FRIDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2025

2025 Boston Irish Hall of Honors

Dr. James O'Connell, M.D.

Hon. Claire Cronin

Hon. Marty Meehan

Boston Irish Honors recognizes the leadership and accomplishments of individuals and families of Irish ancestry who exemplify the very best of our values, legacies, and traditions, by telling the stories of their special achievements in public service, education, medical care, philanthropy, and community leadership.

Welcome to the 15th Annual Boston Irish Honors

Boston Irish Honors symbol
by Vincent Crotty

Today's installment of the Boston Irish Honors luncheon is a rite of fall now in its fifteenth season here in the capital city of Massachusetts, the "next parish over." We gather today to salute two men and one woman who are bound together by extraordinary tales of purpose-driven accomplishments that would no doubt delight their forebears across the pond. Ambassador Claire Cronin, UMass President Martin T. Meehan, and Dr. Jim O'Connell embody the finest qualities that we seek to emulate as Irish Americans: Public service, good-humor and kindness, and a mission-driven duty to enhance the lives of all of our neighbors, no matter their station in life or nation of origin.

Our collective immigrant story is central to our success in this city and state— and we mean to carry that enterprising spirit forward through this luncheon.

The Hall of Honors that they join today was conceived as a means to recognize and uplift the nobility of the work that Dr. O'Connell, President Meehan, and Ambassador Cronin have devoted their lives and careers to with astonishing results.

In a special way, we seek also to remember and celebrate one of our dearest friends, the late Jack Thomas, a journalist of the finest order whose words graced the pages of the Boston Globe for decades, but who also generously lent his talents to our publications as well. We are delighted that today's event— and this program— will help carry on his treasured memory. We are indebted to his wonderful wife, Geri Denterlein, for her friendship and support.

Finally, a word of thanks to all of the sponsors and guests who have made today's program a stirring success for our cause: the Edward W. Forry and Mary Casey Forry Foundation for Community Journalism. Your support allows us to continue to tell our stories and train a new generation of reporters and storytellers. We are eternally grateful for your faith in us.

Slainte!

–Ed Forry, Bill Forry, Linda Dorcena Forry, and Maureen Forry-Sorrell

Today's Program

35th Anniversary, Boston Irish Magazine

Welcome and Introductions
Linda Dorcena Forry & Maureen Forry-Sorrell

Blessing and Invocation
Rev. Tom Kennedy

Committee Co- Chair Welcome
Regina Quinlan Doherty, John C. O'Hara Event Co-Chairs

Custom Luncheon
Preset Salad – Custom Old Fashioned Irish Salad: Butter Lettuce and Watercress
Hard Cooked Egg, Pickled Beets, Tomato, Cucumber, Radish and Scallions
French Dinner Rolls with Butter Balls
Entree – Guinness Braised Short Rib of Beef
Dessert – Family Style Irish Shortbread Cookies
Coffee and Twinings Tea - Table Service
Vegetarian meal upon request

Induction to Boston Irish Hall of Honors
Marty Meehan
Dr Jim O'Connell
Claire Cronin

Closing Benediction
Rev. Jack Ahern

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Acknowledgements

Dusty Rhodes, Rachael Patten and Carol Willison at Conventurs; Flavio DeBarros, whose images are recording today's event; floral centerpieces by Dhalia's Garden; Gail Sarni and the chef, cooks and wait-staff Gourmet Caterers for their service to us today. And to all our sponsors, committee members and guest at today's luncheon, *go raibh math agar— A Thousand thank you!*

Marty Meehan follows two guiding lights: his Irishness, and the martyr Thomas Ashe

By Robert P. Connolly

As a young man visiting his grandparents' home after Sunday Mass, Marty Meehan came to appreciate his family's special connection to Ireland.

Affixed to the living room wall at Josephine Ashe Meehan's home in the Acre section of Lowell was a formal portrait of her beloved first cousin, the Irish patriot Thomas Ashe.

After John F. Kennedy's assassination in 1963, his photograph joined Ashe's portrait – making it clear to visitors that for her these were two epic figures.

Josephine Ashe and her cousin, Thomas Ashe, grew up in Lispole, an Irish-speaking village on County Kerry's Dingle peninsula. Thomas, a teacher, school principal, musician, writer, and native Irish speaker, found himself drawn to the fight for Irish freedom. Josephine emigrated to the United States in 1911, settled in Lowell, and married Martin H. Meehan, an Irish immigrant and World War I veteran.

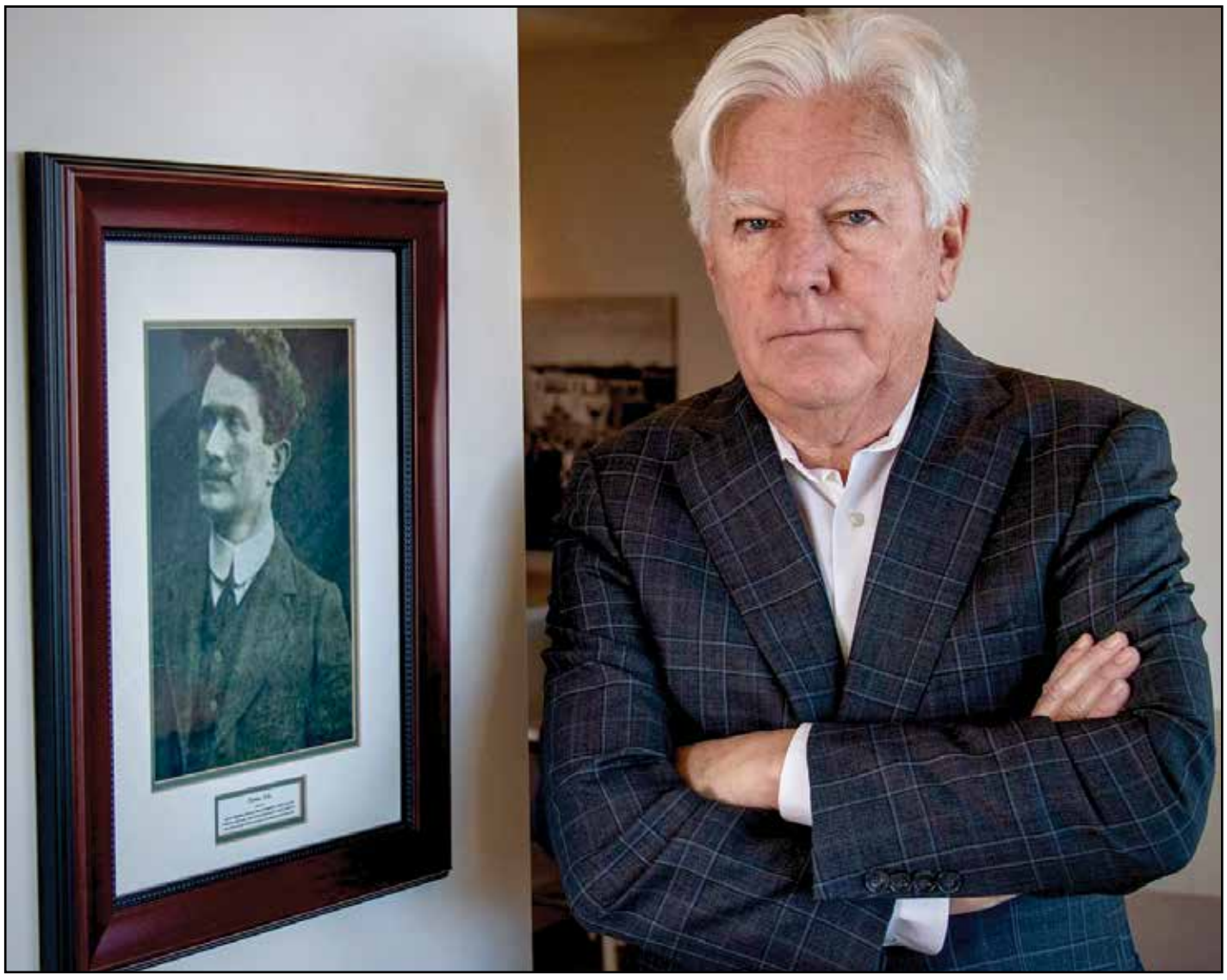
"My grandfather was Martin H. Meehan, but my father and I are both Martin T. Meehan – the T being for Thomas Ashe," Meehan recalled in an interview.

A founding member of the Irish Volunteers and president of the supreme council of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, Thomas Ashe fought on the front lines in the Easter Rising of 1916, at one point leading an Irish Volunteers attack on a police barracks in Ashbourne, County Meath, that was seen as one of the few military victories for the revolutionaries. His hit-and-run tactics created a template for republicans during the 1919-1921 War of Independence.

Ashe's biographer, Sean O'Luing, compares the Battle of Ashbourne to the battles that took place in Lexington and Concord in 1775. "Like Lexington and Concord, it re-echoes around the world," he wrote in "I Die in a Good Cause, Thomas Ashe: A Biography."

Taken into custody after the demise of the Easter Rising and initially sentenced to death, Ashe was released from prison in 1917 as part of a general amnesty. In prison, he had served as an Irish Volunteers leader alongside the future Irish president and taoiseach Eamon de Valera.

Arrested again in 1917 after delivering what British authorities deemed to be a seditious speech, Ashe began a hunger strike to protest the British government's denial of political-prisoner status. He died on Sept. 25, 1917, suffering a horrible death after prison officials at Mountjoy Jail tried to end his hunger strike by force-feeding him. He was 32 years old. An inquest into his death resulted in an unambiguous finding: "We condemn forcible or mechanical feeding as an inhuman and dangerous operation, which should be discontinued," the members of a coroner's jury said.



Marty Meehan at home with portrait of Thomas Ashe, seen in full measure below. *Family photo*

History records Ashe as the first Irish republican prisoner to die on hunger strike – and his death rocked Ireland, with 30,000 mourners filing by as his body lay in state at Dublin City Hall. Thousands more filled the streets when his funeral procession wound its way to Dublin's Glasnevin Cemetery. Michael Collins, Ireland's legendary military and political leader, spoke at Ashe's graveside. Tragically, Collins would be buried at the same cemetery five years later at age 31, a victim of Ireland's Civil War.

