

# BECOMING AN *Irish legend*

*There's plenty of craic to be had at Waxy O'Shea's*

WAXY O'SHEA'S  
IRISH PUB

11900 SHAWNEE  
MISSION PARKWAY

(913) 631-1759

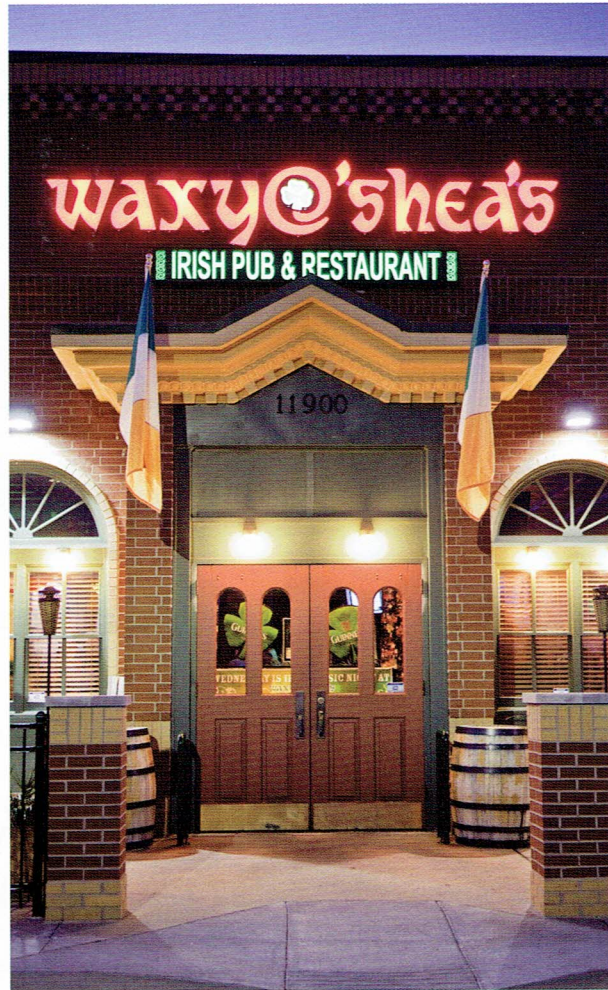
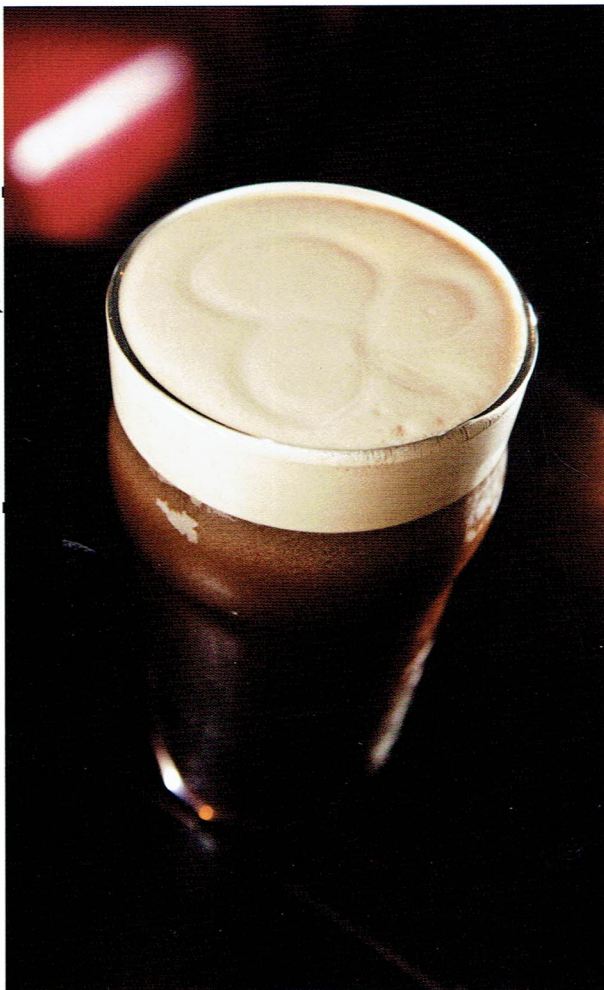
MONDAY-SUNDAY  
11:30 A.M.-1:30 A.M.

