

SENIOR LIFESTYLES

Accordionist shares love of Irish via broadcast

By Rob Cullivan
Staff Writer

BRIGHTON — If you tune in to WWWG-1460AM on your radio from 4-5 p.m. Sunday, March 12, and give a listen to "Irish Party House," host Ted McGraw, 62, may tell you about a prominent Irish music group coming to town. Or maybe he'll read your name over the air during one of the show's many song dedications.

"Most of the time, if I see people out and about around town, they'll button-hole me for that," he said of dedications.

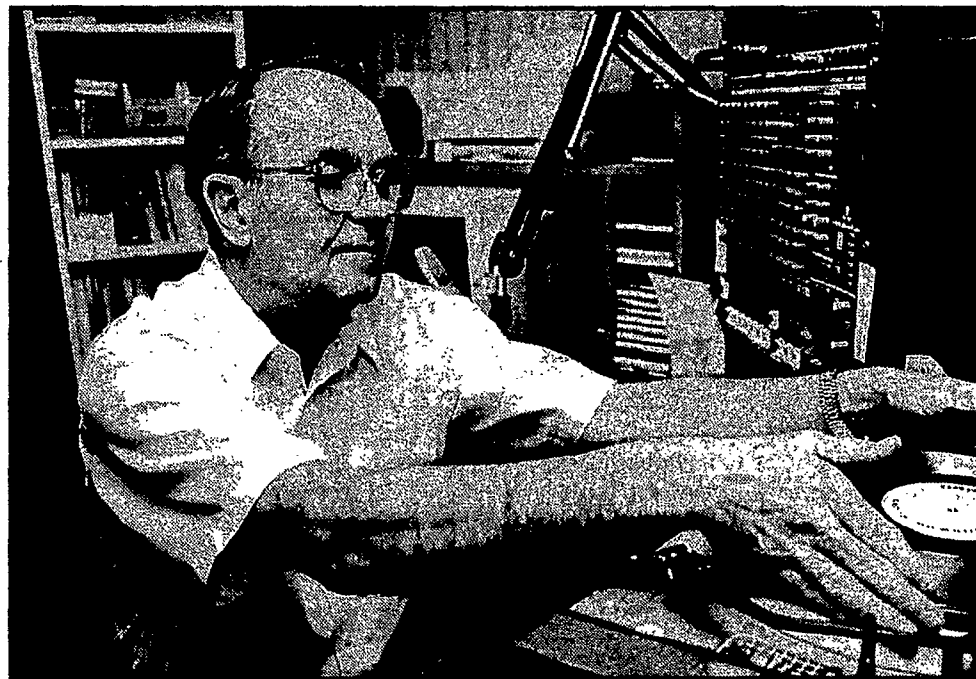
In its 26th year, "Irish Party House" was created by McGraw, a living encyclopedia of Irish music and culture. A retired Eastman Kodak Company engineer, McGraw plays the button accordion in his spare time and also hosts "O' Fiddler," a radio show devoted to traditional fiddle music on WRUR-88.5FM Sundays from 10 a.m. to noon.

McGraw, who is married with three children and four grandchildren, has devoted much of his spare time to Irish and U.S. folk music since the 1950s when he was a student at St. John Fisher College in Pittsford. At that time, he began sitting in with local Irish musicians, developing his expertise on the accordion and starting a collection of Celtic music, which he says now numbers in the thousands of recordings.

"There used to be a lot of Irish music on the radio in the '50s," McGraw said during an interview in the WWWG studio, from which he broadcasts "Irish Party House."

"I always thought it was uplifting, with happy melodies."

The Irish and the fiddle shows are labors of love for McGraw. Fringe benefits have included interviews such legends as piper Paddy Moloney, leader of the world-



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Edward "Ted" McGraw, host of Irish Party House, puts a record on the turntable while recording a session in his home March 1 for a future broadcast.

renowned traditional Irish group, The Chieftains.

McGraw buys many of the recordings his listeners hear, although he occasionally gets promotional recordings from record companies. He said he makes an effort to focus on Irish and Irish-American performers not necessarily heard on other Irish music shows in the country. He especially likes to play songs particular to the various counties that make up Ireland, since these tunes evoke memories for immigrant listeners.

McGraw grew up attending Our Lady of Lourdes Church, just down the road from WWWG, and graduated from Aquinas Institute. He recalled singing traditional Irish songs as a boy with his

mother and the rest of his family around the McGraws' piano. Married since 1960 to his Irish immigrant wife, Bridget, McGraw has Irish ancestors on both sides of his family. He has visited Ireland several times and played with musicians there.

Currently a parishioner at Holy Spirit Church in Webster, McGraw said he looks forward to St. Patrick's Day every year as a chance to highlight activities in the local Irish community.

"I think it's great that the Irish have a saint of that magnitude to get people focused on the Irish," he said. However, he acknowledged not always being happy with the way the sacred day is commercialized.

"You don't like to see the green pigs

and the green beer. (But) a lot of that is gone, including some of the more offensive greeting cards."

McGraw's contributions to the local Irish community are myriad, ranging from performing with The Blackthorn Ceili Band, which plays Irish, Scottish and U.S. country music, to lecturing and teaching on Irish music and culture in area schools and colleges. In fact, during one such course McGraw met a married couple, Deirdre Cunningham and Bill Chaisson of Rochester, who he is now training to help him out with his show. McGraw was a guest speaker for the course in Irish music they were taking, and the couple answered his call for volunteers.

McGraw has also written a number of articles on Irish and other folk music for various publications including *Sing Out*, a prominent folk-music magazine. And he belongs to just about every major Irish cultural group in the area. He claims membership in the local chapters of the Irish-American Cultural Institute, the Ancient Order of the Hibernians and the cultural organization Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann (A Gathering of Irish Musicians). A former member of Rochester's St. Patrick's Day Parade Committee, McGraw served as the parade's grand marshal in 1992.

A tireless promoter of all things Irish, McGraw continually pointed out that Rochester-area residents can learn all they want about the local Irish scene by calling (716) 234-ERIN. He added that he'll keep on promoting Irish music as long as he can because he wants as many people as possible to enjoy the music's wide range of expression — from sad laments and meditative airs to rousing marches and lively dance tunes.

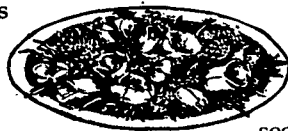
"Anything you can think to write about, the Irish have done it," he said.

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