Decades later, IRA prisoners in Northern Ireland would follow Ashe's path, with 10 republicans starving themselves to death – similarly protesting the government's refusal to treat them as political prisoners.

On the day of Ashe's funeral, de Valera told mourners: "His death would tell the world … that nothing but freedom would satisfy the Irish people, and that they are ready to perish, one after the other, rather than submit to be conquered."

Notes the historian Francis J. Costello: "Ashe's death caused indignation throughout Ireland and his funeral served as an occasion for national protest."

Reflecting on the life of the man who occupied a place of honor at his grandparents' home, Marty Meehan said: "Thomas Ashe was a great Irish hero. I have always been inspired by his courage and his commitment to the cause of freedom, dignity, and equality. And I've tried to fight for the same things."

His career has focused on public service. The Lowell native served as a member of the US House of Representatives from 1993 to 2007 before leaving Congress to become chancellor of his alma mater, UMass Lowell. In 2015, he was elected president of the 73,000-student, 5-campus UMass system. Throughout his career and in his various leadership positions, Marty Meehan has worked in particular to build bridges between the United States and Ireland.

As a result of his commitment to public service and to US-Irish relationships, he is being inducted into the Boston Irish Hall of Honors this year along with Claire Cronin, the former Massachusetts legislator and US ambassador to Ireland, and Dr. James O'Connell, president of the Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program.

"It is particularly meaningful to be entering the Hall of Honors alongside two such distinguished public servants," Meehan said. "Dr. O'Connell has saved and improved lives on the streets of Boston, and Ambassador Cronin has represented her constituents and our nation with great distinction. Dr. O'Connell and Ambassador Cronin have fought for people and for a brighter future -- and I'm honored to be associated with them."

Irishness is His North Star

Perhaps because of his connection to

Marty Meehan's Political Times

Thomas Ashe and his legacy, Irishness has always loomed large in Marty Meehan's life. It has served as a guiding light for him. "I've always felt that our Irishness is why we have to fight for everyone." he says. "I think there is Irishness in my passion for education, and part of me thinks that comes from Thomas Ashe. Fighting for the underdog is something I've always believed in. When people find themselves in a difficult situation, I always feel drawn to them and want to try to help them," Meehan said.

Growing up, Marty Meehan was heavily influenced by his father, Martin T. Meehan Sr., a compositor, or typesetter, for the Lowell Sun newspaper. He recalls that during the 1960s "my father asked his mother (Josephine Ashe Meehan), to write to her sister, who was still in County Kerry, to ask if he could come to Ireland to visit. When she said yes, he took a week off from his job. He fell in love with Ireland and traveled there every year after that.

"And I would tell you that when I go to Ireland, I feel at home. And I feel the presence of my father when I'm over there. My father had a tremendous influence on me. I always loved him."

Early on during Meehan's congressional career, the stars began to align in favor of the United States playing a more constructive role in Northern Ireland. In the US Senate, Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts, Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York and others forged ties with leaders on both sides of the Irish border. In the US House, Meehan banded together with colleagues like Richard E. Neal of Springfield, Joseph P. Kennedy II of Boston, Peter King of New York, and Bruce Morrison of Connecticut to forge a new and more even-handed approach aimed at settling the conflict in Northern Ireland.

Rep. Neal, Meehan's Washington DC roommate during his years in Congress, has made key contributions to the Irish peace process and continues to serve as co-chair of the Congressional Friends of Ireland Caucus.

For those hoping for a change in US policy toward Northern Ireland, the election of Bill Clinton in 1992 was a welcome development. "After Bill Clinton was elected president, it became clear that that the United States was going to play an important role in addressing the Troubles, and I wanted to be part of that," said Meehan.

For years, the United States had essentially rubber-stamped British policy in the North, but Clinton and leaders in Congress believed that new thinking was needed and that the US should play a more active role.

"We worked together to fashion a policy change that I believe helped to bring a peaceful resolution to the conflict that lasted there for too many years and claimed far too many lives," said Meehan. "The United States played a very important role, and today, life is better in Northern Ireland than it was."

As a US House member, Meehan served on the Ad Hoc Committee on Irish Affairs and cosponsored resolutions calling for all-party peace talks – negotiations that eventually led to the signing of the 1998 Good Friday Peace Agreement.

Jennifer Maguire Meehan (Marty's wife), Bill Clinton and Marty Meehan at the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement celebration in Belfast, 2023 EMK and MTM.

At UMass, he has forged ties to colleges and universities throughout Ireland, creating research and student-exchange programs that provide significant benefits on both sides of the Atlantic.

At UMass Lowell, he established the Center for Irish Partnerships, an entity that works to create links with educational institutions in Ireland and Northern Ireland in areas including the social sciences, the natural sciences and engineering, the humanities, health, and education.

As president of the UMass system, he has fashioned collaborations with Irish educational institutions including Queen's University Belfast, Dublin City University, University College Cork, and the University of Galway.

Meehan traveled to Belfast in 2017 to deliver the keynote address at the Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice, located at Queen's University Belfast. On that occasion, he spoke about the successes and durability of the Northern Ireland peace agreement negotiated by Mitchell with these words:

"That this agreement, forged in the cauldron of conflict – with hatred, violence, and mistrust never far away – has proven to be so resilient is a testament to the courage and tenacity of the political and governmental leaders, to the people of Northern Ireland and, of course, to the man who guided the process with wisdom and patience and whose work and life you honor, Senator George Mitchell."

More recently, he signed on with the Massachusetts-Ireland Trade Commission, an entity established last year to "to help strengthen the economic ties between Massachusetts and Ireland."

His decades of involvement with Ireland and Irish issues have formed a bond that Meehan prizes. "Like my father, I fashioned a lifelong connection to Ireland and its people. It's an important connection, which is why I am so pleased about becoming a member of the Boston Irish Hall of Honors," he

(Continued on next page)

US Sen. Edward M. Kennedy with then U.S. representatives Edward Markey and Marty Meehan

Tony Blair and Marty Meehan on the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement celebration in Belfast, 2023

Marty Meehan and US Rep. Richard E. Neal at the dedication of a bust honoring former US Senator George Mitchell at Queen's University Belfast

Meehan Family Album

Meehan family … Martin T. Meehan Sr. and Alice Meehan with their seven children

Marty and his father, Martin T. Meehan Sr., in downtown Lowell

Marty Meehan and brothers Mark and Paul Meehan with their grandmother, Josephine Ashe Meehan. Marty at the left, Mark at the right and Paul being held by Mrs. Meehan.

"I've always felt that our Irishness is why we have to fight for everyone. I think there is Irishness in my passion for education, and part of me thinks that comes from Thomas Ashe."

–MARTY MEEHAN

said. "I've been privileged to be able to give back during the course of my career – and I look forward to building and deepening this vital relationship."

A 'Most Remarkable' Personality

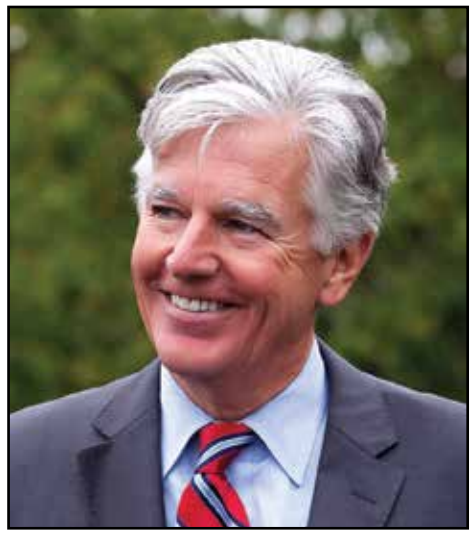
Thomas Ashe was among the republican prisoners who began a hunger strike on Sept. 20, 1917. Because of their unwillingness to accept common-criminal status, the republicans had already been forced to sleep on cold, damp floors after their beds, bedding and shoes were taken away by prison guards.

The feeding procedure involved a rubber tube being inserted into a prisoner's nose or mouth and then forced into the victim's stomach. A mixture of eggs and milk was then pumped into the prisoner.

Ashe endured five feedings before dying on Sept. 25. During his fifth and fatal feeding, he complained that the tube was being inserted into "the wrong passage," perhaps into his lungs, but the procedure continued. The cause of his death was ruled to be "heart failure and congestion of the lungs."

In his introduction to Sean O'Luing's biography of Ashe, the esteemed Irish historian J.J. Lee assumes that the fallen patriot no doubt would have gone on to great things had he not died in 1917.

He speculates that Ashe might have become a minister in government and potentially would have played "a central role" in the War of Independence and, perhaps, in the Civil War that followed.



