

A golden decade in a familiar Boston home

By Ray O'Hanlon

If you were going to build a literal bridge from America to Ireland, Boston Harbor would be as good a place to start as any. If symbolism and heritage had any part in the planning, it would be the most appropriate starting point.

The Irish have long considered Boston a home away from home, an extension of their native place.

They are not alone of course, but the links between Boston, between Massachusetts, and Ireland are standout, permanent, very special.

As such, there are many bridges between the Bay State and the Emerald Isle: cultural, social, emotional, and physical in terms of trade and economic exchange.

Hence Golden Bridges, an annual endorsement and celebration of all these links now a decade on the go in its favorite venue: the Seaport Hotel.

The Golden Bridges conference took initial flight in New York in 2007 but very quickly took wing northward to its first Boston gathering, in 2008, at the John F. Kennedy Library where eleven Golden Bridges awards were presented to ten individuals and one company. Those individuals were as varied as former congressman Marty Meehan and Ken Casey of the band Dropkick Murphys.

From that sacred space the conference moved the following year to the Seaport Hotel and World Trade Center.

Back in 2009, the Northeast/Northwest flavor of the gathering was not confined to those areas. Golden Bridges has its own flexible frontiers. So New York still has a say in deliberations. So has Belfast and Dublin.

In that '09 year the chief honoree was Massachusetts Lieutenant Governor Timothy Murray and Mary Louise Mallick, First Deputy Comptroller of the State of New York, led a premier list of conference speakers and participants.

Other participants included Gary Hanley, head of North American operations for Invest Northern Ireland, and Michael Heaney, Director of Services with Donegal County Council, and Conor Murphy who, at the time, was Minister for Regional Development in the Northern Ireland power sharing government.

Local participants included Massachusetts State Senator Therese Murray, the first woman president of that body, and James Barnes, Community Development Director for the City of Lawrence, Tim Cahill, Treasurer and Receiver General for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and Sean P. Moynihan, founder and Principal of the Moynihan Group, a Boston-based legal and consultancy firm.

The following year, 2010, would be a standout for a very particular reason. The venue was the Marriott Copley Place Hotel and the main guest speaker was Mayor of County Donegal, Cora Harvey.

Awards were presented to a number of individuals and organizations but this year there would be a special award in memory of Dave Burke, a member of the Ancient Order of Hibernians and cornerstone figure in the Irish American community in Massachusetts.

Burke had passed not long before the Golden Bridges gathering. He himself had been honored in the 2007 event and had spoken the following year at the JFK Library gathering.

Of Burke, Ed Forry of the Boston Irish Reporter would write: "The late Lawrence Hibernian leader David R. Burke will be memorialized with the dedication of a bronze plaque in his memory at the An

Gorta Mor Memorial in Lawrence's Immaculate Conception Cemetery. Former Ambassador to the Vatican Raymond L. Flynn will be the principal speaker. He will be joined by Ireland's Consul General to Boston, Michael Lonergan, and several AOH and LAOH national, state, and county Officers.

"Burke was a member of Division Eight, Ancient Order of Hibernians for over 40 years and served as an officer in various capacities on national, state and county boards as well as on the division level. An enthusiastic supporter of Irish history and culture, he was instrumental in organizing and orchestrating annually Irish Heritage Month in the city of Lawrence. He was the founder and president of the Irish Foundation of Lawrence, Inc., and also the Irish Room and Hibernian Collection at the South Lawrence Branch Library, which houses one of the largest collections of Irish books, media, memorabilia and periodicals in the Northeast."

The inaugural David Burke Award (it would become more familiar as the Dave Burke Award) was presented by Dave's wife, Pat, to a legendary son of Southie, Raymond Flynn, former mayor of Boston and U.S. ambassador to the Vatican.

As well as the former mayor, a future mayor, Marty Walsh, was also a 2010 conference participant.

In 2011, the conference returned to the Seaport Hotel. It featured a "Showcase Seminar on Northwest Ireland" and an opening address by State Senate President Therese Murray.

Away from the Seaport conference hub there was a roundtable discussion at the Massachusetts State House, hosted by State Representative Eugene O'Flaherty, and a business breakfast at the University of Massachusetts Lowell Inn and Conference Center.

Visitors from Ireland's Northwest that year included Mayor of Donegal Noel McBride, and Sharon O'Connor, CEO of Derry City Council. Irish diplomacy was represented by Consul General in Boston, Michael Lonergan. Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams was also a participant and took part in an interview conducted by Kevin Cullen of the Boston Globe. Other participants and honored guests included Ray Flynn, Mary Sugrue-McAleer, Executive Director of the Irish American Partnership.

