Mission Viejo's Angela Haack celebrates the arrival of spring weather.
They did it on a bet

St. Patrick’s Parade founders tell how it was

Tom Mitchell and Bob Ramsay have never been known to turn down a sure bet. So when Ramsay’s wife challenged them to organize Mission Viejo’s first St. Patrick’s Parade in 1970, they happily obliged.

“We were all sitting around one day discussing lifestyles on the east coast compared to those on the west coast,” recalled Mitchell. “Well, the conversation eventually came around to St. Patrick’s Day celebrations and how the New York parade is such a tradition. Before we knew it, Lee was betting us that we couldn’t get 100 people to march in a St. Patrick’s parade — that people just wouldn’t celebrate the holiday on the west coast the way they do in New York. She bet us $10 we couldn’t do it.” Lee Ramsay lost her $10.

In fact, the spontaneous success of the event would have made other communities turn Shamrock green with envy, for Mitchell and Ramsay more than satisfied the conditions of the wager. Nearly 2,000 people participated in the pageant, and in the words of one participant, it “turned out to be an absolute smash.”

That was 10 years ago. This year, Ramsay and Mitchell will launch another decade of successful St. Patrick’s Day celebrations, and will lead the roster of entrants as grand marshals. Both relish the thought of the honor, basking in nostalgia as they reminisce about their first St. Paddy’s parade.

The two didn’t have much time to stage the event. It was already well into January when planning began, but by March 17, Ramsay, “we had an extravaganza on our hands. It’s a wonder the whole thing came off so well.”

“We like to say,” smiled Mitchell, “nearly 2,000 people showed up. We completely filled the high school parking lots with participants.”

According to reports about the event, several thousand spectators lined the streets between Mission Viejo High and the nearly two-mile trek to the Mission Viejo Country Club inn.

The spirit of Mission Viejo and other areas was reflected in a variety of ways. Parade entrants, for awards included members of the Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts and Indian Guides. There were mounted riders from Rancho Mission Viejo, covered carriages turning two referred to, especially town in from Ireland via Aes Lingus Irish International; and the band and drill team from Mission Viejo high school, the only high school then. The local Kiwanis Club, the Ayudantes Auxiliary of the Children’s Home Society, the Saddleback Mothers of Twins and the Lesse, a little high school also. The local Kiwanis Club, the Ajudantes Auxiliary of the Children’s Home Society, the Saddleback Mothers of Twins and the Leisure World Hikers also marched.

“One lady — she was from the Leisure World group — actually performed flips all the way down the parade route!” exclaimed Mitchell. “Our group won the award for best marching unit.”

Perhaps the most impressive stunt of the day, however, was the delivery of a Blarney Stone specially imported from Ireland for the occasion, so the legend is told. It seemed these parade planners stopped at nothing to make it a day community residents would long remember. The “rock drop,” as it was affectionately referred to, was carried off with split-second timing.

“We hired a helicopter to fly it in,” said Mitchell. The stone was placed near the entrance of the Mission Viejo Country Club, accompanied by a bronze plaque laddies said, “let it be known that a small care of this bit of stone shall bring forth happiness and good fortune this day.”

“The only problem we had in delivering it as I recall,” laughed Ramsay, “was that the wind generated by the copter rotor blew down a nearby tent and I think even a newspaper photographer.”

“We had a few celebrities in the parade, too,” said Mitchell, naming Deacon Jones and other Rams football stars. Mission Viejo’s St. Patrick’s Parade hasn’t changed much over the years. Mitchell and Ramsay continued to organize the annual event for two more seasons, but by the third year the Mission Viejo Activities Committee, which has remained the sponsor of the event, took over the job.

This year, more than 3,000 people are expected to march in the parade, composing 100 entries. The “nicest thing about this parade,” says event chairman Art Edgren, “is that it remains an extremely community-oriented event. We still have the Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Campfire Girls and Indian Guides marching. We still have local school bands and the Mission Viejo Recreation Center float, and local clubs. It is all about carrying a real hometown atmosphere.”

The idea of “suburban farming” has been gaining momentum locally and the enthusiasm of Casta del Sol’s Vegetable Garden Club illustrates the success of such projects.

Thelma Cullings has hollyhocks. Dee I. Valentine tends giant sunflowers and Enie Stohula and his wife have installed an intricate drip irrigation system with automatic timers.

The three join more than 150 other Casta del Sol residents who grow their own crops at a one-acre site reserved for residents of Mission Viejo’s retirement community.

According to president, Ed Cox, the club has “engendered more interest in terms of the number of people who are actively involved than just about any other organization in the retirement community.”

Already, he says, there’s a healthy waiting list of residents who were not fortunate enough to obtain one of the 96 available plots. Eventually the site will be increased to twice its present acreage to accommodate more farming enthusiasts.