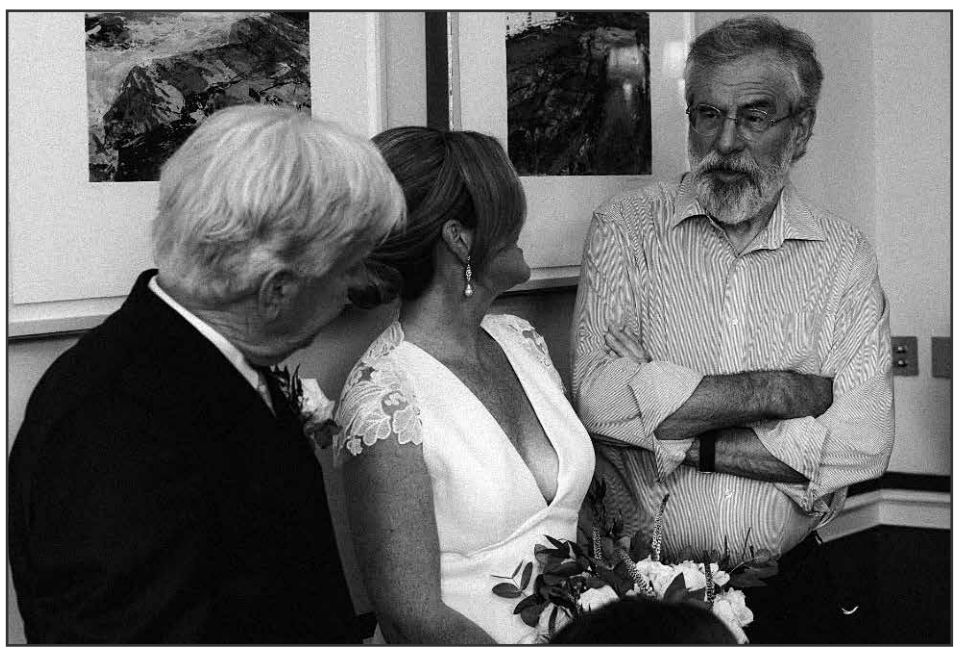
While his premature death denied him those opportunities, "Thomas Ashe remains one of the most remarkable personalities in Irish history," Lee writes.

Various memorials throughout Ireland pay tribute to Ashe, as does a poem written by the celebrated Sean O'Casey, the author of plays including "The Plough and the Stars," "The Shadow of a Gunman" and "Juno and the Paycock."

In his poem "Lament for Thomas Ashe," O'Casey writes:

"The breasts of the mountains with anger are hearing
Swift rivers of tears down their rugged cheeks fall,
Their mantle of heather the wild wind is rearing,
And their proud heads are capped with a storm cloud of woe.
Why gather the gloom in a manner appalling?
What causes the sunshine in terror to flee?
The mountains of Erin are plaintively calling,
Thomas Ashe, Thomas Ashe, we are mourning for thee."

Robert P. Connolly has written about Irish issues for the Boston Irish Reporter and the Boston Herald. He is retired from his position as vice president of communications for the UMass system.



Marty Meehan, Jennifer Maguire Meehan, and Gerry Adams, president of Sinn Fein (1983-2018).

Her Irish heritage and community service are central to Ambassador Cronin's story

By Cassidy McNeeley

In May 2021, Claire Cronin was riding comfortably in the passenger seat of her family's Acura as her husband Ray drove along the familiar backroads from Easton to Mansfield. A few miles into their ride to Trattoria Romana Pizzeria, where they were meeting up with her sister and brother-in-law for dinner, their conversation, paired with the background sounds of the radio, was interrupted by a phone call.

As the ringtone blared through the car speakers, Ray pulled over, and Claire moved her hand toward the center console screen, which had lit up with a 202 phone number and "Washington, DC" typed below. "I was, like, 'that's a strange number,'" she recalled in an interview. "I answered, and, lo and behold, it was President Biden."

The president wasn't just calling to say hello. He asked her if she would like to become the US Ambassador to Ireland. As Cronin said later: "When the president asks you that, there is only one good answer and that is 'yes.'"

After a bit more chatter on the White House phone, it was on to dinner over an Italian meal with exciting information that she couldn't yet share. But that stop and phone call along the road in Easton wasn't the start to her ambassadorship; the journey had begun long before.

With her husband Ray and their daughters Kate and Kerry standing by proudly, US Ambassador to Ireland Claire Cronin presented her diplomatic credentials to Irish President Michael D. Higgins at his residence in Dublin on Feb. 10, 2025. *US Embassy photo*

Cronin grew up on the west side of Brockton with her parents, James Daniel McLaughlin and Phyllis (Lucey) McLaughlin, four siblings, and deep Irish roots. Her father, a lawyer, was a first-generation US citizen, the son of immigrants from the Inishowen Peninsula in Donegal. On the Lucey side, all four of her great-grandparents were from Ireland, two from Galway, one from Cork, and one from Clare.

"When we did our ancestry.com, we came back as like 99.99 percent Irish," Cronin said with a laugh. "It was a big part of our life, particularly with my father's family. We certainly grew up with a very keen understanding of Irish history and culture. My father would tell us stories about the War of Independence and the Civil War in Ireland."

The strong heritage wasn't passed down in history lessons alone but also through holiday fun. When Cronin thinks of Christmas, she can still hear the Irish tunes her grandmother played on the piano and the voices of her siblings singing along.

"I was number three out of five, the middle child, but I was really more of an older child because my parents had two children, and then there was an eight-year gap, and then I came along. I was the oldest of the younger three."

Might the responsibility for looking out for her younger siblings – sister Joan, and brother Hugh – be the source of Cronin's leadership skills as she moved through Whitman Elementary School, West Junior High, and Brockton High School.

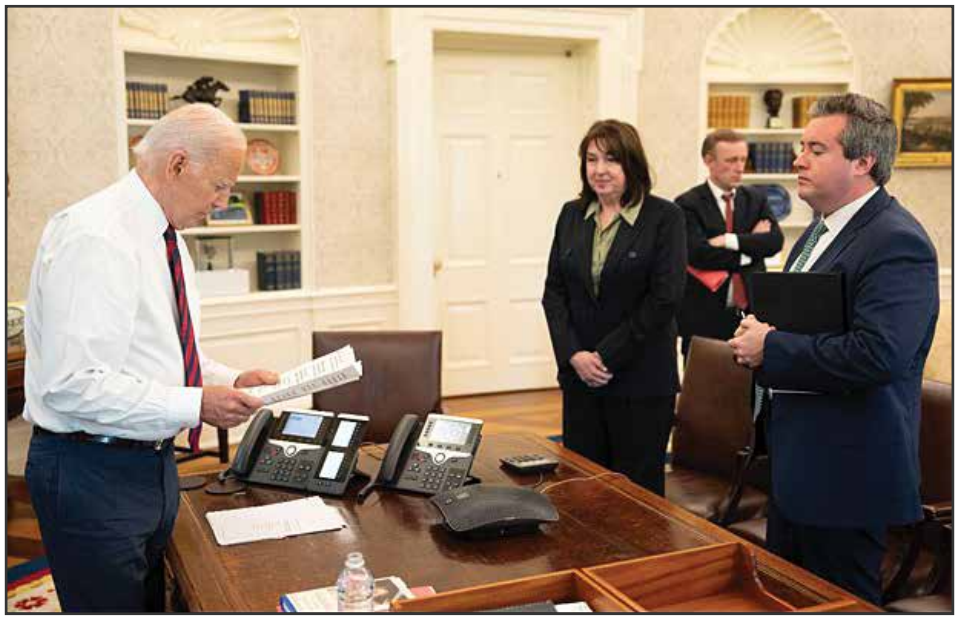
"I certainly got my interest in the law growing up in a household with a father as a lawyer," she said. "But probably the greatest impact in my life was that I grew up in a family that tremendously valued public service and the way it could benefit your community."

While her father spent his time in court as a trial lawyer, her mother was leading elementary classrooms in Randolph and Avon. But a commitment to public service in Massachusetts politics extended beyond Claire Cronin's immediate family.

"I am the third generation of my family to have served in the House of Representatives," she noted, though it was not a matter of the baton being passed from person to person. "The first was a great-uncle, William McCarthy, my mother's uncle. He represented Rockland and served in that chamber in the 1920s and 1930s. The second was C. Gerald Lucey, an uncle who was a member from 1947 to 1953, and mayor of Brockton from 1952-1956. I was first elected to the Legislature in 2012."

Thirty years before that formal entry into the world of politics, Claire took her Brockton High School diploma with her to next-town-over Stonehill College, where she studied political science and communications.

"I had a great interest in politics, and I always thought I wanted to be a journalist," she said. "I interned in the Governor's Office, and that is probably the first time when I really felt the importance of the work being done at the State House. I always thought I would be part of it as a staff member, not actually the elected."



Briefing president Biden in the Oval Office in March 2024 with John McCarthy, Special Assistant to the President, and National Security advisor Jake Sullivan in the background.

While Cronin wasn't aware of how she was seen as a possible player in the political realm, others saw the possibility early on.

"Gerry Lucey was probably the most famous mayor of Brockton. He was incredible," said fellow former mayor Jack Yunitz. "I think that's what deep down inspired her in the end to get into government." He related a story about her political beginnings that has been told with minimal variations over the years.

One day during her senior year of college, she left the library, picked up the phone, called the State House, and asked for the governor's office. She chatted with a man on the other end of the phone for quite a while. After ex-

plaining why she was calling and what she hoped to gain from the experience, the gentleman invited her to meet him at the State House the following day. That's when Claire finally asked for his name. He told her he was Ed King, and he was the governor. She started her internship the very next week.

After Stonehill, Cronin continued her studies at Suffolk University Law School, where she earned her degree in 1985. That same year, she passed the bar and was admitted to practice in US district courts and before the US Supreme Court.

At some point between lectures, case books, and briefs, and exams, there came into her life a young man, also of Irish descent, named Ray Cronin. "Claire and I first met through common friends when she was still in college and I had graduated," he said in an interview with *Boston Irish*. "I had a bunch of buddies, we rented cottages on the Cape. Claire ended up at one of those cottages."

He added, "We were friends for eight to nine years before we had any inkling that we were more than friends. We decided one day that we had more interest, and it didn't take long. We had only dated for about six weeks before we were engaged." Marriage followed in 1989 and it has been the Ray and Claire Show ever since.

In 1992, they took their first trip to Ireland to attend her brother Hugh's wedding. After hearing about the old country all her life, Cronin said the visit was something she will never forget. Despite falling in love with areas like Dublin, Kinsale, and Dingle, she didn't return until 2022, of which trip she says: "In my wildest dreams, I never would have anticipated that I would come back as the US ambassador."

But between 1992 and 2022, a lot of life happened. The Cronin family grew with the arrival of two daughters, Kara and Kerry, and lost dearly with the deaths of her father in 1998 and her mother in 2012.

