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O'DOWD



## Our Voice from New York City

### Happy sober Paddy's Day (Monday, Mar 18 2013)

**IT WAS a snowy, cold St. Patrick's Eve in New York City on Saturday.**

The annual parade marched up Fifth Avenue as usual, but the crowd was a bit thinner due to the weather. We were spoiled the past couple of years with warm sunshine, so it was definitely a shock to see snowflakes in the middle of March.

Taoiseach Enda Kenny, who marched with the United Irish Counties Association, spoke passionately about the Irish economy and his vision for a prosperous future, while making the rounds in New York.

***The chill helped the many Irish pubs – who wants to freeze outside when you can stay nice and warm watching the parade on TV?***

There is always so much to do in New York around St. Patrick's Day. One novel event that has really taken off, though, rips the drunken Irish stereotype to shreds.

The second annual Sober St. Patrick's Day party took place at a high school auditorium on the Upper East Side and the place was jam-packed with hundreds of revelers.

***Families continuing festivities after the parade were there; so too were people in recovery looking for a way to celebrate in an alcohol-free capacity.***

For only \$12 per ticket, guests were given three hours of top-class Irish entertainment, food and non-alcoholic beverages. Children were dancing in the aisles and people enjoyed themselves in a casual atmosphere.

#### Pubs

Holidays like March 17<sup>th</sup> provide a great financial lift to the Irish bars – but, I don't think I'd survive very long in one of them on Paddy's Day.

***Getting plastered is a goal of many on the day but not everyone feels the same – which is why Sober St. Patrick's Day is a concept whose time has certainly come.***

"The whole mission is to change the perception of what St. Patrick's Day can be, and not let it become something that's hijacked by binge drinking," says event founder Bill Reilly.

The success of Sober St. Patrick's Day in New York has also crossed the Atlantic to Belfast, which hosted a sober party yesterday.

I see the concept spreading – it makes sense, a celebration of Irish culture in an environment where boozing it up isn't the top priority.

#### Wisdom

I love New York's Irish pubs, and believe me, I would have been drinking with the best of them on St. Patrick's days long gone by. But with age comes wisdom, and I can appreciate the appeal of having an event that celebrates Ireland's day minus the green beer and shots.

***Meanwhile, celebrations continue for Kenny tomorrow at the White House for a meeting with President Obama. The Kennys will also be the guests of honor at a White House party in the evening.***

It's a great opportunity for Ireland, as the president carves out much of his day for Irish-related activities.

Kenny, I have no doubt, will make the most of his face time with Obama, just as he impressed all those he met in New York.



**CONCEPT:** Non-alcoholic festivities