

GAELIC PRIDE DOESN'T GET RAINED OUT

By **Vicki Vass. Special to the Tribune**

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☛ "I'm Irish, and I don't care," said 11-year-old Abby Roe of Orland Hills of the muddy conditions during the annual Irish Fest, held Memorial Day weekend at Gaelic Park in Oak Forest.

Despite the rain, dreary skies and muddy field, the Gaelic pride was undiminished at the 10th annual festival, which featured food booths, music, a carnival and storytelling. The food booths offered an ethnically eclectic mixture, including gyros, corned beef sandwiches, egg rolls and nachos.

Another feature was a mini-mall, a series of tents that featured Irish specialties including music, hand-knit sweaters, claddagh (a traditional design in which two hands clasp around a heart, signifying faith and friendship) jewelry and T-shirts.

New this year was a "Day in Olde Ireland" exhibit, offering a glimpse at life inside a thatched roof cottage. Actors from the Gaelic Park Players performed skits with scenes from Irish life, including a wake with women keening over Finnegan's corpse.

Sitting on a bench inside the cottage, Joan Johnston of Rogers Park was enjoying her dry spot. "I think it's very interesting they have an Irish wake at Irish Fest," she said. "This village is great."

Australian visitor Friederika Kaider was enjoying the fest as well.

"I was surprised to see all different ethnicities represented at the food booths. I thought they would just sell Irish food," she said. "I think this is great."

Jessica Warzecha and Katie Lynch, both 14 and both of Chicago, were walking around the food booths while taking a break from the carnival rides.

"My parents are from Ireland. I come every year," Katie said. "My parents know everyone. I love the rain and the mud--it makes it the best festival. I wear my worst clothes and run around."

Nancy Swistowicz and daughter Shanna, both of Chicago's Mt. Greenwood neighborhood, were wandering around the shopping area.

"We come every year," Nancy Swistowicz said. "I especially enjoyed the Irish cottage this year. It's amazing to think my grandmother lived in one like that."

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