In the early 2000s, Cronin juggled being both a parent and a public activist, maintaining a law practice in Brockton and sitting on several Democratic committees.

In 2012, she took the big step by announcing her candidacy for a newly redistricted seat in the House where her ancestors had served. The campaign wasn't easy. Cronin first had to win a four-way Democratic primary and then defeat the Republican candidate in the general election.

During the campaign, she grappled with the passings of her mother and a brother-in-law. "My mom saw me win my primary in September, but she did not see me win my election. That's probably one of my little sadnesses in life that she never got to see me get to the finish line."

After Cronin took her seat in the House two months later representing the 11th Plymouth District, it didn't take her long to become a leader there, too, said Rep. Carole Fiola of Fall River.

"I came in after Claire in a special election. She got sworn in in January, I got sworn in in September," said Fiola, from Fall River. "I didn't know her at all and didn't really know other reps; it was kind of lonely."

Above, Ray and Claire with their daughters Kara and Kerry on the occasion of Kerry's graduation from Providence College. Below, four McLaughlin siblings in front of their grandfather's home in Moville, Ireland. From left, Joan Burke, Claire, Geraldine Osborne, and Hugh McLaughlin. Bottom, Her grandfather, Hugh McLaughlin, fourth from the left with his brothers, James McLaughlin, Thomas McLaughlin, Eugene McLaughlin and Michael McLaughlin after they gathered in a New York City pub shortly after arriving in the United States.
Family photos

She added: "One day, Claire, who sat in a different division from me, said, 'Hey, I noticed you over there,' and invited me to meet with her. She was extremely welcoming. It's a rare thing in this world, in this type of job, that is very focused on your district, your legislation, your priorities, for someone to reach out."

Over time, the two women established a lifelong friendship, bonded over marriage and motherhood. To this day, they refer to themselves as the "Gateway Girls," having represented Brockton and Fall River.

During her nine years in the House, Cronin served as the vice-chair of the Joint Committee on the Judiciary and then became the first woman in the history of the Massachusetts House to serve as chair of that panel.

Current House Chair Mike Day met Claire during his first year in the Legislature in 2015. "I got assigned to my first term on the judiciary committee, and Claire was the vice chair at the time. I talked to her right off the bat, and she helped guide me through the first term. Ups and downs, mistakes, what to watch for, things like that. I'm not alone in looking at her as a role model, a mentor, and a friend. That's unusual to have those three bottled up in one person to so many people in the Legislature."

While at work on Beacon Hill, Cronin took time to get involved in Joe Biden's 2020 presidential campaign, during which she announced the Massachusetts numbers in the roll call at that year's Democratic National Convention.

"After the president was in office, I received an email from the transition team that just said, 'Would you be willing to be considered for a position within the administration?' Truth be told, I was incredibly happy with the job I had in the House of Representatives." Not thinking much about it, Cronin

(Continued on next page)

responded that she was interested in working with the State Department and identified Ireland as her top choice if selected. "That was pretty much the end of it. I didn't lobby for the position, I went happily along with my life, and I was made majority leader in the House."

All of which brings us back to the very beginning of this story, when Claire Cronin's next steps in life came together on a suburban road south of Boston in 2021:

There were extensive background checks, thorough investigations, and numerous interviews before President Biden announced in June his nomination of Claire Cronin as United States Ambassador to Ireland. US Senate confirmation came in December, and she was sworn in on Jan. 19, 2022.

Laura Striese, the executive director of the Charity Guild, a food pantry Cronin supports in Brockton, has known Cronin most of her life and describes her as a "hometown hero." Ray Cronin seconds that motion: "Becoming an ambassador is the manifestation of the adage 'When preparation meets opportunity,' he said. "She brings people together and builds great relationships."

When the new ambassador moved into her most-elegant new residence in Dublin, Ray and their daughters joined her for the ride. Within the first six months, Cronin had already visited all 26 counties in the Republic of Ireland and ventured into the North as well. Later in her tenure, with thanks to extended relatives, she got to explore where her family came from.

"Last Christmas," she said, "my brothers and sisters came over to Ireland, and we made the trek up to Donegal for them to see my grandad's house, which is still owned by the family. It was unbelievably emotional to go with my siblings on this trip."

In addition to all the traveling, Cronin was a very welcoming host at the Deerfield Residence in Dublin's Phoenix Park to family and friends from afar during her three years as ambassador. But it was the "Open Doors" program, a cultural exchange initiative led by Cronin, that brought the largest number of people to her stately home.

US Envoy to Ireland Claire Cronin with students on a visit to Scoil Eoghain National School. *US Embassy photo*

"I wanted to open the doors of the embassy and the residence to people who normally would have never had that opportunity," Cronin said about the program of engagement for students and young adults. "I wanted to make sure that the average person whom I might have known in my life back in Brockton or Easton had that opportunity." The result: Participation in the J-1 Visa Program hit an all-time high.

One notable visitor was the president himself, who, with Claire as part of his entourage, took a historic four-day tour around Ireland to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement.

The juxtaposition of that experience with Cronin's just-folks demeanor in other venues struck her friend Tim Cruise, Brockton's city clerk, as defining her sense of place

"I would receive pictures of her on Air Force One with President Biden, and at the same time, when she was home for a weekend, she could be at the local pizza place with us and make everyone feel the same," said Cruise. "That's a rare trait that people have. To be able to move in those high circles but still be grounded and remember who you are and where you came from."

Now Claire is back home, and still busy. She is a scholar-in-residence for Public Policy and Global Affairs at the UMass Amherst's Newton campus and a consultant to the public policy law firm Smith, Costello, & Crawford.

And politics? "I don't have any immediate plans," the ambassador says, "but I would never say never."

From Claire serving lunches to seniors at a Brockton Council on Aging summer barbecue to speaking at the signing of a long-awaited Criminal Justice Reform bill with then-Attorney General Maura Healy behind here, Claire embraces political life. *Courtesy photos*

“I’ve become the local doctor I wanted to be’ – Jim O’Connell of his time with the homeless

By Kevin Cullen

When the Famine hit Ireland 180 years ago – and, let’s be honest, it wasn’t a famine; it was an unnecessary starvation, caused by a government that wanted rural, unreformed Catholic Ireland to die – the O’Connells from Kerry and the Hayeses from Cork rolled the dice and got on a boat.

They didn’t know each other, but fate would put them together. And in their leaving, like so many who abandoned Ireland when the potato crop failed and the British government failed them, Ireland’s loss was America’s gain.

The two families settled in Newport, Rhode Island, which at the time was not the home of fancy yachts and people who lived elsewhere, summered in Newport, or maybe the Hamptons, and golfed on weekdays. It was a working-class harbor town, and the people who were employed there, like the O’Connells and the Hayeses, worked with their hands and survived by their wits.

Some of them went off to fight in the Civil War, for the Union, for a country that didn’t accept them, like it didn’t the Tuskegee Airmen and Black patriots who fought the Nazis and returned home to be called the “N” word. But the Irish, as there was at that time, no “I” word, went off and fought, because they knew they were doing so for something that mattered.

These are the roots underlying the life of Jim O’Connell, the doctor for the homeless, the unrooted, the abandoned, like the Famine Irish who had no alternatives but to leave their homes and throw their lot in with a place that initially rejected them, reluctantly accepted them, and gradually came to the conclusion that, as they say, you can’t beat the Irish.

O’Connell was one of six, or as they’d say in Newport at the time, “in a small Irish Catholic family.”

He was the product of a mixed marriage, not only in the context of Kerry and Cork, but also because his parents hailed from parishes of different strata. Newport was like Dorchester, in that people identified themselves not by neighborhood, but by parish. His mother Anne (Hayes) O’Connell grew up in St. Augustine’s, downtown, in the 5th Ward. His father Jim O’Connell was from St. Joseph’s, uptown, which was grittier, poorer.

His dad didn’t make it out of high school; he instead went off to fight the Nazis before graduating. His mom got a full scholarship to Fordham, but her descent into a fog of mental illness at the time prevented her from accepting it. Later, she went to a small Catholic college for women in New Jersey.

His mother’s illness led to frequent hospitalizations and absences from the family home. While his father worked at the local Navy base, young Jim spent a lot of time with maternal grandfather, John Hayes, who somehow, beyond any explanation, found himself the head pro at the Newport Country Club, a bastion of the landed gentry which, if it were any snootier, would be up its own nose.

He served the golfing membership at the club for a half century, and in that time, he was never allowed to enter the clubhouse, because he was a Catholic, and even worse, an Irish Catholic.

“Now my cousins are on the country club board,” Jim O’Connell said, chuckling.

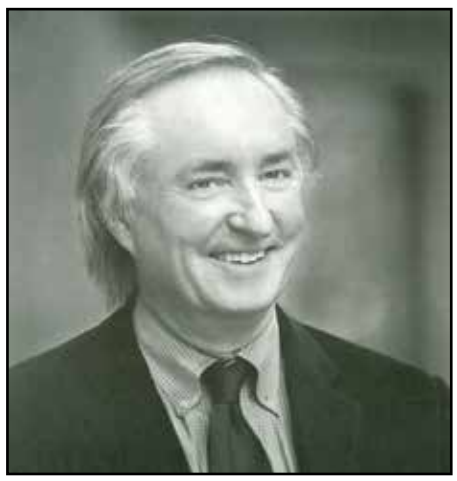
Things change.

When he was president, Dwight Eisenhower summered in Newport, and frequently golfed at the Newport Country Club. “He’d golf with my grandfather,” O’Connell said. “Eisenhower liked him because he was quiet, reserved, unlike everybody else a president was around.”

He saw a gun for the first time around that time – It was sticking out of the golf bag of one of the Secret Service agents guarding Eisenhower.

Jim O’Connell was a young boy on a September day in 1953, when his grandfather took him to stand outside St. Mary’s Church in Newport. At that age, he didn’t appreciate what he was witnessing, but his grandfather was insistent that he would see Jack Kennedy marry Jacqueline Bouvier.

