

LONG ISLAND / NASSAU**Mineola man who saved St. Patrick's Day parade gets grand marshal nod**

He is now president of the Irish American Society of Nassau, Suffolk & Queens.



Jeff Clark, grand marshal of the annual Mineola St. Patrick's Day parade, poses with the Mineola Fire Department Ladies Auxiliary on Sunday, March 4, 2018. The parade is hosted by the Irish American Society of Nassau, Suffolk & Queens. Photo Credit: Marlo Jappen

By Marlo Jappen

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In 2011, when financial pressures threatened the future of the annual Irish American Society St. Patrick's Day Parade, Mineola's Jeff Clark decided the show — or in this case the parade — must go on.

The Village of Garden City, which is where the parade was routed for more than 30 years, imposed a fee for the Irish American Society of Nassau, Suffolk & Queens to host the event due to the cost of police overtime.

"We couldn't afford to do it," said Betty McLoughlin, who served as president of the organization from 2016-17.

Although Clark had no involvement with the society — aside from watching his daughter's Irish step dance performances at the society's center on Willis Avenue in Mineola — he wanted to help out. He reached out to friends and collected enough money for the tradition to continue.

The following year, he and Mineola Mayor Scott Strauss secured Mineola as the new home for the parade with a route ending just a block away from the center.

"We draw far more spectators than we did [before]," Clark said. "It's less industrial so it's very inviting for people to walk down the street and watch."

Clark, who served as chief of the Mineola Fire Department from 2012-17, has since taken on a more active role with the Irish American Society. He was elected as president this past January and has chaired the parade for the past six years.

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For Clark's contributions, he was selected as grand marshal for the 2018 parade in a unanimous decision, said Aileen Scott of the Irish American Society of Nassau,

Suffolk & Queens.

"This year, since he's grand marshal, we decided to give him a break," McLoughlin said with a laugh.

Clark, 54, who has six adult children with wife Maureen, was all smiles as he ventured down Mineola Boulevard on Sunday wearing an oversized top hat and sash.

"I find parades to be fun," Clark said. "They bring out your friends and neighbors. It's always a celebration and it puts people in a good mood."

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