Art McCabe, Economic Development Manager for the City of Lawrence, was the winner of the Dave Burke Award and Pat Burke once again did the honors by pre-



Dave Burke.



The Seaport Hotel is both venue and home for Golden Bridges.

senting.

The 2012 conference would welcome, among a range of political figures from Massachusetts and Ireland's Northwest, Irish government minister Dinny McGinley, and Minister Stephen Farry from the Northern Ireland Department of Employment and Learning.

One of the honorees that year bore a particularly famous political name and that was Thomas P. O'Neill III.

The conference was notable for it being the occasion of the first woman winner of the Dave Burke Award, Kathleen O'Toole, one of the top law enforcement figures in Massachusetts.

O'Toole's law enforcement career has spanned both a continent and an ocean. She served as the first female commissioner in Boston. She would later cross the Atlantic and take up the post of first Chief Inspector of the Garda Inspectorate before returning to the U.S. to lead the Seattle Police Department.

There would be no conference in 2013. The reason was a positive one, however. The prime convener of Golden Bridges, Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, was serving as Lord Mayor of Belfast and duties there ruled out both his organizing work for the event, and flying the Atlantic.

The conference reconvened in 2014 at the Seaport Hotel and worked to the theme of "New Alliances in a New Era." The Irish government was represented by Minister of State Joe McHugh and other Atlantic crossers included Brenda Stevenson, Mayor of Derry, and artist Robert Ballagh. The arts were also represented by Irish-born singer and conference honoree Danny Hutton of Three Dog Night fame.

Mayor Marty Walsh attended, as did his predecessor Ray Flynn. The Dave Burke Award was presented to Billy Sullivan of AOH Division 8 in Massachusetts.

The 2015 conference opened on a high note. In fact notes of all levels. It began with a cultural showcase featuring The Belfast Community Gospel Choir and Kaz Hawkins and also featured dancers from the Heavey Quinn Academy of Irish Dance. Mayor Marty Walsh returned, and the Irish government was represented by Consul General Fionnuala Quinlan.

Mayor of Donegal Ciaran Brogan participated, as did the Mayor of Derry and Strabane, Elisha McCallion.

Boston Police commissioner Bill Evans and Sean Moynihan, President of the Irish Network, held up the host town's end and the Dave Burke Award was presented to Dr. John Lahey, President of Quinnipiac University in Connecticut.

2016 was of course a standout year in Irish historical terms. Minister Joe McHugh,

who is from Donegal, made a welcome return visit.

The West of Ireland was not forgotten in the big year, Chicago-based Senator Billy Lawless, a Galway native, being presented with the Courage of Connacht Award.

The Heart of Irish America Award, meanwhile, went to Massachusetts State Representative Tim Whelan and broadcaster Seamus Mulligan, of the Irish hit Parade on radio station WROL, was recipient of the Dave Burke Award.

Minister Joe McHugh, whose portfolio covered "Gaeilge, Gaeltacht and the Islands, made it back for the 2017 conference and was by now so familiar with its mood and purpose that he threw away his scripted speech and spoke from the heart.

John Kelpie, CEO of Derry City and Strabane District Council, also a multiple conference attendee, presented the Golden Bridges Award for Service to Peace and Reconciliation to Norman Houston, Director of the Northern Ireland Bureau in the U.S. Massachusetts State Representative Mary Keefe was presented with the Golden Bridges Award for Services to Irish American Politics. Maureen Coyle of the Maine Irish Heritage Center was the recipient of the Award for Services to the Irish Diaspora, while the Dave Burke Award was presented to Bob Collins of AOH Division 8.

And so to 2018. Golden Bridges will reconvene at the Seaport Hotel and will mark a decade of association with the venue on Thursday, November 15, and Friday November 16.

As it is every year, the purpose of the conference is to promote partnerships between the Northeast United States and Northwest by highlighting community, business, and education initiatives, this by bringing together leaders from both sides of the Atlantic in a venue overlooking Boston Harbor.

The 2018 honorees are Abbots Ireland; Allstate; Bill McLaughlin, IACBN; Cathal McGloin; Dave Barrett, Director, Irish Cultural Center of New England, recipient of the Dave Burke Award; Kevin Monaghan, Irish Labor Leader; Margaret Lynch, Cleveland, Ohio; Tim Murray, Worcester Chamber of Commerce; Victoria Denoon; Vinny O'Malley, Executive Director, Maine Irish Heritage Center.

Bridges are links. Golden Bridges links Massachusetts, Boston, and the U.S. Northeast to the new Ireland, the one where ancient ties between counties in the island's Northwest are spurring new joint business and economic ventures, regardless of lines on the map.

Long may this continue!