

Jazz Band calls all swing dancers for St. Patrick's Day

by JESSICA L. FINCH
Associate Editor

Put on those dancing shoes and get ready to bid — it's time again for Amherst High School's annual Big Band Dance and Silent Auction.

"Come and enjoy the music. There will be some great items auctioned off," said Amherst Band Director Craig Incontro.

This is the 12th year that Amherst's band and orchestra students have organized the dance and auction.

From 7 to 11 p.m. Saturday, March 17, the Amherst High School gymnasium, 4301 Main St., will be turned into a jazz club featuring the award-winning Amherst Jazz Band playing swing and jazz music for three hours.

Anyone needing to take a break from swing dancing can waltz through the tables of silent auction items. Incontro said that in the past, items available for bidding included restaurant gift certificates, autographed sports memorabilia, tools and jewelry.

The money raised helps the students pay for the band and orchestra trips.

"We welcome everyone from the community to come in and listen to the band," he said, adding that 20 students are featured in the Jazz Band.

On March 3, six of the band members were featured in the All-Erie-County Jazz Festival. Last year, Amherst's Jazz Band was named the Top Jazz Band at a national band competition held in Virginia Beach, Va.

Students organize the entire event, do the legwork for the silent auction by asking community members for donations and also run the dance, with the assistance of Incontro and parent volunteers.

The Big Band Dance and Silent Auction has been the band and orchestra's largest fundraiser of the year.

Tickets cost \$5. For information, call Incontro at 362-8354.

'DIVA by DIVA' celebrates eighth birthday

"DIVA by DIVA: A Celebration of Women," Western New York's longest-running show, celebrates its eighth consecutive season in March with "Bring Your Daughter to DIVA!"

The show, conceived, written and produced by Mary Kate O'Connell and O'Connell & Company, "DIVA by DIVA: A Celebration of Women" is a fast-paced, cabaret-style event filled with songs, readings, poetry, humor and quotes for, by and about women. During its long and laugh-filled run, more than 150 local DIVAs have participated in the production. And over the years, no two shows or casts have ever been exactly alike.

The special birthday DIVA performances are dedicated to the women who have made a difference in the audience's lives and will feature special guest DIVAs, prizes and surprises.

Special "Bring Your Daughter to DIVA!" performances will be held at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, March 21 and 22; at 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, March 23 and 24; and at 2 p.m. Sunday, March 25.

All seats are \$20. Call 839-3949 or visit www.oconnellandcompany.com.

All performances are at The Cabaret in the Square Theatre, Snyder Square, 4476 Main St. at Harlem Road.

Fancy footwork

Local Irish dancers victorious at world championships

by BREANN HOWELL
Editor

St. Patrick's Day may be just around the corner, but the spirit of Ireland can be found all year in Rince Na Tiarna Irish dance school.

Practicing in rented studios in South Buffalo, East Aurora, Kenmore, Williamsville and Erie, Pa., dozens of students kick up their heels each week.

Directed by instructor Mary Kay Heneghan, dancers learn to master the toe-tapping, feet-flying moves of Irish dancing, all while keeping their arms rigid at their sides.

Several came home from the February 2007 All-Ireland Dance Championships with awards, and others have earned spots in the upcoming world championships in Scotland.

Though just about everyone is familiar with the jig, mastering the lightning-quick footwork of traditional Irish dance takes practice, poise and a whole lot of dedication and finesse, Heneghan said.

Heneghan, who recently moved from West Seneca to Orchard Park, has been teaching lessons since she was 4. She opened her own school in 1986 but said Irish dancing was really popularized about a decade ago by "Riverdance" and "Lord of the Dance."

"When 'Riverdance' hit, everyone wanted to Irish dance," said Heneghan, who teaches classes six days a week.

Though her company's name, Rince Na Tiarna, is Gaelic for "Lord of the Dance," Heneghan said it was not inspired by the Michael Flatley musical but rather by the song, often performed as a hymn.

"I always like the song 'Lord of the Dance,'" she said. "So, I had someone translate it into Gaelic."

Though her parents hail from Ireland, Heneghan said her students come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds.

Rince Na Tiarna dancers, ranging from age 3 to college students, wear soft shoes, often compared to ballet slippers, and hard shoes that click and clack on the floor. The dances can be performed individually or by teams of four to 20 people.

Though the majority of her dancers are girls, Heneghan does have about nine male students.

While she said she loves teaching dances to new students, the instructor said

her least favorite part of her job is choosing whom to send to competitions.

"What's hard is, it's competitive," she said.

"You have to scrutinize

which dancers get to compete."

At competitions, females don elaborate embroidered dresses designed by Heneghan. Unlike ballerinas or other types of dancers, Irish dancers wear the same outfit for all their competitions and shows. Once they outgrow the costume, they resell it, according to Heneghan.

