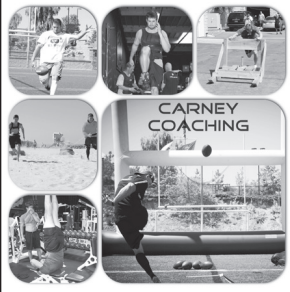


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"Irish You A Merry Christmas" A Great Success In San Diego

by Stephen Aherne, Executive Director Irish Outreach, San Diego

ONE MOMENT WILL STICK IN THE MEMORY WHEN WE look back at our inaugural Irish You a Merry Christmas San Diego event. Our mission when undertaking this charitable initiative was to mobilize the Irish community to bring festive cheer to some of the children that need it most in this great city that has been so welcoming to our community. At 3pm, while 250 happy young guests were being entertained by the Irish dancers of Malone Academy, a surge of excitement rushed through the crowd as the children spotted a fire engine making its way towards the dining party. As it got closer, the figure of Santa O' Claus in his green silks in the passenger seat became clear. Our friends in the San Diego Firefighters Emerald Society were delivering St Nick in style. Waiting for him when he disembarked was Edward, his loyal Irish Wolfhound. In that one moment, the screams of excitement and looks of wonder and awe on the children's faces as they studied this unusually colored Santa and his magnificent beast confirmed that our mission had been accomplished. Santa would go on to present the children with a wonderful array of gifts so generously provided by our chief sponsor, Touch This Media, ensuring all went home with a smile on their faces and some Irish cheer in their hearts.

The day's proceedings began at 1pm when our guests began to file in. Neil Morrison and Aidan Hurley kept the crowds entertained early on with a selection of Irish and festive music. Later they would be joined by Tim Foley, Tony Cummins, and Eamon Carroll. What a selection of San Diego's finest Irish musicians! At the same time, the Gaelic sports demonstrations were taking place under the watchful eye of Ciarán Charlton, the new GAA Games Development Administrator for San Diego, all the way from County Mayo. Ciarán was ably assisted by volunteers from the four Gaelic sports clubs of San Diego. It was great to see the enthusiasm and, indeed, the skill with which the children took to the Irish sports. One very special guest who also tried his hand at Gaelic Football and Hurling was San Diego Chargers great John Carney. A graduate of Notre Dame, Carney spoke of his admiration for Gaelic games and how he would have loved the opportunity to play them while growing up in Florida. Having played in the NFL as recently as 2010 and seeing that he has lost none of that accuracy with the boot, certain members of Setanta Gaelic Football Club were quick to invite Carney to join up for the season ahead! Although recently inducted to the New Orleans Saints Hall of Fame, San Diegans will always claim John Carney as their own. His presence was a wonderful treat for guest and volunteers alike and on behalf of our organizing committee, I would like to thank John for being such a wonderful ambassador on the day.

With appetites built up from the frenetic sporting activity, it was time for Christmas dinner. After a wonderful blessing by Irish Outreach chaplain, Fr Nick Clavin, himself a nationally renowned sportsman back in Ireland, our volunteers served a plated three course meal provided and prepared by Ruth's Chris. This was Christmas dinner prepared as it should be. The reviews were gushing. There was even enough for our volunteers to dine and I suspect they did not taste better turkey over the holidays! As dinner was cleared away, the Irish dancers took center stage before Santa's dramatic arrival and that is when the fun really began!

In the midst of all the festivities, the organizing committee made a big check presentation of \$3,000 to Dr Cabello, principal of Roosevelt Middle School, to assist with sending the school's in need students to 6th



Guests enjoy the arts and crafts tent



Oscar, Nicolas and Roy. GAA sports challenge winners and possible future stars?



Chargers great John Carney tries his hand at Gaelic Football



Great excitement as Santa O' Claus and his loyal companion Edward the Irish Wolfhound make their way through the crowd.

The Irish You a Merry Christmas San Diego organizing committee would like to thank the following businesses for their support:

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