

Featured

Colleen O’Riordan: Former Rose of Tralee and Newly Installed Officer of the Friendly Sons and Daughters of St. Patrick



Colleen Gallagher O’Riordan, 2007 Rose of Tralee

Colleen O’Riordan sang The Impossible Dream from the musical Man of La Mancha when she competed in the International Rose of Tralee Contest in Ireland in August 2007. It might be called the theme song of her life and key to understanding what makes her tick. The song’s words are truly her own: “I’ll always dream the impossible dream and I’ll reach the unreachable star.”

Tom Conaghan who was formerly the executive director of the Irish Immigration Center and a family friend urged Colleen to enter the Rose of Tralee contest. Tom knew Colleen had an exquisite singing voice which she had developed singing for St. John Neumann Parish Church, Haverford as well as for musical shows at Archbishop John Carrol High School. He assured her that her voice, intelligence and poise could beat out the 12 Rose of Tralee contestants. When she did win and she traveled to Ireland as the 2007 Philadelphia Rose nominee, Colleen was changed forever.

Colleen’s summer visit to Ireland sparked her to return to Ireland many times for much longer stays. In 2008, she attended a two-year graduate program at the National University of Ireland Maynooth where she received an MA degree in Drama Therapy. After working in Washington for seven years for former Congressman Patrick Meehan, she worked three years in Ireland for Blueface, a Dublin-based global technology and communications company that was acquired by Comcast in 2020. She met, Sean O’Riordan, her future husband, at Blueface where they both worked. Colleen married Sean at the height of the pandemic on July 25th, 2020 in Our Lady Mother of the Church, Castleknock, Dublin with family and friends only in attendance via Zoom.



Sean and Colleen O’Riordan
July 2020 Wedding in Ireland

Colleen recently became the first woman officer of the Friendly Sons and Daughters of St. Patrick when her installation as Secretary took place at the March 2022 Gala. She is the first woman in the 251-year history of the society to be given this honor. Women first became members in 2016. In that year, Colleen joined along with four of her six sisters at the ceremony in which Ambassador Anne Anderson became the first woman member. Colleen’s father, John Gallagher, Jr., had been a member for a long time and having no sons was proud that finally, his daughters could join.

The Gallagher family were nearby neighbors of the Heenan family in Haverford. In 2020 when Collen and Sean moved back after their marriage, Joe Heenan asked her if she would consider serving on the board of the Friendly Sons and Daughters.



Gallagher Family

Colleen speaks about this: “We grew up with the Heenan Family. Over the years, Joe Heenan pulled me into the events of the society. When my husband and I came back from Dublin to live and work in Philadelphia, Joe said that he thought I would be great on the board. He asked me to accept the nomination as society secretary when my name was put forward at the December 2021 meeting. I said even though I had never served on any board before I would be honored to accept the nomination as the society’s first woman officer.”

Colleen’s Gallagher ancestors hailed from Donegal and emigrated during the famine years becoming Pennsylvania coal miners. Her father’s grandmother was a Quaid who hailed from Kilkenny. The Quaids were horse farmers who eventually settled in Mt. Carmel, Pennsylvania. Colleen is almost 100% Irish except for her own mother, Susan Gallagher, whose maiden name was Crisanti, Italian. However, there was Irish even here because Colleen’s maternal grandmother was Agnes McCullough whose family came from County Tyrone. The Irish in Colleen dominates her life. Her love of Ireland has been central to her life since she first set foot in Tralee in 2007 as the Philadelphia Rose.

All wish Colleen great success in her new position as the first woman officer of the Friendly Sons and Daughters of St. Patrick. Colleen can move this esteemed group forward by making women central decision-makers who can help the Society “reach that unreachable star.” A phrase from her favorite song.