In addition to designing outfits for her students, Heneghan has assisted with costume design for the 2001 movie, "Rockstar."

Heneghan's students compete overseas twice each year. In their most recent competition, the All-Ireland Championships, four dancers traveled to Killarney, Ireland, and all four came home with medals.

Winners were Kevinah Dargan of Williamsville, who placed fifth overall, first in hard shoe and 12th in soft shoe; Fiona Dargan of Williamsville, second overall, fourth in hard shoe and fourth in soft shoe; Erin Lynch of Williamsville, 16th overall and 12th in hard shoe; and Rose White of Rochester, who placed 22nd overall and 16th in

hard shoe.

Kevinah, Erin and Rose, along with Darcy Regan of Amherst, will represent Rince Na Tiarna in April in the World Irish Dancing Championships in Glasgow, Scotland. Kevinah was the 2005 world champion, the youngest female in North American history to win the world championship, according to Heneghan. The former world champ is now 13.

While most of the dancers

take about two classes a week, it's up to them to practice more on their own.

"Just like anything, the more you want it, the more you'll practice,"

Heneghan said.

The Rince Na Tiarna owner noted that there are approximately seven other Irish dance schools in the area, two of which also compete internationally.

In the week leading up to St. Patrick's Day, Rince Na Tiarna students will have more than 60 performances, including dancing at three weddings on March 17.

The Irish dancers can be seen during the following performances:

March 16 — 11:30 a.m., at the cafe in the Larkin Building, 726 Exchange St., Buffalo; 5:30 p.m., Hearthstone Manor, 333 Dick Road, Depew; 7:30 p.m., Roycroft Inn, 40 South Grove St., East Aurora; 9 p.m., Buffalo Irish Center, 245 Abbott Road, Buffalo.

March 17 — 7 p.m. at the Buffalo Irish Center.

March 18 — 5:15 p.m. at the Buffalo Irish Center and 7 p.m. at Malone's Pub, 3020 Delaware Ave., Buffalo.

For more information on Rince Na Tiarna, call 675-8785.

e-mail: bhowell@beenews.com

What's Going On

Temple Beth Zion to hold adult education course

Temple Beth Zion will hold adult education courses from noon to 1:30 p.m. Wednesdays, March 14, 21 and 28 at 700 Sweet Home Road, Amherst. For more information, call 836-6565, ext. 12.

WIICH to host mini-fashion show

Women Interested in Cystic Health will host a Mini-Fashion Show at noon Wednesday, March 14 at The Protocol Restaurant on Transit Road. The cost is \$20. For reservations, call 652-9613 or 652-0375.

Church to host artist work March 15

The Amherst Community Church will host works by Abby Lammers at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, March 15 at 77 Washington Highway, Snyder. Call 634-7015.

Garden club to meet at Forest Elementary

The Forest Stream Garden Club will meet at 6:45 p.m. Thursday, March 15 at the Forest Elementary School, 250 North Forest Road, Williamsville. Al Festaiuti, owner of A&B Landscape Services, Inc. will present a program on organic gardening methods.

Seminar to inform about thyroid problems

Dr. John Zilliox, a chiropractor, will present "Could it be your thyroid — what doctor's don't tell" at 7 p.m. Thursday, March 15 at Positive Health and Wellness, 3316 Sheridan Drive, Amherst. For more information or reservations, call 833-1664.

South High to address the dangers of bullying

Williamsville South High School will host a parent program as an extension of the Rachel's Challenge student assembly from 7 to 8 p.m. Thursday, March 15 at the school, 5950 Main St.

Voters features speaker on health of Great Lakes

Jennifer Nalbhone of Great Lakes United will be the guest speaker at the Issues Luncheon sponsored by the Amherst Unit of the League of Women Voters of Buffalo/Niagara at noon Friday, March 16, at Scotch and Sirloin Restaurant, 6999 Maple Road. Nalbhone will address invasive species as they affect the Great Lakes and contributing waters. She will cover current and ongoing methods of control as well as legislation at the state and national level. Interested persons are invited to attend this public meeting. The cost to attend is \$13 per person. Call 633-7069.

Sweet Home lacrosse to benefit from breakfast

The Sweet Home High School lacrosse program will hold a pancake breakfast from 8 to 10:30 a.m. Saturday, March 17 at the school, 1901 Sweet Home Road. The cost is \$5. Call 250-1463.

Trinity United Methodist Church to hold dinner

Trinity United Methodist Church will host an all you can eat spaghetti dinner from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. Saturday, March 17 at Trinity United Methodist Church, 711 Niagara Falls Blvd., Amherst.

Big Band Dance and Silent Auction set

Amherst High School's Big Band Dance and Silent Auction will be held from 7 to 11 p.m. Saturday, March 17 at the Amherst High School gymnasium, 4301 Main St., Amherst. Tickets cost \$5. Call 362-8354.

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