WWW.WAXYOSHEAS.COM

STORY BY  
CLAIRE M. CATERER

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
TIM ANDERSEN



**MUSIC SPILLS OUT** the wooden doors as waiters hasten to arrange tables and chairs on the patio.

A whoop goes up from the crowd. Inside, a smiling man drapes ropes of green beads around children's necks as waitresses thread through the bar bearing pints of Guinness. A woman shouldering bagpipes blows high, lonely notes as she strolls into the

dining room, and around her a tall Englishman hustles to find places for people to sit.

While it's not quite a Dublin tavern, the near-authentic setting is Waxy O'Shea's, an Irish pub in Shawnee.

Once home to a succession of failed restaurants, the location may seem like a strange place for an Irish pub. But inside, the black-panel walls, brass fittings and shiny bar

imported from Ireland via designer Andy Thornton of West Yorkshire, England, help thirsty patrons relax from their busy lifestyles.

Longtime Shawnee-area residents Lee Sanford and Bob Ridenhour, proprietors of Waxy O'Shea's, boasts strong Celtic ties. Sanford's grandfather was born in Ireland, Ridenhour's wife is Welsh, and in the 1970s the pair traveled abroad. "We toured Wales and Scotland

and Ireland playing rugby and always liked the pub culture over there,” says Sanford.

It was an appealing idea to bring that culture to the United States. Though the partners have operated other Irish pubs in the metro area—W.J. McBride’s in Overland Park and O’Dowd’s on the Country Club Plaza—they were intrigued when the Shawnee location became vacant. “This building always had a pub look to us,” says Sanford. So, undeterred by the frequent tenant turnover, he and Ridenhour opened Waxy O’Shea’s in July 2009.

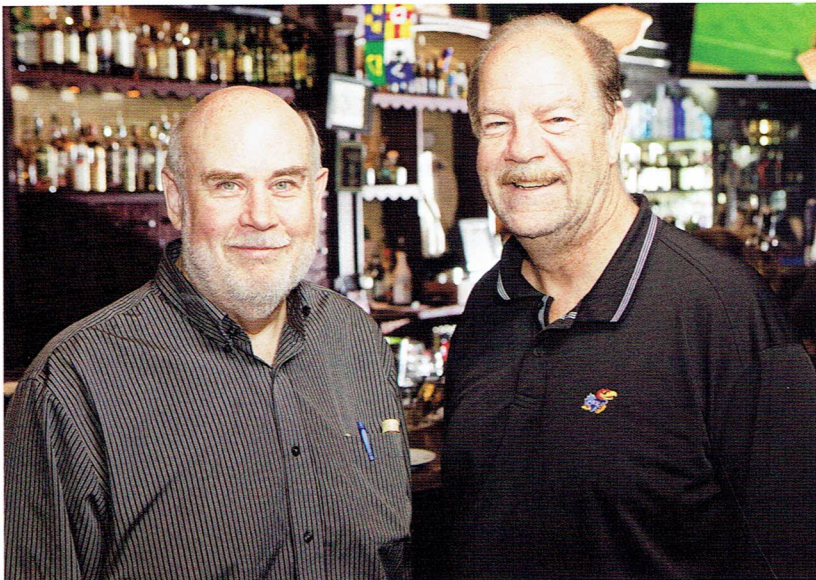
They borrowed the name from a pub owner and raconteur who lived in Ireland during the early 1900s. They thought the name sounded fun, which is the whole point of a pub, right? Likewise, Sanford wants people to think of Waxy’s as the *craic* (pronounced “crack”)—the Gaelic term for fun.

