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TIME TO CELEBRATE

St. Patrick's spirit in H-Town: Traditions and celebrations abound on day when everyone's Irish

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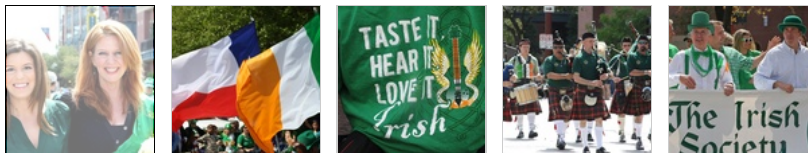
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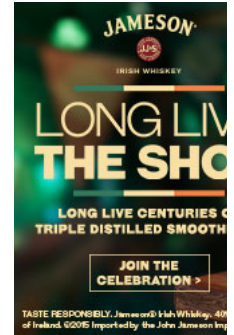
Donna McKenzie (right) and daughter Sophia Macris at Houston's St. Patrick's Parade. Courtesy photo



How do Houstonian Irish Americans celebrate their Irish heritage on St. Patrick's Day? We asked three notable locals with Irish ties to fill us in on how they uphold Irish traditions, and where they'll be celebrating the patron saint come March 17.

Long-time Houston radio personality Donna McKenzie holds a special place in her heart for St. Patrick's Day. "I've always loved it because my whole family participates," states the red-haired beauty, reminiscing about her childhood, "My mother would make scones and Irish soda bread and stews. We would all look for four-leaf clovers in the yard, and my dad would always find one."

While McKenzie will celebrate on March 17 by making colcannon (a traditional Irish dish made with potatoes and kale) for her family, she will also commemorate the holiday on March 14 at [Houston's St. Patrick's Parade](#). "It's a high season, not a one day celebration," she notes.



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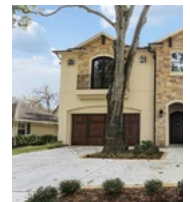
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McKenzie is a huge supporter of the parade and has been involved for 25 years holding roles from volunteer and grand marshal to honorary Irish Queen for the Day and, this year, emcee.

"It's easy to be part of, and great for kids. Plus there's a big party afterwards that's a whole lot of fun. Houston has a great Irish community – so welcoming. Everyone can be Irish for a day."

Dual citizenship

"Although I'm not Irish, myself, I've always celebrated St Patrick's Day. I grew up in Chicago where they [turn the river green](#)," says Philip Hilder, a Houston lawyer and former federal prosecutor.

Now married with four children, Hilder met his wife in her hometown of Ballymote, Ireland (their children, along with Hilder, have dual citizenship). Every summer since their first child was born 16 years ago, the Hilders travel to Ireland to keep cultural ties alive (and escape the Houston heat), ensuring that the kids grow up with a good sense of understanding of the Irish culture.

Also an annual occasion, at home in Houston the family heads to their favorite Irish pub every year on St. Patrick's Day.

"It's a tradition," Hilder says. "It's family-friendly and they have activities the kids enjoy such as Irish dancing and music. Since the kids spend every summer in Ireland, hanging out there reminds them that summer break is around the corner."

Bagpipers and Irish dancers

In his youth, Decklan Plunkett, who hails from Dublin, Ireland, climbed to the summit of Croagh Patrick (Irish for (Saint) Patrick's Stack) in the remote in County Mayo, Ireland, as is customary for many Irish folk. The climb, 2,500 feet, is a way to pay penance and gratitude to patron saint, St. Patrick.

"Back in Dublin, (St. Patrick's Day) is not a big celebration, it's a religious holiday. I moved to Houston and started working in bars 30 years ago when I was just 18 years old. Now I can really celebrate," he says.


The pub where he plans to honor St. Patrick's Day will offer bagpipers, Irish dancers and live music throughout the day.


"It's a good time to let your hair down. Take the day off if you can," he says.


And, may we suggest, the day after, too. Slainte.


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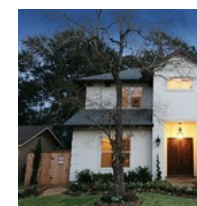
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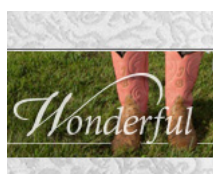
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