

Radio show yields 'green' for DeSales High

By Lee Francis Strong
Staff writer

GENEVA — Why is Dublin, Ireland, the largest city in the world?

Because it's Dublin — as in "dublin" — everyday.

Although such jokes can spur a few groans, they are also among the staples of Ed Tracey's annual fundraising St. Patrick's Day radio broadcast.

From 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Tuesday, March 17, the DeSales High School principal will share Irish jokes, news, music and history with listeners on 1240 WGVA-AM, as part of his annual "radio-thon" to raise money for the school at 90 Pulteney St.

This year marks the marathon's 15th anniversary — an anniversary that almost didn't take place.

"I wasn't going to do it this year," Tracey explained. "I thought 14 years was enough. But the station called and said, 'You're going to do it this year, right?'"

The marathon's financial success also played a factor in Tracey's decision to do the show. Previous marathons have raised thousands of dollars for the school through pledges, sponsors and challenges.

"I sing for money," Tracey acknowledged, laughing. "It's no problem for me. It's money for DeSales."

The principal said he hopes to raise money this year toward replacing the school's ancient boiler, which, he said, will not last through another winter.

And even though his Irish program is not likely to raise the \$30-40,000 necessary to purchase a brand new boiler, the effort will help alert the community to the school's needs, Tracey said.

"People hear that, you never know when you'll get a donation," he said.

In addition to raising money, promoting awareness of DeSales and its needs has been the program's aim since Tracey started it in 1978.

When he first conceived of the idea to perform the fundraiser, Tracey said he thought about a telethon. He opted for radio because there are no television stations based in Geneva. WGVA officials embraced the idea after Tracey contacted them.

Serving as the show's master of ceremonies, the DeSales principal introduces music, tells jokes, mentions students' names on the air, announces the "Honorary Irishman of the Year," and talks with guests. He has even spoken by phone with visitors and public officials from Ireland.

"It's just delightful to hear the Irish



Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor

DeSales High School Principal Edward Tracey (right) has been hosting his annual St. Patrick's Day radio broadcast for 15 years. He has been joined in the mornings by WGVA radio personality Jerry Sherwin.

accent," Tracey said.

Preparing for the show is a year-round effort for Tracey. He subscribes to two Irish newspapers to keep informed of news. He has amassed a library of books about Ireland to prepare himself for any questions listeners ask him on the air. Tracey and his wife, Beryl, also scour record shops regularly for the latest in Irish music.

Tracey's own roots are decidedly Irish, albeit with a dash of New York City. He recalled that as the child of Irish immigrants, "it was a sin to miss the St. Patrick's Day parade in New York."

All of Tracey's preparation pays off during the show, regular listeners said.

"We wouldn't miss it," declared Tom Long, whose wife, Mary, graduated from DeSales in 1934. "We look forward to it. We get up early to listen."

"I get up and turn the radio on for the 6 a.m. news, and keep in on all day," Mary Long said. "I just love the music."

"His program for St. Patrick's Day is solid Irish music," remarked Gene McFadden, whose son, Robert, was a 1991 graduate of DeSales. "It's been reported — and I believe it's true — that he could tape it and sell it."

Tracey noted that he has received

positive feedback from listeners during broadcasts as well. "Someone stopped on the (New York State) Thruway one time," Tracey recalled. The driver had been passing through Geneva, picked up the station on the radio and stopped at a rest stop "to thank me," the principal said.

The broadcasts also include Irish history and geography quizzes. "So I better know my stuff," Tracey remarked. "I'm representing DeSales."

This constant awareness that he is representing the school also means that Tracey is careful with what he says and the music he plays during the show because of Ireland's political ten-


sions.

In fact, Tracey said, the theme for this year's marathon is "The Orange and the Green and Peace in Between." The focus is based on the colors in the Irish flag, representing Protestants (orange) and Catholics (green).

But even though he's careful about stepping on potential political land mines, he said the show's heart remains in its music and celebration of Irish customs.

"It's a fun thing," Tracey said. "It brings a lot of joy. I feel like it's a ministry now."

And that's no blarney.




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