

Restaurants

Listings are excerpted from the Reader Restaurant Finder, an online database of more than 3,000 Chicago-area restaurants. Restaurants are rated by more than 2,200 Reader Restaurant Raters, who feed us information and comments on their dining experiences. Web ratings are updated daily; print listings reflect the most current information available at publication time. Reviews are written by

Reader staff and contributors and (where noted) individual Raters. Though reviewers try to reflect the Restaurant Raters' input, reviews should be considered one person's opinion; the collective Raters' opinions are best expressed in the numbers. The complete listings and information on how to become a Reader Restaurant Rater are available at www.chicagoreader.com/restaurantfinder.

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Specialists

Soda Bread and Other Delights

Get Your Irish On

24 places to celebrate Saint Paddy's Day

Celtic Crown

4310 N. Western | 773-588-1110

F 5.2 | S 4.4 | A 8.0 | \$ (5 REPORTS)
ENGLISH/IRISH/SCOTTISH | LUNCH, DINNER:
SEVEN DAYS | OPEN LATE: SATURDAY TILL 3,
OTHER NIGHTS TILL 2

Irish pubs are everywhere, yet new ones are constantly cropping up. It's perplexing—when's the last time you heard someone say, "Damn, if only they'd open an Irish pub in my neighborhood, then things would really take off?" But Celtic Crown has carved out a nice little niche for itself in a crowded landscape. There are three bars with distinct personalities, so if you get tired of the action on the main floor (the most sports-bar-like environment) you can just head up- or downstairs and find yourself in a dark, intimate room or a quiet, spacious one with a pool table. The menu lists the usual mix of salads, sandwiches, a few higher-priced dinner options like strip steaks and barbecued ribs, and Guinness-infused edibles. The Reuben had piles of very thin-sliced lean corned beef, sauerkraut, and dressing on great-tasting rye bread. The Crown outdoes most burger suppliers in town simply by serving hamburgers on real buns—ones that don't break down two bites into your meal. The burger I got, cooked medium rare, was stalwart, maintaining its integrity to the very end even though it was loaded down with hickory sauce, ketchup, and a decent amount of burger juice. The fries were not good, but hey, they've also got tots and they were perfect. Best of all, prices are reasonable—more so than, say, those at the Grafton a few blocks northeast. **Chip Dudley**

Celtic Knot

626 Church, Evanston | 847-864-1679

\$\$\$

ENGLISH/IRISH/SCOTTISH | LUNCH, DINNER:
SEVEN DAYS; SUNDAY BRUNCH | OPEN LATE:
FRIDAY & SATURDAY TILL 2, MONDAY-THURSDAY
TILL 1, SUNDAY TILL MIDNIGHT

It was well past 2 AM the day after Saint Patrick's Day when Debbie Evans finally gave up. Evans, a chef, was working in the kitchen at Tommy Nevin's, and she was exhausted. She took off her whites and swore then and there that she'd never work at another Irish pub. Fat chance—luckily for us. The perfectly opaque grilled salmon served here on a generous bed of spinach is so good you won't care if it's less-than-traditional pub food. (Avoid the overly sweet balsamic and garlic dressings in favor of the nicely

When Gretta Yore left Galway as a young woman to emigrate with her mother and five younger sisters to Chicago, she never thought the brown bread her mother baked from scratch every day would come to be considered a delicacy. Her grandmother had been known to make it in a three-legged cast-iron oven over an open fire, and "baking was nothing special to us," she says. "We just did it. We didn't have shop bread, as we called it."

Now, as the Galway Bakers, Yore and three of her sisters supply their brown bread, soda bread, and other traditional Irish baked goods to several restaurants and shops in the greater Chicago area, provide "sweet tables" (dessert buffets) for wedding and baby showers, and sell their goods—which also include apple tarts, tea cakes, boiled raisin bread, plum puddings, and a multigrain bread called caisein—at events such as the Irish American Heritage Center's annual Saint Patrick's Day festival. It's a big commitment for four women in their 50s and 60s who have families, work full-time, and have to fit all their baking into evenings and weekends. "We have two other sisters who are not involved who think we're nuts," Yore says.

The Galway Bakers—Yore, Carol Coyne, Irene Higgins, and Dolores Byrne—made their debut in December 2004, when they sold loaves of the brown bread, which they dubbed Nana's Brown Bread after their mother, at an LAHC event. Given the season, they also offered plum puddings and traditional marzipan-frosted Irish Christmas cakes. "We thought that's where the big draw would be," Yore says, "but the bread just took off. We sold out of everything we had that day."

But it wasn't until the following March that the sisters really solidified their repertoire. About a week and a half after their mother passed away at age 91, the LAHC called and asked the sisters to participate in that year's Saint Patrick's Day festival. For the grieving family it was a welcome nudge. "That got us back on our feet and moving," says Yore. This time around they added scones, apple tarts with vanilla custard, Galway tea cake (a breadly yellow loaf with raisins and candied cherries), and porter cake, made with Guinness and "not overly sweet," Yore says. "The Galway tea cake, now, would be sweeter."

