

# Successful new events save Chamber's St. Patrick's Festival from disaster

Old Man Winter took a parting shot on the first day of spring – dealing a sucker punch to what should have been the biggest day of the Chamber of Commerce's annual St. Patrick's Festival.

After a week of glorious warm temperatures and sunshine, Saturday dawned to driving rains, winds in excess of 35 mph, and temperatures which had fallen by 40 degrees overnight.

Chamber officials waited until the last minute in hoping the winds would die down, but choose to cancel the parade rather than to expose float participants and marchers to the elements, which by then included sleet and snow flurries.

But the irony is that by most accounts, this year's festival was still a success and Mother Nature's pre- and post-festival timing may have kept the event from being a total financial disaster for the chamber.

The saving grace was the activities which were added to the festival for the first time this year. Some of those events were on Wednesday, March 17, the "real" St. Patrick's Day which drew hundreds of people to the Irish Capital of Texas.

For the first time, the traditional stew cook-off, usually held on Saturday, was moved from the city park to The Corner Lot. With nine entries, it was the most successful in recent memory, with the ladies of Greens Creek Methodist Church claiming top honors with their meatball stew, narrowly edging out the entry from Shear Heaven, prepared by Lindsay Moore.

The inaugural dog show, sponsored by Bradberry's Best, attracted almost four dozen canine critters who sought top honors of being the friendliest, of having the loosest skin or the longest ears and several other attributes worthy of honor.

The Shamrock Princess, Luanne Schexnider, was a hit with all the out-of-town kids who wanted to have their picture made with her. She read to children at the library early in the day and then presided over the afternoon tea which honored the contestants for the Little Miss Dublin contest.

The wonderful weather continues on Thursday which was highlighted by the Little Miss Dublin pageant at the middle school auditorium. **(RESULTS HERE)**

On Friday night, the Junior Miss Dublin and Miss Dublin pageants were crowned. **(RESULTS HERE)**

The Chamber of Commerce float was prepared and ready for the new Miss Dublin court to make their first public appearance on Saturday morning, but with the cancellation of the parade, the court will make its first parade appearance at the Cowboy Culture Celebration parade in late April. The Little Miss Dublin contestants will also participate in the CCC parade with the senior citizen on the Golden Shamrocks and Lucky Charms float entry.

Saturday activities moved to the city park after the parade was cancelled and chamber officials were surprised and delighted that there were very few indoor vendor cancellations. The park building was filled, with vendor displays running the gamut from purses and jewelry to wood work and jellies. Unfortunately, attendance was light but vendors had the chance to enjoy the free entertainment in the park building, highlighted by the Dublin Cloverleaf square dancers, the Texas Tornado dancers from Abilene and the very popular Baggy Bottom Boys from Granbury. As the chill factor dropped and winds increased, activities wrapped up by mid-afternoon, giving the chamber volunteers time to clean the building and prepare for the evening event.

The public response to the first Dublin karaoke talent contest Saturday night was by all accounts amazing. The rotten weather didn't keep 10 very talented contestants, ranging in age from elementary to mid-30s, from taking to the stage. After a runoff, judges choose the top three winners who were presented cash awards. **(Add results)**

"With the success of the new events including the downtown stew cook-off, the dog shot and the karaoke contest, it is hard to be upset about this year's festival," said Karen Wright, the chamber's executive director.

"The biggest disappointment was the parade cancellation because we had almost 70 entries already signed up and we expected many more drop-ins. But the cancellation was the right call," Wright said. "No one needed to be exposed to the temperatures on Saturday morning, especially the kids who had been scheduled to take part.

"We were also disappointed that the carnival had to close down on Saturday afternoon, but again it was the right call because we didn't want anyone being hurt. Fortunately the carnival came to town a day early because of our Wednesday events and they stayed through Sunday afternoon which was much better weather, so kids still had an opportunity to enjoy the rides."

"We always knew that the athletes in the Highland Games are the toughest guys in the world and they proved it Saturday, by continuing with their events," Wright said. "And our local athletes were out there challenging them. Most of the men agreed, however, that it was not an ideal day for a kilt."

It will be several days before all the records are compiled to determine the financial outcome of the event, which is traditionally the major fundraiser for the chamber.

“We fund the major part of our annual budget with the St. Patrick’s Day festival and it is these funds which help us promote commerce and tourism in Dublin,” Wright said. “Even though our income will be less than most recent years, we are hopeful that we didn’t lose our shirts when Old Man Winter gave us a parting shot. It was bad but it could have been much worse without the success of our new events, some of which took place prior to the bad weather.”

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