Owned and operated by the Casta del Sol Homeowners Association, the garden site was subdivided into individual gardens measuring 20 by 20 or 10 by 20. An annual rental fee of $10 and a nominal cleaning deposit are the only costs, although all “tenants” must supply their own gardening materials and are responsible for maintaining their crops.

The program was established last July when a sign-up sheet was circulated among residents to determine whether enough were interested in the concept. The club was a little slow in getting started, Cox said, “but, once the ball got rolling it was a cinch. When we set out to do something, it gets done. And everyone pitches in to help,” he boasted.

Gardeners at Casta de Sol have discovered the program is productive as well as pleasurable.

“It provides solace for the soul and food for the table, too. It’s an opportunity for people to get close to the earth,” Cox said.

For couples like Abbie and Herbert Greenwald, who hail from Illinois and can tell a story or two about harsh winters, this is especially appreciated.

“We come from, you wouldn’t dream of having a garden of any kind at this time of year. But here we can grow all year,” he said.

They cultivate winter crops of strawberries, tomatoes, Swiss chard, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, carrots, beets and beans. Summer crops yield squash, eggplant, corn, zucchini, melons, boysenberries and many others.

Members of the garden club meet once a month to share ideas, drawing from each person’s experience, personal knowledge or professional background as sources to improve their hobby.

In addition to many members who grew up on farms or seem to possess natural green thumbs, the club boasts a number of professionals who offer useful and much appreciated gardening advice. Among them are Dick Clark, who lectures at Orange Coast College on agronomy and 3rd Gordon, a state-licensed entomologist who shares his expert advice on insect control.

And what probably is the biggest attraction for the group is the camaraderie that seems to have developed naturally. “We meet a lot of new friends down at the garden. In fact, I guess you could say that the program gives people a real sense of community spirit and group effort,” Cox said.

HARVEST TIME — Casta del Sol Garden Club members (from left) John Cullings, Thelma Cullings, Abbie Greenwald, Herb Greenwald, Geri Watkins and Ed Cox harvest their crops, strawberries, tomatoes, broccoli and carrots are just a few favorites grown during the winter.

THAT’S A LEAFY LETTUCE— Geri Watkins (left), program chairman, and Ed Cox, president of the Casta del Sol Garden Club, examine a head of lettuce that Geri and her husband grew on their garden plot. Each plot measures 20 by 20 or 10 by 20 and all “tenants” are responsible for maintaining their gardens.
NEW FOSSIL SITE — Paleontological specimens removed individually and in "block" form from a rain-endangered Mission Viejo site have been safely moved to new indoor quarters near Alicia and Jeronimo. As artist's concept shows, a complete workshop-exhibition facility is being constructed for the tens of thousands of fossils retrieved and stored by Mission Viejo Company over the past 13 years. With the new facility in operation, paleontologists can continue excavation and research in a protected environment.

Auditions set for college play

Open auditions for Saddleback College’s upcoming premier production of Ketti Frings’ “My Genius, My Child,” are slated for 5 to 7:30 p.m. March 3 and 4 in the main campus studio theatre. The play, to be performed for the first time on any stage, is based on three years in the life of American playwright Eugene O’Neill. The story takes place in the early 1920s and is set in and around New York City.

According to director Brian Donoghue, eight men and five women, aged 20 to 55, are needed. The play is scheduled to open in the Mission Viejo college’s studio theatre for two weeks beginning May 1.

For further information contact the director at 831-4763.

In the area of photography, the community college is offering a five-week studio photography class beginning March 6.

According to photographer and lecturer Mark Chamberlain, students need a 35mm or larger format camera and a working knowledge of its operation.

To register, district residents must either complete the registration card included in the Community Services brochure mailed recently, or register in person in building A on the main campus.

South Coast Repertory is presenting the west coast premiere of “Right of Way” through March 23.

The production, directed by SCR artistic director Martin Benson, marks the second staging of the Richard Lees play, which had its world premiere at the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis.

Through the lives of an elderly Santa Monica couple, Teddy and Mini Dwyer, the play explores the question of individual choice by examining the issue of a person’s right to choose the way he or she is to die.

Married for nearly half a century, the couple finds the thought of being separated unbearable, yet inevitable due to Mini’s illness. So they choose a course of action to cheat fate. The plan seems infallible until they disclose it to their daughter, who makes her own plans to interfere.

Tickets for all mainstage productions are $8, $9 and $10, and are available at the SCR box office and through all mutual agencies. Box office hours are 10 a.m. to 8:30 p.m., Tuesday through Sunday, and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday and non-performance days. For ticket information, telephone (714) 957-4033.

South Coast Repertory is located at 655 Town Center Drive, two blocks north of the intersection of the San Diego Freeway and Bristol Street, in Costa Mesa.