“The pub in Britain and Ireland is almost a community center,” Sanford says. “People go to meet and talk and socialize.” That’s the



ambiance he and Ridenhour try to replicate with events like open mic night, karaoke and the Tuesday-night “pub quiz,” a communal trivia game popular in England. Local bands like the Musical Blades and The Radio Flyers provide live music on the weekends.

Because music is central to an Irish pub, Waxy’s provides an ongoing venue for Irish musicians on Wednesday nights. The Three Dollar Band and Bob Reeder, aka “the Irish Balladeer,” are frequent performers. Reeder, who lives in Independence and plays music all over the metro, says



TOP Irish musician Bob Reeder entertains a busy crowd. CENTER Lee Sanford, left, and Bob Ridenhour are the *craic*-seeking owners of Waxy O’Shea’s in Shawnee and Branson, Missouri. BOTTOM Bartender Paul Spencer, better known as “Spence,” knows just the cure for a long day.

Waxy's is "a great representation of the culture." He adds that the pub gives people a valuable link to their ancestry. "Everybody does claim their heritage because it is their rock to stand on," says Reeder.

Reeder respects Waxy's ties to the old country, noting the business owners' support for Children for Peace in Ireland, a nonprofit group that works in Northern Ireland and Kansas City to bridge the gap between Catholic and Protestant teens. He adds that Sanford and Ridenhour are "a duo that believe in the Irish traditions."

In its 14 months of business, Waxy's has attracted many loyal regulars. Timmy O'Brien has abandoned his previous pub favorite for Waxy's. "It's a much more friendly, genuine atmosphere," he says. O'Brien, who has traveled extensively in Ireland, adds that Waxy's proprietors have captured the authentic pub experience. He enjoys the menu, especially the fish and chips, which Sanford confirms as a top seller.

Waxy's airy dining room just off the bar gives adults and families alike the chance to enjoy traditional Irish pub fare as well as American favorites. Scotch eggs, shepherd's pie and the "boxty," a kind of potato-pancake wrap filled with meat or seafood, are just a few Irish offerings, along with a large selection of Irish ales on tap. Marge Clark, a patron from western Shawnee, enjoys the Waxy's Sampler Platter. "The calamari is the best I've had anywhere, including Hawaii," she says, adding that the Ellis Island Reuben is her favorite sandwich.

Sanford says Waxy O'Shea's is here to stay. The partners recently added an attractive outdoor patio. Several new menu items have debuted, including a strip steak, pork chops and salmon. Sanford's vision for the pub is to grow and embrace the community while trying to bring something new to the area. "We're not a chain. You can't go to one on every block," he says. He urges Shawnee folks to shift their ideas about American bars and try something a little different, and not just on St. Patrick's Day.

Any day, says Sanford, is a good one to enjoy the *craic*. **SM**



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## KISS ME, I'M IRISH

*These organizations help locals explore their Irish roots.*

### THE IRISH AMERICAN CLUB OF JOHNSON COUNTY

*The social club was founded "to promote Irish culture and to create an appreciation for Irish heritage." Open membership. Meets at 7 p.m. on the third Thursday of each month at COURT OF APPEALS PUB & GRUB, 11121 JOHNSON DRIVE, SHAWNEE. WWW.IRISHAMERICANCLUBOFSHAWNEE.COM*

### THE CELTIC FRINGE

*The club membership "is open and inclusive to anyone with interest in Celtic culture." Meets at 7:30 p.m. on the first Tuesday of each month at THE GAF, 7122 WORNALL ROAD, KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI. WWW.CELTICFRINGE.ORG*

### THE IRISH MUSEUM AND CULTURAL CENTER

*Enjoy classes in Irish Gaelic language, dance, music and genealogy plus exhibits and a gift shop at UNION STATION, 30 W. PERSHING ROAD, KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI: (816) 474-3848. OPEN 10 A.M.-4 P.M. WEDNESDAY-SATURDAY AND NOON-4 P.M. SUNDAY. CLOSED MONDAY AND TUESDAY. WWW.IRISHMUSEUM.ORG*

*For more information on Kansas City's Irish offerings, visit WWW.KCIRISH.ORG.*

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