

2024 PARADE GRAND MARSHALLS

If you ask the organizers of the **Ancient Order of Hibernians Saint Patrick's Day Parade in Dogtown** how their parade started forty years ago, they will tell you that there are hundred and one different stories to explain the parade's beginning. But they will add in their typical Irish way “and each one is true!”

Discussions about starting a “new” parade had been underway for a while, but it was a final vote by the Joint St. Louis and St. Louis County Boards of the Ancient Order of Hibernians in 1983 to turn the parade into a reality.

So shortly after the vote, the Hibernians began planning in earnest. Getting the event off the ground faced long odds. There was already a "St. Patrick's Day" parade held in Downtown St. Louis. But it was usually held on the Saturday before St. Patrick's Day, not on the saint's actual feast day, March 17.

Honoring St. Patrick on his “special day was important to the Hibernians. The Hibernians also felt the downtown parade was more of a civic event and the Hibernians wanted to put on a parade to focus on celebrating Irish heritage.

To accomplish this goal at their first meeting following the vote, the Hibernians decided the parade should showcase a number of Irish-oriented themes. First and foremost, obviously the parade should honor St. Patrick as the Apostle of Ireland on his feast day. They also felt the parade should promote Irish heritage history, culture, and be a celebration of their Irish-Catholic faith. Finally, they wanted to highlight the many contributions of Irish to America.

To recognize the 40th Anniversary of the first event, the organizers of 2024 parade are dedicating the parade to the founders of the first St. Patrick's Day parade. Of that original group, three remaining "founders", **Jim Sheerin**, **Tim Wiese** and **Jim Mohan**, will be honored **as Grand Marshals** of the **2024** parade.

Sheerin and Wiese were members of group that cast the original vote to create the parade. They later were part of the original committee, along with Mohan handling Public Relations, that began to turn the parade a reality.

One first thing the committee wanted to establish was the parade's "Irish" identity. To do that they focused on the touchstone of their community, the Irish family.

The key element of every Hibernian St. Patrick's Day Parade since 1984 is the marching of the family "clans." Every year St. Louis Irish families gather and parade together as a unit, each group carrying signs emblazoned with their family name or crest. Hibernians say the family clans is what makes their parade so special.

For the first two years the parade was held in St. Louis County. But it in 1986 the parade was moved to Dogtown, the city's last remaining "Irish" neighborhoods.

The Hibernians' original goal in putting on the event was to mount a parade similar to typical celebration one might find in a small town in Ireland in the 1800's. During that period, the Irish would gather together and then parade through their small towns, past the church and then the day with a festival. The Dogtown neighborhood was the perfect setting to make this Hibernian dream come true.

Over the years the Hibernian Parade as grown to become one the premiere events in the City of St. Louis. Annually it is named the "top ten" of things to do in St. Louis. A few years ago, St. Louis Magazine ranked the Hibernian Parade in its top three, just behind the St. Louis Cardinals and Ted Drewe's Frozen Custard, to say the least a pretty elite group. The people of St. Louis also have spoken and have numerous times named the Hibernian Parade the "Best Parade" in the city.