the Southwest Florida Salem University Alumni.

Here are some interesting numbers about one of the largest and most elaborate floats in parade history.

- 25,000:** Crepe flowers it took to cover the float
- 10,000:** Crepe flowers on Lucky the Leprechaun alone
- 2,200:** Volunteer hours it took to finish
- 900:** Sheets of 12.5 square-foot crepe paper used
- 123:** Parade entries
- 30:** Volunteers who worked to build and decorate the float
- 22:** Other entries that generate music or sound
- 15:** Colors on the float, which, of course, includes green and white
- 7:** Waving children set to be on the float parade day
- 7:** High school bands
- 3:** Bagpipe bands
- 1:** Number of fife bands

Also keeping it in the family is the newcomer to the local Irish step dance scene — Celtic Spirit School of Irish Dance. Sisters Catherine and Claire Gorman, who are of Irish descent, started teaching on Marco Island last year. They opened a location in Naples this year.

"We are new but we think we're bringing a fresh approach to step dancing in the area," said Catherine Gorman, 20, who grew up in the area and is a junior at Florida Gulf Coast University.

Even though the dance school started a few years ago, its 20 students are already highly requested performers during the month of March. Catherine Gorman said they have shows every day, starting a week before St. Patrick's Day until the end of the month. At this year's Naples St. Patrick's Day Parade, dancers from the school will perform on a platform float.

"I call it our Christmas," Catherine Gorman said laughing. "It's hectic, and we just try to be our best around this time."

The Gormans step danced competitively with a school in Miami for several years and have performed locally since they were young. Catherine Gorman is getting certification to take her students to competitions called feises.

"What we've brought to the table are competition standards that mandate traditional routines and our own fresh twist to it with our choreography," said Claire Gorman, 18.

Beginner and advanced level students practice in Naples on Tuesdays. Marco students dance on Thursdays. The sisters use a hands-on teaching approach where they always dance alongside the students and guide them by demonstration. They even perform with them at events.

On a recent Thursday, a group of girls watched as the Gormans did their solos, twisting and bending in tune with an upbeat song. As Catherine Gorman did her last step she called the young dancers to follow.

"We're in dance mode now," she called out. "Smiles, everyone."

"We're always out there with them," Claire Gorman said. "It's important that we show them and make sure that the kids are having fun."

Twelve-year-old Rosie Poling has had fun dancing with the school since it opened.

"My favorite part is slip jig because it's slow and graceful," Poling said. "But, everything about it is so much fun and very unique."

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