Concert on tap

The Irvine Master Chorale is scheduled to perform with the Pacific Symphony Orchestra during an 8:30 p.m. concert March 8 at the Santa Ana High School Auditorium.

The program will include Verdi’s “Four Sacred Pieces,” and Rachmaninoff’s “The Belle.” John Alexander and Keith Clark will be conducting, respectively.

Tickets at $8, $6 and $5 are available by calling 542-1760.

“TAKE A NUMBER DARLING” — Bill Bodner (left) engages in a scene with Benny Goodman during the Saddleback Valley Community Theatre production of "Take a Number Darling." The group is currently holding auditions for its upcoming play, "Murder at the Vicarage."

SV thespians stage mystery

Saddleback Valley Community Theatre will be staging the Agatha Christie mystery, "Murder at the Vicarage," during March and April.

Curtain time is 8 p.m. Thursday through Saturday with a 2:30 p.m. Sunday matinee. Play dates are March 21-22, March 28-29, April 10-11 and April 18-19.

A Sunday matinee will be held March 23.

This mystery marks the group’s second production since it’s new theatre opened at 25741 C. Obrero, Mission Viejo. The group opened the theatre with the comedy, "Take a Number Darling." Reservations are necessary and can be made by calling 770-0381 or 830-9252.
MV orchestra to perform at seniors meeting

The Saddleback Valley Seniors Club will hear the Mission Viejo High School Orchestra during its noon luncheon meeting at Montanoso Recreation Center Friday, March 14.

Also scheduled is a noon buffet lunch on Wednesday, March 19 at Columbia Savings and Loan in El Toro. Tickets are $2.

During an evening social at 7:30 p.m. Friday, March 28, a Leisure World square dance group will perform at Montanoso Recreation Center.

Trips scheduled for March include a tour of the Norton Simon Museum in Pasadena and a Lawry's Restaurant buffet lunch. Reservations can be made at the general meeting or by calling 837-6092.

Membership in the seniors club is open to all Saddleback Valley residents 55 and over.

Baseball season looks optimistic

Encouraged by the nucleus of players returning from last season, Saddleback College head baseball coach Dick Stuetz is more optimistic than usual as the 1980 season approaches.

"I'm always the eternal optimist when the season starts, but I really feel we have the best athletes since I've been here," Stuetz said. (Last year the team was 19-17 — only the second winning season in the school's history.)

They played well together in the summer program (winning the Orange County Metro League) and during the fall, so I'm looking for big things. The key will be whether our pitching comes around. Defensively and offensively we'll be very sound."

One of the key reasons why Stuetz feels so good about the upcoming season is the return of last year's offensive leader, Doug Fritz.

The sophomore outfielder established a new school record last season, batting .357. He also set a school mark with 37 RBIs, breaking last year's NCAA Division III record of 32 set in 1977.

Two of the top candidates for the other starting outfield berths are returnees Pete Changala and Dave Kook. Both saw limited action last season, going to the plate just 42 and eight times, respectively.

Saddleback's conference season gets under way the first week in March with Citrus, San Bernardino and Southwestern again being the teams to beat.
For your convenience

Emergency and frequently called telephone numbers

Orange County Fire Dept. 538-3501
Orange County Sheriff's Dept. 834-3000
Mission Viejo Municipal Advisory Council 581-7610
Pacific Telephone 642-1161
San Diego Gas & Electric 498-7043
Moulton Niguel Water District 831-2500
Santa Margarita Water District 586-1973
Southern California Edison 835-5320
Southern California Gas Co. 634-0251
U.S. Post Office 495-5020
OCTD Dial-A-Ride 540-6215
Mission Viejo Company 837-6050
Casta del Sol “Fiesta” Homes 586-7500
Casta del Sol Recreation Center 837-6921

March in Mission Viejo

CALENDAR ITEMS WANTED
Send details on your April activities to The Reporter at the address below. They will be published on a first-come, first-served basis.

SUNDAY MONDAY TUESDAY WEDNESDAY THURSDAY FRIDAY SATURDAY

2 Baby Swim School (M) Jazzercise (M)
3 Sandbox Club (S)
4 Viejo Swingers Mix and Make It (M)
5 Baby Swim School (M)
6 Viejo Swingers

7 Friday Flicks (S)
8 Bunko (CdS)
9 Sandbox Club (S)
10 Mix and Make It (M)
11 Sandbox Club (S)
12 Mix and Make It (M)
13
14
15 St. Patrick’s Dinner/Dance (A)
16 St. Patrick’s Day
17
18 Sandbox Club (S)
19 Mix and Make It (M)
20 First Day of Spring
21
22

23 Sandbox Club (S)
24
25 Sandbox Club (S)
26 Mix & Make It (M)
27
28
29 Costa Cabaret (A)
30 31

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