

Envoy gets warm Kingston welcome



Ambassador Anne Anderson speaking at the launch of the 13th Annual Hooley on the Hudson. PHOTO: PETER McDERMOTT

By Peter McDermott
pmcdermott@irishecho.com

Mayor Shayne Gallo hoped that the Irish ambassador didn't mind saying that she was smitten with Kingston, N.Y.

When Anne Anderson came to the podium, she made clear that she didn't mind at all. "I am smitten," she said.

It was the Sunday morning of Labor Day Weekend and she was there to formally launch the 13th Annual Hooley on the Hudson, a day-long event in the historic Rondout district that featured entertainment on three stages.

An hour earlier, Anderson had been present at a flag-raising ceremony on the Rondout plot

where the Irish Cultural Center Hudson Valley will soon be built.

On the Saturday, Anderson was given a tour of Kingston, which was made the first state capital in 1777, and was guest of honor at a reception that night. Other guests included Congressman Chris Gibson and novelist William Kennedy.

The ambassador said the Irish Cultural Center Hudson Valley promised to be a "new jewel in the crown" for Kingston.

State Assemblyman Kevin Cahill, introducing Anderson, said the center would not only remind people that they Irish, "but that they are Irish and from the Hudson Valley."

Anderson is the 17th Irish ambassador to the United States and the first woman to hold the job. That latter piece of information provoked a huge cheer from the crowd on Sunday morning, as did the announcement that this would be the "Anne Anderson Hooley on the Hudson."

Anderson said in her remarks at the earlier ceremony that she was impressed "by the warmth shown to me personally and the country I represent."

She added: "I'm struck, too, by the number of private citizens in Kingston, who out of sheer loyalty and love for Ireland, are flying the tricolor."

"The Irish came with absolutely nothing and gave everything," she said.

"They created indestructible bonds of friendship between the United States and Ireland," Anderson said. Noting the number of younger people at the event, she said those bonds would continue into future generations.

The Irish found an openness when they came to the United States, the ambassador said, and she was delighted that young African-Americans, Hispanics and Asian-Americans, for instance, were open to experiencing

and participating in Irish culture.

Anderson said there are the Irish-born, the Irish by DNA and the Irish by affinity. "With my powers as ambassador, I declare you all to be Irish," she said.

The Ambassador said she was delighted to hear that the Irish language, which she learned going to Donegal as a young girl, is being taught formally in the city, thanks to the Ulster County Ancient Order of Hibernians.

Anderson said, too, that it was appropriate that one of the Hooley's three stages was devoted to the spoken word. "When you go into a pub in Ireland, the greeting is not 'How are you?' Rather people say: 'What's the story?'"

Referring to the overcast weather, she said that grey skies shouldn't stop a "good Irish party."

It was prophetic. The acts on the main stage, notably Barley Juice, didn't let two bursts of rain in the late afternoon and early evening put them off their stride. And the skies had largely cleared by the time Black 47 began at 7 p.m. for the last two hours of the festival.

Organizers were confident at the outset that up to 22,000 people would pass through Rondout for the Hooley. No official figures were available by day's end, but they were happy to deem the "Anne Anderson Hooley on the Hudson" a success. As for the Ireland's ambassador herself, one organizer said: "She was wonderful, wasn't she? She was very gracious."

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