“He was so taken by the idea that this Irish Catholic kid, a kid from Boston, could become president of the United States,” O’Connell said.



Dr. Jim O’Connell was tending to a homeless person on a Boston street when the photographer Bill Brett came by and took the photograph above. About such occasions, the doctor says: “These are people who have been dealt terrible hands, and they invite you into their world, without reservation, without conditions. Those relationships sustain us all.” Bill also featured Dr. Jim, at left, in his 2014 book-as-photo album, “Boston Irish.”

O’Connell was educated by nuns for eight years, Christian Brothers for high school, and then by the Holy Cross fathers at Notre Dame, so he has every right to be estranged from his upbringing. But he is not, as is his nature. He sees beyond the criminality of the bishops who protected abusers to remember the priests and nuns he admired for their commitment to caring for the poor and the marginalized. His Catholicism is steeped in social justice.

“You can’t just abandon that,” he said.

And he never has. Whatever kernel of goodwill those nuns and brothers in Newport put in his head, eventually blossomed, like a beneficial virus, to do good.

But it wasn’t a straight road. It never is.

In college, he thought he was going to be an academic. But his heart wasn’t in it. After graduating from Notre Dame with a degree in philosophy, he enrolled at the University in Cambridge for a master’s degree.

“It trained those two years in England,” he said.

Not surprisingly, he left the rainy greens of England for the sun and soothing winds of Hawaii. He followed a woman, and while that relationship never progressed, his love of the lush, wild landscape of Hawaii, and his love of those multi-cultural Hawaiians, did.

He taught high school students in Honolulu and loved it. They gave him energy. But as much as he liked teaching, and loved those kids, it wasn’t doing it

The late globe-trotting humanitarian, Dr. Tom Durant, was a key welder of Jim O'Connell's life in medicine.

Courtesy photo

for him. "I was living in paradise," he said. "But I didn't know what to do."

He decided to go back to school, to the New School in New York, to pursue a doctorate in political philosophy. He was assigned as a teaching assistant to Hannah Arendt, the great German and American philosopher and his hero.

It was 1975 and he thought he had found his path. A few months later, Arendt died of lung cancer, and O'Connell was left adrift.

He went back to work where he always went back, since he was 11 – to The Pier, the restaurant in Newport where the tips were good and the customers were not so bad.

He and his roommate at the time convinced themselves that everything would be so much better in rural Vermont, so they pooled their tips and bought a place, for short money, near Smugglers' Notch and invited their drop-out friends to join them.

Jim O'Connell, the great street doctor, was, in fact, a hippie ski bum for two years. "I can't refute that," he said.

What we can refute, in hindsight, is the notion that his time in Vermont somehow detoured him from what was his ultimate goal. To the contrary, it helped him focus on something that was more fulfilling.

At some point, as ski bums always do, he woke up from a fog and realized that his life wasn't cutting it. He finally admitted to himself that he wanted to be doing something that would satisfy his soul. He wanted to be a doctor.

For an aspiring medical student, he was something of an anomaly. He was, um, old, and he realized that he needed all those pre-med science classes he had eschewed in college. So he signed up for classes at Brown University.

While he was doing that, he was still working weekend nights at The Pier.

In 1978, to his great surprise, Harvard Medical School accepted him. It wasn't his first choice. He had wanted to go to the University of Vermont, imagining himself the local GP who took care of everybody in the village.

But UVM told him, basically, what everybody in that world would: You're too old. He remembers, word for word, what one of the admissions counselors at UVM said: "Unless you are possessed of a font of human energy bordering dangerously on the pathological, I would dissuade you from pursuing a career in medicine."

Luckily, for those thousands of his future patients, O'Connell ignored that counselor's advice. He was headed to Harvard, which, for its irony, would have pleased his grandfather to no end.

"Growing up in Newport, we hated Harvard," he said. But he grew to love it, and Harvard loved him back.

Medical school match day, when students learn where they will go for their post-graduate residencies, is a both a joyous and a crushing day.

It's joyous because young people, who have decided to dedicate their lives to helping others, have finished the first, rigorous leg of their journey, medical school. Crushing, in that they often don't not get the place they wanted.

On the evening of Match Day, St. Patrick's Day, in 1982, O'Connell and his compatriots retired to the Black Rose, the Irish pub next to Faneuil Hall. They were celebrating, but also commiserating.

"There was a guy," O'Connell remembers, "dancing a jig, jumping from table to table." When "the guy" got to O'Connell's table, he looked down at the crestfallen medical school grads and said, "What's the matter with you guys?"

O'Connell tried to explain, saying that while they were happy to graduate from medical school, they weren't so happy with where they were going off to work.

The guy who danced on the tables told them, "Do not do that. Do anything else." And then he danced off.

Jim O'Connell did not dance off. He went off to Massachusetts General Hospital and the first day he was there, a doctor, an older doctor, got up to address the new residents.

The doctor who greeted them, Dr. Tom Durant, was the man who was dancing on the tables at the Black Rose and told a group of medical school grads to do something, anything, else.

On that first day of orientation, Tom Durant remembered that night in the Black Rose, without saying so explicitly. In the midst of his introductory remarks, he looked squarely at O'Connell and said, "I thought I told you not to be here."

But he was there, and Durant would become an important mentor, a welder of O'Connell's life in medicine.

O'Connell could not have chosen a better mentor. Tom Durant was one of a kind, a Dorchester guy who became a globe-trotting humanitarian doctor.

I knew Tom Durant for much of my adult life. When he wasn't tending to people at Mass. General, or teaching at Harvard Medical School, he was off in some far-flung, poverty-stricken or war-ravaged place, treating the poor, the forgotten, the dying.

When I was the Boston Globe's European correspondent, based in London, I covered the Balkan wars, and one day I was in Macedonia, after weeks in Kosovo, where the Serbs were ethnically cleansing the place of Muslims. A man I knew at my regular hotel in Skopje, the capital of Macedonia, told me that there was a doctor treating the refugees at some godforsaken field near the border with Kosovo, where the Macedonian authorities had corralled all the war refugees.

"He is wearing a baseball cap," my Macedonian friend said. "Boston Red Sox."

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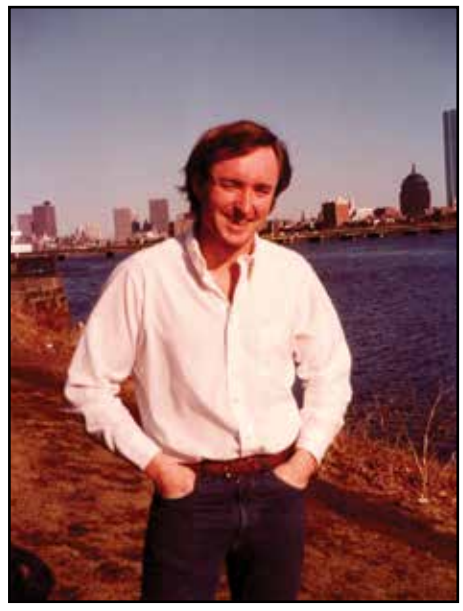


Above, new University of Notre Dame summa cum laude graduate Jim O'Connell and his parents, Jim and Anne (Hayes) O'Connell, in 1970. At left, a young Jim shadowed by the Boston skyline. Below, Dr. Jim with an extraordinary servant of the homeless, the late nurse Barbara McInnis (1935-2003) who showed him the ways and means of treating Boston's homeless wherever they are at. The South End's Barbara McInnis House is dedicated to her memory.

He's now the doctor he wanted to be

As I set off for the refugee camp, I knew who I was looking for. I stumbled around for a bit then ducked into a medical tent, and there was Tom Durant, explaining to a homeless, pregnant refugee what she needed to do to deliver a healthy baby in an unhealthy environment. He was doing his best to comfort someone clearly distraught, tired, scared, and hungry.

Durant looked up at me, betraying no emotion. His greeting was typical of him. "How'd the Sox make out last night?" he asked. "I don't know," I replied, shrugging. "I don't have time to check the box scores."

Tom Durant sniffed, saying, "Then you're useless" and turning his attention back to his patient.

Jim O'Connell nodded in recognition when I related that story to him . He knew that, aside from a great sense of humor, Tom Durant carried with him an oversized sense of empathy for those who needed care. It didn't matter what they looked like, how much money they had, their religion, where they came from, their language. If they needed help, Tom Durant was there.

That was the kind of doctor Jim O'Connell wanted to be, and in many ways, Tom Durant ensured that was the kind of doctor he became.

If it is simplistic, but not totally inaccurate, to reduce the peace process in Northern Ireland to John Hume asking Tip O'Neill and Ted Kennedy to get Ronald Reagan involved and then Reagan getting Maggie Thatcher to take the Irish government and Garret FitzGerald on as equal partners and then John Major and Albert Reynolds pushing the thing forward, and Bill Clinton throwing the money and might of US diplomacy behind it all, and then Bertie Ahern and Tony Blair getting the whole thing over the goal line, then it is both simplistic and accurate to explain how Jim O'Connell and Boston Health Care for the Homeless came about.

When he was mayor of Boston, Ray Flynn was trying to get a grant to provide medical care for homeless people, whose numbers had grown dramatically in the 1980s.

So Flynn, a Southie guy, called his old Dorchester pal, Tom Durant, and said, "I need a doctor." And Durant said, "I've got just the right guy."

That right guy was Jim O'Connell, who at the time was in his last year of residency at Mass General. Dr. John Potts Jr., the chief of medicine at MGH, was fully involved in the conspiracy with Flynn and Durant to make O'Connell the head doc for the homeless.

"Do this for a year," Potts told O'Connell, who knew exactly what was going on.

"I said yes because it was Tom Durant behind the scenes, and I couldn't say no to Tom," he said.

So in 1985, Jim O'Connell left the ICU at Mass General and started taking care of the homeless on the streets of Boston. He took Potts at his word – that it was just for a year – but then a funny thing happened: Jim O'Connell fell in love with his patients.

