



As our parade marks a milestone event on Sunday, March 11th, 2012, it is hard to believe that 25 years have gone by since the first tentative marchers headed down Yonge Street.

For all of those 25 years and many more, Eddie Thornton has been involved in our community and has always given without asking anything in return.

Throughout those same years, Eddie rose to the pinnacle of his own profession. When he retired last year as Executive Director of Apprenticeship with the Carpenter's Union, and Toronto General Contractors, his retirement dinner of almost 1,000 people was just an incredible event. As Master of Ceremonies on the evening of March 10th, I witnessed first-hand the tributes paid to this Westmeath man that made me proud to be Irish and to be part of such an auspicious occasion. The list of over 20 guest speakers was a veritable who's who of the construction industry and political establishment.

Over the past 30 years, due to Eddie's involvement with the trade unions and construction industry, he assisted many Irish Canadians get employment and into apprenticeship programs. His support for many of the new arrivals has gotten many young people off to a great start in this country.

Over the past several years, he initiated the 'Ontario Cast in Place Concrete Development Council'. He was also responsible for establishing school to work programs, which is now province wide (Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program). These efforts were recognized with several awards including the Queen's Jubilee Medal in 2002, for significantly improving the interest/skills of youth in the construction industry.

Eddie continues to be a member of the board of directors of the Good Shepherd Refuge, and has received an award for continued help in assisting the homeless, He also continues to be involved with their fund raising efforts. In 2003 he received a gold medal from the 'Gift of Life' after donating a kidney to his daughter Margaret.

Before immigrating to Canada in 1966 from Castlepollard in County Westmeath, he was involved in hurling and Gaelic football. He played county hurling for Westmeath in the under 14, under 16, under 18, under 21 and senior. Several old stalwarts of Toronto's hurling scene from those days remember the tenacious Eddie and may still have some shin marks to prove it.

His talents didn't just extend to the playing fields. He was a member of the Firehouse Five Showband, Eddie and the Cravats Showband and the Innisfree Ceili Band.

On arriving in Canada, Eddie's first stop was Edmonton and then on to Toronto. He played hurling and football for Garryowen in Toronto, and hurling for Offaly in New York. He was a key

member of the Tara Showband for several years, making several records with the band and as a session man on other recordings. Many of our community have fond memories of dancing to Eddie and the Tara at the Maple Leaf Ballroom on St. Clair Avenue west.

He opened the first Irish Pub in the west end of Toronto - the Old Sod, and thereafter the Kings Well Pub. In 1968 Eddie gave up singing "*The Westmeath Bachelor*" when he met and married the current Rose of Tralee, Kathleen O'Sullivan, and they have three daughters - Margaret, Laura and Kristen, and four grandchildren Brendan, Brogan, Ireland and Sullivan.

Eddie has been involved in numerous fund raising events within the Irish community over the years. Having served with Eddie on some such projects he always delivered what he promised and had a great talent in raising funds and reaching ambitious financial goals.

He was involved with the Westmeath Association and assisted in the building of the floats for the St. Patrick Day Parade for several years. Eddie was also a board member of Ireland Place many years ago and although the project was unsuccessful in the end, his efforts were monumental.

Nowadays Eddie is taking time to smell the roses and relaxing with family and friends after a hectic work career and community involvement.

The St. Patrick's Parade Society in its 25th year sure has given credit where credit is due. We hope to see our whole community cheering on Eddie on March 11

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, 2012 and hopefully the night before at the Grand Marshal's Ball at the elegant Liberty Grand.