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The 38th Cleveland Irish Cultural Festival Returns to Northeast Ohio

Festival cancellations due to Covid-19 finally lift

CLEVELAND, OHIO, June 27 – The 38th Cleveland Irish Cultural Festival makes its return to Northeast Ohio after a three-year hiatus caused by Covid-19 and scheduling conflicts in 2022. The three-day event will take place Friday, July 14th through Sunday, July 16th at the Cuyahoga County Fairgrounds.

The festival is expected to draw over 30,000 people from across the tri-state region, all descending on the area to celebrate Irish culture and its traditions.

John O’Brien Sr. started the festival in 1982 with the goal of celebrating Irish music, dancing, sports and theater among Clevelanders. Currently, there is an estimated population of 1.6 million Irish people living in the state of Ohio with over 13% residing in the Greater Cleveland Metropolitan area alone.

“We didn’t know it would become an annual thing,” said O’Brien Sr. “We had nearly 4,000 people at the first one and they kept asking about the next one so we kept it going.”

The festival, which was originally two days, moved to the fairgrounds in 1990, making way for more space to introduce new exhibits and activities. The event is known for its musical entertainment and draws national and international Irish bands, while things like a petting zoo, crafts, a fireworks show, and camogie games round out the weekend with family-focused activities.

O’Brien Sr. passed the festival baton to his son-in-law, Phillip Parente, who has a vision to make this year’s event and those to follow, a destination for everyone.

“We have so much going on this year that people can come when we open and stay all day until we close,” he said. “You don’t even have to be Irish.”

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A few changes to this year’s festival include going cashless for on-site admission, food, beverages, and merchandise. Parente said the progressive move is to help improve the guest experience and offer secure transactions.

“We think we'll see fewer lines, less wait times and better service,” Parente said. “Plus people won’t have to worry about carrying cash around or searching for an ATM with high fees.”

Going cashless is considered the future of festivals due to its ease and convenience, along with increasing the amount of money people will spend. Cashless payment volumes are expected to increase 43% by 2025, according to Tappit’s Global CEO, Jason Thomas.

Several new musical acts have also been added to the weekend’s itinerary with performances by Ally the Piper, The Bow Tides, The Elders, and Seanie Vaughn. They join familiar favorites like The High Kings, Brigid’s Cross, and The Prodigals.

Parente thinks the changes and additions will be beneficial to everyone, including younger audiences he hopes to attract, while still appealing to older generations who have been coming to the festival since the beginning.

“We have people who brought their kids here when they were little and now those kids are bringing their own. We want them to grow up with it and really learn about and appreciate the rich Irish culture.

About the Cleveland Irish Cultural Festival

The three day event takes place at the Cuyahoga County Fairgrounds, 19201 E Bagley Rd, Middleburg Heights, OH 44130. The festival hours are Friday, July 14th from 5:00 - 11:00 p.m., Saturday, July 15th from 1:00 - 11:00 p.m. and Sunday, July 16th from 1:00 - 10:00 p.m. A mass will be celebrated at 11:30 a.m. on the 16th. Parking is free and children under 10 get free admission. Advanced tickets can be purchased online. General admission is $15.00 per day and a weekend pass is $35.00. For more information, visit www.clevelandirish.org

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