

Celtic Pennsylvania
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2008 Penn-Mar Irish Festival in Shrewsbury, Pa.

We attended the 8th annual Irish festival to benefit the Penn-Mar Organization, Inc., held in Shrewsbury, Pa. (near York). Overall it was a nice little festival (and it is little). It is worth a visit, especially if you get the \$5 tickets beforehand. Tickets were \$7 at the door. Kids under twelve are free. It is held at the Markets of Shrewsbury which is a place that sells the wooden sheds, play sets, gazebos, etc. that the Amish or Mennonites make. There are indoor stores with garden products, a bakery, a flower shop, a bulk foods area, etc. It is not a real big market area. The weather that day was very sunny and about 80 degrees.

The Irish festival was held at one end of the market's pretty big parking lot. It is a one day affair. There were about 24 product and food vendors there and 16 entertainers listed. We did not see even half the entertainers perform and so will not review them much. Of the vendors, only half were selling Irish themed items. 4 of the entertainers were Irish dance groups and 2 were pipe and drum bands. Many of the entertainers were fairly local. Barleyjuice, a more nationally known band, was going to perform twice later in the day. In our opinion they should have performed at least once earlier, and then once later. The food vendors were not that great. They need at least one more Irish themed food vendor there, and if they expand, they will need even more. I had lamb sausage with peppers and onions, which was decent. There was only one Irish food vendor that we could see. They had a kid's tent which was a little small and packed. I am not sure what they had for activities there but it was a popular corner. We only spent about 2 hours at the festival since it was small.

The festival was well attended. We have no idea if it was any kind of record turnout. But for the little size of the festival, there were more than enough people there to bring a sizeable donation to Penn-Mar (a non-profit group) and a profit to the vendors. As we watched the vendors we saw many people actually buying items (this is not always the case at festivals). The parking arrangement worked out ok, as they had most people parking in a steep grass field adjacent to the paved market lot. Although about a hundred more cars would have caused a problem with parking.

It was hot since the festival is held in a paved parking lot, and they might think about a more shady area to hold the affair in the future. A big problem I saw was the size of the performance tents. They were too small for the number of people and could have been double their size, if it wasn't for the lack of area. Since it was so hot and sunny, we had a hard time finding any little sliver of shade. The performance tents were standing room only. There was not a lot of space to sit while eating food. We did like the timing of the festival as there are no other ones, in Pennsylvania, this week of June.

They sold beer there which is a good thing for any real Irish festival. They had the beer in one corner and really should put it in two, one at the beginning and one at the end. The

festival was nicely laid out in a rectangular area. This is an Irish festival and not a Celtic one. So don't go there expecting many Scottish or Welsh goods.

Any Celtic or Irish festival has a hard time with the size to people ratio. If it gets too big then you have to expand into another area, find more parking, hire more and better bands and hopefully get vendors to fill up the space. If it is too little people lose interest and will not return the next year. The driving force for most Celtic or Irish festivals is the quality and variety of vendors and, especially, the quality of entertainment. Those have to be maintained to stay in business. If Penn-Mar's goal is to have a small manageable Irish festival, year after year, that brings in decent donations, than they probably have succeeded with this Irish festival.

The Positives

- Good time of year
- Good Pennsylvania area for a festival (close to Maryland)
- Manageable size to walk around
- Well laid out grid for the vendors and entertainment
- Good Irish dance groups
- Easy access off a major highway
- Free admittance for children under 12

The Negatives

- Kid's area too small
- Entertainment tents too small for viewers
- Lack of another Irish food vendor
- Lack of sizeable tented area for eating
- Hot parking lot location
- Need even more advertising
- Lack of sizeable number of Irish vendors

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