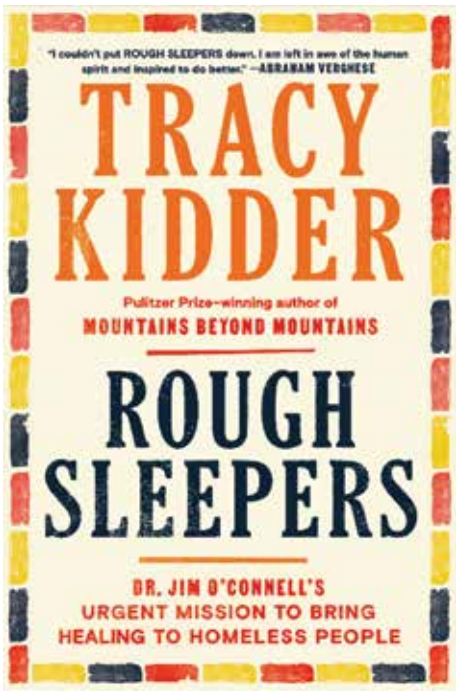
They were, like his Famine-era immigrant family, refugees, cut off from the creature comforts of a wealthy society that in many ways didn't see them and would rather they disappear.

But they never disappeared to Jim O'Connell. They became more than his patients. They became his friends.

He had once imagined himself becoming the local GP in some rural burgh of Vermont, up in the mountains, the wise old doctor who took care of the local people.

Then he realized that local people in Boston also slept on the grates in back of the Public Library in Copley Square and nodded off on benches in the Boston Common in the middle of the day because it was impossible to get a decent night's sleep outside. They lined up outside the Pine Street Inn or at the shelter at the Shattuck, looking for a meal, a bed or maybe just a kind word.

Forty years is a long time in any line of work. But tending to the most vulnerable among us brings a special burden. O'Connell, now married to Dr. Jill Roncarti, ScD, a volunteer researcher at BHCHP, and the father of Gabrielle,



doesn't see it like that, though.

"What's kept me going is, you realize it's a privilege," he said. "These are people who have been dealt terrible hands, and they invite you into their world, without reservation, without conditions. Those relationships sustain us all. And I'm blessed, working with the people I work with. I've become the local doctor I wanted to be."

As they say in Belfast, good on ye, Dr. Jim, good on ye.

Kevin Cullen is a columnist at The Boston Globe.

Congratulations, President Meehan!

A 2025 Boston Irish Honoree

Thank you for leading the University of Massachusetts system with conviction and commitment. Your lifelong dedication to public service is a testament to your character, and our faculty, staff, alumni, and students are better for it. The Board of Directors and your friends at the UMass Foundation thank you for your continued leadership and send congratulations on this well-deserved honor.

Robert J. Manning, '84, '11 (H)
Chairman, Board of Directors
UMass Foundation

"There are places I remember All my life, though some have changed…"

"In My Life"/Lennon/McCartney

When my husband, Jack, listened to this classic Beatles tune, I imagined he was thinking of Dorchester. Over the course of his 50-year career at *The Boston Globe*, he spoke lovingly of the neighborhood of his youth and longingly of the people who shaped his world view. He wrote of Dorchester with a reverence customarily reserved for the lives of the saints.

And then there was Ireland. At one point or another, he took all of his children to the Emerald Isle. On his first trip, having done his homework, he called from a payphone in Donegal to a woman in County Fermanagh thought to be a cousin. Lo and behold, she was! What ensued was a visit long remembered.

It seems the Irish have never met a stranger. Our new cousins welcomed us warmly into their home, took us on a tour of the Belleek factory, where one cousin created the beautiful flowers that grace its more elaborate pottery, and then the younger members of the household introduced our five-year-old son to Irish football.

The Irish count their blessings.

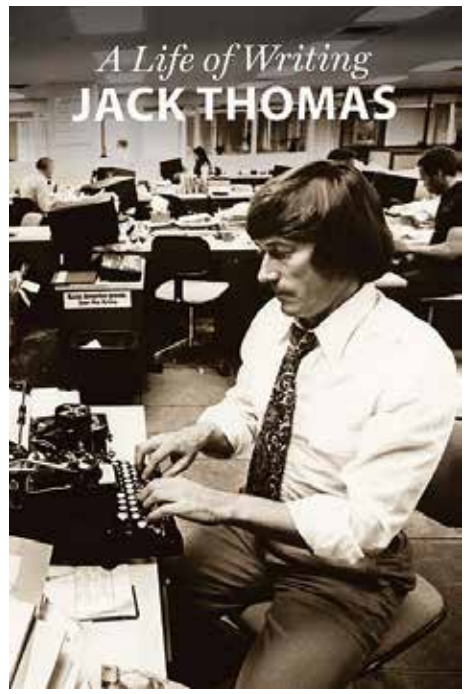
Jack counted among his many blessings the Forry family. He was grateful to Ed for recruiting him to write about the Irish Americans who contribute so much to his beloved Boston.

He was the product of a mixed marriage. On his father's side, his roots were Welsh and Episcopalian. On his mother's, all Irish-Catholic. Somehow, in the tug-of-war of marriage, his parents agreed that the children would be brought up in the Anglican tradition, making Jack one of the few Dorchester Irish Protestants.

"What he loved most about Dorchester was the place where he sang in its choir, played on its basketball team, and met his first love. On Oct. 3, 2022, Jack was brought home to All Saints Church."

–GERI DENTERLEIN

Book cover photo/Stan Grossfeld



For Southie's Burkes, 'family' is a sacred word

By Jack Thomas

At twilight of a soft October night, on Day Boulevard, deep in South Boston, in a weathered first-floor meeting room of the Boston Harbor Yacht Club, there's an end of the summer tranquility until, one by one, the four Burke brothers arrive, bearing sweet lobster rolls, potato chips, and ice-cold beer, and in rickety chairs around an antiquated table, their stories pour forth about Irish values, about the grand character of South Boston, and especially about the Burke family and their revered mother, Ellie, and their father, Johnny, a Good Samaritan who ran an old-fashioned drug store at D and Sixth for more than half a century.

First, though, regarding the *Boston Irish Reporter* award to the Burkes as exemplary Irish, the brothers agree on one point – they do not deserve the accolade.

"There's nothing we did as a family that was extraordinary," says Dennis, an orthopedic surgeon. "We didn't become presidents of anything or captains of industry, and we didn't cure cancer and we didn't become great philosophers.

But we are the children of two parents, second-generation Americans who never went beyond grammar school. We're ordinary people lucky to have had parents who cared for us, who gave us direction, and who had a clear idea of right and wrong, and that's all we needed."

His brother, John, a senior vice president at Staples, picks up the narrative:

"First, my sister Jacquelyn couldn't make it tonight, but she's here in spirit. And if there's a story here, the beginning is about two people from a poor background who found one another, and the middle part is that she worked hard to raise five children while he worked at his drugstore, seven days a week.

"The end of the story is the legacy, how their 5 children became 10 with wives, 29 with grandchildren and now with 12 great grandchildren, their offspring number is 41. It's a story that fulfills my father's dream to see articles in the newspaper about the good people of Southie."

John and Ellie Burke's family - the Burkes of South Boston - joined together after lunch with five tables of relatives and friends.

Margaret Brett Hastings photo

Today's award is more important than the Academy Award for Best Hairstyling or the Grammy for Best Pop Instrumental Album, because it's recognition by neighbors and friends that the Burkes represent the best of Irish culture.

In an age when 25 percent of children are raised in single parent homes, and when 1.6 million children in America are homeless, the Burkes of South Boston are models of sibling loyalty who reflect the values of the Roman Catholic Church, South Boston, and their Irish heritage – with a big dash of Lithuanian.

"We're from a mixed marriage," explains John. "My father was Irish, my mother Lithuanian, and we went to St. Peter's, a Catholic Lithuanian school in Southie."

Any portrayal of the Burkes begins with Johnny Burke (1907-1995), who ran the drugstore at D and Sixth Streets and never denied palliative drugs to anyone, however poor, and also his wife, Ellie (1918-2005), who was known for her grace and generosity.

As in most Irish households, Johnny may have been the public figure, but at home, Ellie was the puppeteer and everybody else a marionette.

So, meet the five "ordinary" children of Johnny and Ellie Burke:

Jacquelyn, 65, of Dennis Port, retired pharmacist, mother of three.

John, 64, of Milton, senior vice president at Staples, father of three.

Paul, 63, of South Boston, deputy fire chief in Boston, father of three.

Dennis, 62, of Milton, orthopedic surgeon at MGH, father of five.

Michael, 59, of South Boston, retired sheet-metal worker, father of five.

The Burke home at 20 Marine Road was a Norman Rockwell painting, where father-in-law Vinnie sat at the living room piano playing "Darktown Strutter's Ball" in honky tonk, and then Jacquelyn played a sing-a-long of her dad's favorite, "You Are My Sunshine"; where mom made Halloween costumes of a penguin, George Washington, and Uncle Sam; and where Aunt May and Auntie Penny lived downstairs with Nana, who came up every day to have tea with mom.

As Dennis says, "It was "The Waltons."

Johnny wanted his family close. Paul was 32, married, and living downstairs when he bought the Kinnealy house across the street, and when Johnny heard that Paul would be moving, he wept.

"But Dad," said Paul, "it's only across the street."

Despite South Boston's reputation for religious fervor regarding politics, the Burkes were agnostics, so consumed with family that politics was based on friendship.

"My parents adored Louise Day Hicks and Billy Bulger and Ray Flynn," said John, " but that had nothing to do with politics, only personal relations."

Regarding South Boston's greatest political crisis of the past half century – busing – the Burke children escaped the trauma by graduating prior to the problem years

"We grew up in a racially polarized neighborhood, and to be kind, it was not racial, but tribal," says Dennis. "Everybody had to survive, and anybody who wasn't Irish was no good.