They also added soda bread, a more upscale cousin to the everyday brown bread. Made with white flour and studded with moist, chubby raisins, in the old days it was baked only on Sundays, "in case someone came to visit," says Yore. It quickly joined the brown bread in popularity. Both are round, crusty,



Sisters Dolores Byrne, Gretta Yore, Carol Coyne, and Irene Higgins

surprisingly heavy, and divided into quadrants by a cross marked into the top—to allow any stray evil spirits to escape, the story goes. Less traditional are the sisters' many sweet breads in varieties like apple-sauce pecan, carrot walnut, zucchini, and pumpkin spice. A chocolate chip-banana version is available either as a small loaf or a massive cake. "This weighs about four and a quarter pounds," Yore says, putting her hand on a cake.

The Galway Bakers don't have a Web site or a retail space, and they don't accept mail orders (although last Christmas they did ship a few plum puddings to people who called up and begged). To try their wares you'll have to visit a restaurant or store they supply—such as Irish Imports Teahan's, 2505 N. Harlem, or the Galway Tribes Irish Pub and Restaurant, 9680 Lincolnway Lane in Frankfort—or track them down at an area festival. For now at least, they have no plans for expansion. "This bread is completely made by hand," Yore says. "If we get too big,

we'll lose the personal touch."

None of the goods has more than a few ingredients: whole-wheat flour, flaxseed meal, steel-cut oatmeal, buttermilk, treacle syrup, a special salt, perhaps some sultanas (golden raisins). Even the pie that the sisters refer to as "apple tart" is a minimalist creation: its thin, crisp crust holds only sliced apples and a bit of sugar, not even a touch of cinnamon, "so you can really taste the apples," says Yore. The sisters import their treacle, whole-wheat flour, and the steel-cut oats from Ireland.

Where do their other supplies come from? "Wherever I see something on sale," says Yore. "We're very thrifty. Mom taught us well." The sisters use no preservatives—after all, their mother and grandmother never expected their bread to have a shelf life. "Every day of their life they got up and baked bread," Higgins says. "Anything that had been baked the day before, you would never, ever think about eating it." —Anne Ford

muted blue cheese.) The server put me onto a Guinness beef tenderloin and mushroom pasta, and while the stout's flavor only peeked through, the exceedingly tender beef more than compensated, and the pastry was a flaky, buttery delight. Piping hot chips are served skin-on—order them with a side of curry. There are also fish-and-chips and bangers and mash, and hard-core traditionalists/masochists will appreciate the Full Monty Irish Breakfast: bangers, bacon, black-and-white pudding, eggs, tomatoes, mushrooms, and fried bread. More refined diners should know that Evans offers what's probably Evanston's only afternoon high tea service (Wednesdays and Saturdays). On Saint Patrick's Day there's live music, Irish dancers, and bagpipers from 4 PM on. **Peter Tykinski**

Chief O'Neill's

3471 N. Elston | 773-583-3066

F 7.6 | S 7.0 | A 8.3 | \$ (8 REPORTS)

ENGLISH/IRISH/SCOTTISH | LUNCH: SATURDAY-SUNDAY, DINNER: SEVEN DAYS; SUNDAY BRUNCH | RESERVATIONS ACCEPTED FOR LARGE GROUPS ONLY

Irish musicians Brendan and Siobhan McKinney—she plays bagpipes and flute, she plays flute and pennywhistle—named this north-west-side pub after Francis O'Neill, Chicago's first Irish police chief (and a champion of Irish music himself—at the turn of the century O'Neill was largely responsible for keeping traditional Irish music alive, collecting thousands of songs and getting them committed to paper). The entire bar—chairs, tables, bar fittings—and most of the staff was imported from Ireland, and the three cooks in the kitchen dish up traditional fare that

includes Harp-battered onion strips, Galway Bay mussels, and cheddar cheese soup made with Guinness. There's also fish-and-chips (on Fridays there's an all-you-can-eat fish fry for \$10.95), grilled Irish sausage, bangers and mash, and a creamy chicken and mushroom potpie. It's anything but light dining, but perfect for washing down with a black and tan. On Saint Patrick's Day there's an Irish breakfast buffet from 10 AM to noon, music and Irish dancing beginning at 3, and a "Celtic pig roast" at 7. **Laura Levy Shatkin**

Cullen's Bar & Grill

3741 N. Southport | 773-975-0600

F 6.9 | S 6.0 | A 6.8 | \$\$ (5 REPORTS)

ENGLISH/IRISH/SCOTTISH, BURGERS | LUNCH, DINNER: SEVEN DAYS; SATURDAY & SUNDAY BRUNCH | OPEN LATE: TILL 2 EVERY NIGHT

Cullen's is a germophobe's dream come

true, so clean that if my hamburger rolled onto the floor I wouldn't hesitate to exercise the three-second rule. This is not the place for coddle or black-and-white pudding—the only Irish offerings are shepherd's pie and fish-and-chips—but the pub is a monster, and the mac 'n' cheese, made with real cheddar, is significantly better than most. Glazed meat loaf, served with mashed potatoes and grilled asparagus, was homey; and alongside the burgers, sandwiches, and salads there are Parmesan-crusted creamed spinach, Bass ale onion rings, and an artichoke dip that draws raves. Live music plays four nights a week. On Saint Patrick's Day there's live music from 4:30 PM on. **Rob Lopata**

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