

Deacon traveled to Ireland to compete for a pub

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — About six weeks ago, Deacon Gregory R. Sampson of Irondequoit's St. Thomas the Apostle Parish received a flyer in the mail pitching clergy tour packages to Ireland.

But the deacon was still awaiting word as to whether he had won Guinness Import Company's "Win Your Own Pub in Ireland" contest. He briefly considered the tour flyer before discarding it.

"I said, 'Nah, I'll just win the contest,'" Deacon Sampson recalled saying flipantly.

He admits, however, that he was surprised as anyone a few days later when he was named one of 10 finalists from the United States in the contest sponsored by Guinness.

Deacon Sampson remembered this fateful phone call from the contest organizers, as he shared a pint of Guinness with his wife, Carole, at McGinnity's Restaurant & Party House, 534 W. Ridge Road, last Thursday evening, May 19.

"I got the phone call about a half-hour before I had to preach the homily," Deacon Sampson said. "I figured it was some siding salesman that are always calling, and I was tempted to pick up the phone and say 'I'm not interested!' and hang up."

Fortunately, Deacon Sampson's Christian ethical framework contained his contempt for phone marketing. He stayed on long enough to learn that his and nine other 50-word essays describing the "perfect pint of Guinness" had been selected out of a total of 31,000 entries submitted.

"I was just flabbergasted," he said. "I told everyone I knew. I was stopping complete strangers as well and telling them."

The deacon's winning essay, titled "The Limitations of Physics, went like this:

"The physics professor tells us that the perfect pint is precisely 0.47317 liter. But the physics professor is wrong. The perfect pint is Guinness."

Guinness rewarded the deacon's flattery by flying him and his wife — along with the other nine finalists — to Ireland on May 12. They were taken on extensive tours of Ireland's capital, Dublin, including a stop at the Guinness brewery, and through the seaport city of Cobh in the



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer
Deacon Gregory Sampson demonstrates the finer points of pulling a pint of Guinness at McGinnity's Tavern in Rochester.

southern Ireland province of Munster.

The company apparently was unflinching in its treatment of the finalists, treating them to sumptuous meals, generous amounts of Guinness, and free hotel accommodations. The deacon was equally as lavish in his praise for the company's largesse.

"If you wanted to pay for something you had to sneak it in," Deacon Sampson recalled.

On Monday, May 16, the finalists gathered at Connie Doolan's in Cobh. Doolan's was the pub to be rewarded to the finalist whose combined score in dart-throwing, pint-pulling, and oratory exceeded that of the other contestants. Deacon Sampson had practiced

throwing darts at home with his son-in-law, Jason Hubbard. He also spent a few evenings at various Irish cultural events in McGinnity's, learning to pull pints from the tap.

"The head had to be just 'proud' of the top, not over," the deacon said, describing a phenomenon that can only be seen, not reported.

Each finalist also had to recite a new essay of 50 words or less just for the big night, with the subject being, "Why I should own Connie Doolan's."

"Three things the owner must give to the pub," the deacon recited. "Work, worry, love."

"Three things the owner must always remember," he continued. "The guests,

the glassware, the Guinness.

"If these things be done, then there will be three things to be found in the pub," he concluded. "Tradition, Democracy, Happy Hearts."

Despite his eloquent sentiments, Deacon Sampson, along with eight others, lost out to 27-year-old Jay Mulligan, a native of the Irish-American stronghold of South Boston, Mass.

After winning the pub, the previously unemployed Mulligan proved a gracious winner, according to the *Irish Times*. The paper reported that he called for a moment of silence after receiving the pub keys from Connie Doolan, director of trade relations for Guinness, and the pub's namesake.

"Ladies and gentleman, the drinks are on the house," Mulligan said.

Deacon Sampson joked that his Norwegian ethnic roots may have worked against his chances in the contest.

"Mulligan probably has a better shot than Sampson," he laughed.

"I would really have liked to win it," Deacon Sampson admitted. "But everybody was happy that Jay won. He was just a wonderful guy. There were tears streaming out of his eyes when he won."

Indeed, all the finalists so liked each other that they plan to reunite a year from now, Deacon Sampson said.

"We got to be a close-knit group," he explained. "We got to do some real serious bonding."

Despite losing the contest, Deacon Sampson and his wife saw the beauty of Ireland — something the couple had dreamed about for years. And it was all "on the house."

"There's no two ways about it," he said. "I'm going back again."

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