" But in our house, I never heard a

(Continued on next page)

This article, excerpted from a profile of South Boston's Burke Family written for the Boston Irish Honors program in 2014, illustrates the reporting and writing style that the late Jack Thomas brought to the eight in-depth pieces he wrote for the program over the years.

A graduate student at Harvard College has written a 77-page dissertation on three Dorchester neighborhoods, Savin Hill, Meetinghouse Hill, and Neponset.

I was eager to read the study because, to use the local phrase, I was raised in Neponset and was curious to learn how an outsider would perceive a neighborhood that for me is filled with intimate memories.

But the study is a failure, dull like so many academic dissertations, and disappointing because although the author interviewed 21 people who live or have lived in Neponset, he missed the nuances of the neighborhood. His report contains some factual errors. Ronan Park is on Adams Street, not Dorchester Avenue. Meetinghouse Hill is several miles north of Neponset, not south.

He says cities have been described in literature from Homer's Troy and Shakespeare's Venice to James Joyce's Dublin, and there are quotations by F. Scott Fitzgerald, the writer, Andrew Greeley, the sociologist, and Edmund Burke, the 18th-century British statesman.

But the student would have understood Neponset better if he had lived there as a boy in Port Norfolk, across the street from Engine 20, and while firemen were off answering an alarm, the neighborhood children would invade the firehouse, scurry up to the second floor, and slide gleefully down the brass pole until the firemen returned to chase them out. Everybody

JULY 18, 1977
AT LARGE / JACK THOMAS

The Way It Was in Dorchester

should slide down the brass pole in a firehouse at least once in life.

He should have forgotten things like the textures, variations, and dynamics of a neighborhood and talked about why Neponset was a unique seaport village, a neighborhood with railroad tracks, a firehouse where old-fashioned sleighs and engines were stored, the Neponset River, Tenean Beach, Garvey Playground, streetcars, vacant lots for games, a boatyard to play tag, and an outdoor theater where you could watch movies from a nearby hill and, after a while, possibly learn to read lips.

The author of the dissertation should have stayed away from phrases like hierarchy of values and priorities and told how boys in Neponset would know enough on a rainy summer morning not to show up for a baseball game at the Garvey playground, but to report instead to the huge, abandoned airplane hangar in Port Norfolk. It was dim inside, of course, but it was also dry, and what other neighborhood, or, indeed, what other major league team had its own domed stadium?

When the student writes about academic objectivity versus honesty, you know he never fished in the Neponset River, or rode a raft to Milton, or sneaked into Frost Coal Co. and raced the neighborhood boys up three-story mountains of coal until everybody was black with dust and had to wash in the river.

He should have avoided phrases like macrocosmic study of rogue streets and described the beauty of the stately homes, with stained-glass windows, servants' quarters, and butlers' pantries built by wealthy Yankees in the 19th Century.

He should have put a penny on the railroad track or put his ear to the rail to listen for the Old Colony commuter train or played in a railroad caboose or simply jumped onto the ladder of the five o'clock freight train to Milton. The ride was exciting and the walk back along the tracks was a time for talk or tag.

He should have resisted the temptation to write about psychological configurations and instead described how easy it was to hop on the back of a trolley for a free ride to Fields Corner. Why didn't he mention street games like hockey, relivo, and all the vacant lots to play half ball with a broomstick? What about the trips to Minot Street to snatch pears and peaches from the orchards?

Does he know that three boys were needed, one to scamper up the tree and shake the branches, one to pick up the fruit, and one to watch for the big German Shepherd, which ran a lot faster than the boys.

The student forgot about the day that some famous America's Cup yachts were built at Lawley's boat yard in Port Norfolk, and he didn't mention that the Keystone factory manufactured toys, and that if you scavenged the rubbish periodically, you could collect the rejects and assemble a model gasoline station or perhaps a model house.

Why didn't he tell about the summer afternoons of jumping off the pilings at Tenean Beach, or the way a southwest wind would carry the sweet smell of chocolate from Walter Baker Co. across Dorchester to the bay?

He should have spent some time shooting baseball cards against the steps of the Community Church or sat under a streetlight on a muggy summer night waiting for the ice cream truck.

The student quotes James Joyce who called the Atlantic Ocean a bowl of bitter tears for all those Irish who left to come to America.

But he shed no tears for boys who grew up in Neponset. It was a wonderful place.

This article from "A Life of Writing" appeared in The Boston Globe edition of May 18, 1977. Reprinted with permission from The Globe, courtesy of CEO Linda Pizzuti Henry.

For Southie's Burkes, 'family' is a sacred word

swear word, not once. It was not allowed. I never heard my parents utter a racial slur or ethnic derogative, never the N-word, never a Jew-word. We were taught to accept people are they are."

As in most Irish households, all the fun took place in the kitchen, and if mom never consulted Julia Child's "Mastering the Art of French Cooking," she is remembered for traditional comfort foods familiar in Irish-American households in the middle of the last century, from fried baloney sandwiches to franks and beans on Saturday night.

"My mother was an awesome cook," recalls John, "unbelievable fried chicken, great beef stew, hamburger with mashed potatoes, eye of the round every Sunday, and Swiss steak, the lousiest cut, which she'd bang the hell out of, then cook and cover with gravy and onions.

And just before bed – cookies and milk, chocolate chip cookies or sometimes saltines with butter. I still crave something sweet before bed."

When World War II broke out, Johnny Burke was unmarried and ineligible for the draft, but at age 38, he shuttered his drugstore and enlisted in the Army to serve three years as a druggist in the medical corps, where he was known as "Pops."

"Here's what I admired about my father," says John. "He treated everybody with respect. When he died,

In this photo, circa late 1950s, Johnny Burke is pictured in his backyard on Marine Road, South Boston sitting with his youngest son Michael, sitting, and standing, clockwise from left: Paul, Jacquelyn, John and Dennis. Right, the adult Burke children with their mom Ellie some years later. Pictured below, left to right: John, Jacquelyn, Paul, Dennis and Michael. ***Photos courtesy Burke family***

people would come up to me – and some were nefarious characters – and they'd say, 'My grandmother used to send me to Johnny Burke's without money and she'd say, 'Tell Johnny it's for me, and he'll take care of it.' And as he was closing the store, people came in to say they owed $20 or $30, whatever."

At the drugstore, the hours were long. Johnny opened at 7, came home for lunch and dinner, and then when back to the store until it closed at 11.

"My father had a great reputation," says John. "When the welfare checks were late, he'd give customers what they needed until the end of the month, and then they'd settle up. My father had the ability to survive 53 years across from the D Street Project because he knew all the parents and all their kids, some of whom were wise guys, but they knew enough not to screw around at Mr. Burke's drugstore."

The five Burke children worked at the drugstore from age 10, stocking shelves, making sundaes, and mixing Bromo Seltzers for people like Jimmy Bromo, who came in every morning for a Bromo, and then came back that night for another.

"It was not lucrative," says John. "At the end of a week, if there were more money in the till than bills, we ate swordfish. If not, we ate tuna casserole."

With five children to educate, Johnny Burke drained the family's meager savings but never sought assistance.

In his final two years, Johnnie Burke was critically ill with Alzheimer's disease, but Ellie refused to have him hospitalized. "We set up a hospital bed at home and took out the thresholds so mom could wheel him to the front porch," recalls Michael, "and all the grandchildren would visit, talk to him, read to him, comb his hair, and shave him, always showing respect."

When Johnny Burke died in 1995, after the underaker was called, his five children helped carry their father's body down the narrw stairway. 'We all carried the old man down to the hearse," said Dennis, "and we did the same thing ten years later for my mother, which is how it should be. Neither Warren Buffett nor Bill Gates will have a better death than my mother and father, who died at home with their family.

"My mother wanted my father buried at Cedar Grove Cemetery," said Dennis, "and we said to my mother, 'Okay, any particular spot?' And she said, 'the Sweeneys and the Cashmans are buried there, so find out where they're buried and see if there are openings nearby. It would be nice to be in the same neighborhood with them.'"

And now, after a lifetime of happiness in Southie, Johnny and Ellie are buried for eternity with their neighbors.

Congratulations to the 2025 Boston Irish honorees

Honorable Claire Cronin

Honorable Marty Meehan

and

Dr. James O'Connell

About the Edward W. Forry and Mary Casey Forry Foundation for Community Journalism

New non-profit salutes legacy of The Reporter's co-founders, trains next generation of journalists

Team Forry at Boston Irish, from left: Edward W. Forry, Publisher, Linda Dorcena Forry, Business Development, William P. Forry, Executive Editor, and above at right, Maureen Forry Sorrell, Associate Publisher. Managing Editor Thomas Mulvoy is at far right in photo at left. *Newsroom photo courtesy Boston College Magazine.*

Proceeds from today's Boston Irish Honors luncheon will support a charitable foundation that seeks to honor the legacy of our co-founders— Ed Forry and Mary Casey Forry— by strengthening and extending the mission of community journalism in Boston's neighborhoods and beyond.

The newly named Edward W. Forry and Mary Casey Forry Foundation for Community Journalism will build on the work of the Forry family and The Reporter newspapers — including BostonIrish.com —that have been an essential source of well-reported news and opinion in Boston for more than 40 years. The foundation will support young journalists in their training and education and provide an entryway into careers in media here in the city of Boston.

The foundation is particularly committed to creating a pipeline of talent from the neighborhoods of Boston, which have been the focus of the Forry family's work since Ed and Mary launched The Reporter from their Dorchester home in 1983.

The foundation was re-named this year to honor Ed Forry, who is the founder of Boston Irish Honors and remains a critical part of The Reporter's team in Dorchester and in the Boston Irish community.

"The Ed and Mary Forry Foundation will be devoted to the idea that was really at the root of our parents when they conceived of The Reporter back in 1983: That the stories of our communities deserve to be better told and that the people who live here are best equipped to do that themselves," said Maureen Forry Sorrell, Ed and Mary's daughter, the president of the foundation.

"In some form or fashion, Ed Forry has been working in the local news business since he set up an amateur radio transmitter in his Dorchester basement at age 15 to tell his neighbors what he saw going on in his community," said Bill Forry, the executive editor and co-publisher of The Reporter.

"Long before he and Mary started The Reporter and the Boston Irish project, he was writing columns and news stories in weekly newspapers in Dorchester, Mattapan, Hyde Park, Jamaica Plain, and South Boston. His unrelenting dedication to covering the neighborhoods of the city has created a path for dozens, perhaps hundreds, of people to follow that journey, too.

"The Dorchester Reporter made me a journalist. I carried skills honed at The Reporter into work for The Associated Press in Germany and assignments at The Wall Street Journal across Europe, Africa and the US. Over the past several years, as an editor based in New York, I have realized how rare an opportunity I had at The Reporter to cover such varied stories under the watch of mentors who cared so deeply about the community they served."

–Pat McGroarty
Economics Editor, New York Times

"We would like to keep that going for years to come – and this foundation will be a perfect vehicle to make that possible."

Mary Casey Forry passed away in 2004 and a charitable foundation was set up in her name at that time to support the work of hospice care in and around Boston. The reconstituted foundation, which now includes Ed's name in its title, continues to support hospice care efforts, but will expand its scope into the journalism space.

A portion of the funds raised by the non-profit entity will assist in paying for the costs of newsgathering and will also fund a scholarship in Ed and Mary's name to support young Bostonians interested in a journalism career.

The foundation partners with local universities and institutions to recruit and train aspiring journalists in city neighborhoods.

"We have those ingredients already at The Reporter – and within the local news ecosystem," said Linda Dorcnea Forry, the co-publisher of the Dorchester Reporter and an officer of the foundation.

The Forry's Reporter brand is nationally recognized as a leader in community journalism and for training the next generation of reporters and editors. In October 2024, The Reporter was awarded an inaugural $100,000 grant from Press Forward and the Miami Foundation as part of its coveted "Closing Local Coverage Gaps" initiative. In 2025, The Reporter was chosen by Boston University's Department of Journalism to be part of its groundbreaking "New England Newsrooms" project, which is training student journalists to support regional news organizations with essential news gathering capacity and to create new

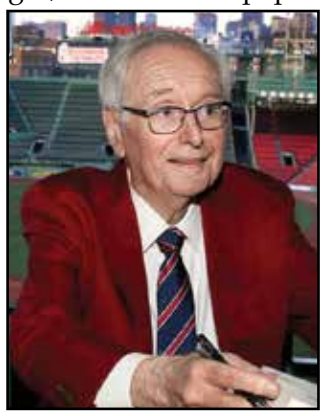
Boston Irish Honors Celebrates Irish Families

The Forry family thanks all who supported today's program, Special thanks to our event co-chairs, Regina Quinlan Doherty and John O'Hara, and to all the members of today's event committee.

The spirit of Boston Irish Honors is captured in the poetic words of a member of our family, 12-year-old Tess Meisel, whose life ended suddenly and tragically on an August morning in a horrific traffic accident.

Look to your God,
Look to your Spirits,
But most of all
Look to your Family,
Because that's where the love begins.
- Tess Jacqueline Tanner Meisel,
1998-2011

For many years, the emcee of Boston Irish Honors was our friend Dick Flavin, a poet, entertainer, author, the Poet Laureate of the Boston Red Sox, a television journalist, political commentator, playwright, and newspaper contributor who loved to tell Irish-American stories, saying:



Dick Flavin, 1926-2022

They represent the best that is in us. We should savor them. All of us here have our own stories, of course. The truth is that everyone else does too, but we Irish like to think we have a corner on the market. All of our stories bear telling and retelling, perhaps with a dash of blarney thrown into the mix; not so as to distort them, understand, but enough to enhance the flavor. After all, even the tastiest Irish story is best served with a bit of garnish.

A new non-profit salutes legacy of Reporter's co-founders

models of sustainability in the news industry.

"We are known for producing high-calibre young journalists who go on to populate other newsrooms," said Linda Dorcena Forry. "Our alumni network is one of our greatest assets – and we'll call on them, too, to help us advance the work of training, and helping to fund, training and scholarships and internships."

Former Reporter journalists have gone on to work in newsrooms across the US, including institutions like Bloomberg News, Boston Globe, Wall Street Journal, Axios, and the New York Times.

Patrick McGroarty is one example. Pat, who has spent the last decade as a journalist at the Wall Street Journal, has just accepted a new position as Economy Editor for the New York Times. He started his career in journalism working at The Reporter with the Forrys and his Boston College mentor, Tom Mulvoy, an associate editor at the Reporter, in 2006.

"The Dorchester Reporter made me a journalist," McGroarty said. "I carried skills honed at The Reporter into work for The Associated Press in Germany and assignments at The Wall Street Journal across Europe, Africa and the US. Over the past several years, as an editor based in New York, I have realized how rare an opportunity I had at The Reporter to cover such varied stories under the watch of mentors who cared so deeply about the community they served.

Jack Conboy, Manager of Advertising and Marketing at Boston Irish, standing at right, discusses ad content with Executive Editor Bill Forry, at middle, and, at computer screen, Production Editor Barbie Langis. ***Photo courtesy Boston College Magazine.***

"With American media under threat and local journalism in retreat, any young journalist would be lucky to make their own start with a mandate as simple as knocking around for the best stories in Boston's largest and most diverse neighborhood. I certainly was."

As Maureen Forry Sorrell says: "Local journalism has never been more important, or more endangered. The big media landscape is a bit of a mess. Algorithms are driving outrage, billionaires are buying megaphones, and truth too often gets drowned out by noise. But here's the good news: News outlets like The Reporter still show up and can help lead the way."

Your support of the Forry Foundation today — and in the future — will help us carry on the mission that Ed Forry and Mary Casey Forry nurtured over the decades and that is thriving through The Reporter and Boston Irish to this day.

Thank you.

For more information on the foundation and how you can help sustain its work with your support, go to forryfoundation.org.

BOSTON IRISH HALL OF HONORS

THIS UNIQUE EVENT CELEBRATES THE HERITAGE OF BOSTON'S IRISH PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES BY HONORING REMARKABLE FAMILIES AND PERSONS WHO SHARE OUR BOSTON IRISH HERITAGE. WHETHER IMMIGRANTS THEMSELVES OR THE DESCENDANTS OF IRISH IMMIGRANTS, BOSTON IRISH HONOREES ARE ADMIRABLE FOR THEIR EXEMPLARY ENDEAVORS IN PUBLIC SERVICE, MEDICINE, EDUCATION,BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP.

2025
DR. JAMES O'CONNELL, M.D.
HON. CLAIRE CRONIN
HON. MARTY MEEHAN

2024
BILLY CLEARY, JR.
HON WILLIAM M. BULGER
REGINA QUINLAN DOHERTY

2023
VINCENT CROTTY & KIERAN JORDAN
HON. MAURA HEALEY
THE ROONEY FAMILY

2022
JON CRONIN
MARY SWANTON
JEREMIAH "JERRY" YORK

2021
MARY SUGRUE
JOSEPH R. NOLAN JR.
ED FORRY

2019
JIM CARMODY
KATHLEEN & JOHN DREW
GRACE COTTER REGAN

2018
REV. RICHARD "DOC" CONWAY
MARY & BOB SCANNELL
DR. TREVOR MCGILL, MD

2017
NORA, ANNMARIE & BILL KENNEDY
TOM TINLIN
KEVIN CULLEN

2016
JIM & MARY (CAHILL) JUDGE
HON. PAUL G. KIRK JR.
KEVIN & JOE LEARY & FAMILY

2015
MARGARET STAPLETON
MIKE SHEEHAN
BPD CMSR WILLIAM EVANS & FAMILY

2014
KATHERINE CRAVEN
MAYOR MARTY WALSH
THE BURKE FAMILY OF SOUTH BOSTON

2013
HON. THERESE MURRAY
GERRY & BOB MULLIGAN FAMILY
JOHN P. DRISCOLL JR.(POSTHUMOUS)

2012
HON. RICHARD NEAL
BRENDAN & GREG FEENEY
MARY & BOB MUSE & FAMILY

2011
KATHLEEN O'TOOLE
HON. TOM KENNEDY
FAMILIES OF
JOSEPH CORCORAN
JAMES HUNT, JR.
MARK & TOM MULVOY

2010
HON. ED MARKEY
JOHN DONOHUE
FAMILIES OF
PEG GERAGHTY;
JIM, HARRY AND BILL BRETT
MAYOR JOHN B. HYNES

Reflection: Boston Irish Honors Luncheon 2024

Names & Faces: Boston Irish Honors Luncheon

More than 350 people were on hand as three legendary figures in the Boston Irish community — Judge Regina Quinlan Doherty, President William M. Bulger, and, Coach Bill Cleary, Jr., at right — were feted at the 14th annual Boston Irish Honors luncheon on Fri., Oct. 25. For the first time, the event was held at John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum overlooking Dorchester Bay and South Boston on Columbia Point.

President Bulger, who attended the event with more than a dozen members of his family, delighted the crowd when he spontaneously broke into song— an "off-script" moment that hushed the crowd and brought many to tears. Reflections from Judge Quinlan Doherty— one of the Commonwealth's most respected jurists— and Coach Cleary were also highlights of the program, which was led for the first time by a sister-duo: former State Senator Linda Dorcena Forry and Maureen Forry Sorrell.

John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Oct. 25, 2025

Clockwise, from right: State Senate and UMass President Bill Bulger with daughters Sarah and Mary; Harvard Coach Bill Cleary Jr.; Linda Dorcena Forry, Regina Quinlan Doherty and Maureen Forry Sorrell; Rev. Jack Ahern (seated), Tom Tinlin, Linda Dorcena Forry, Bob Scannell, Bill Forry; Judge Quinlan Doherty during her introduction by Judge Christopher Muse; Former US Senator Paul Kirk, honorary co-chair.