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Irish Social Club, West Roxbury icon, saved after grass-roots campaign

Posted by Matt Rocheleau November 18, 2011 04:58 PM

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The Irish Social Club of Boston has been saved from apparent doom seven months after former leaders shut down the club's dance hall and headquarters on Park Street in West Roxbury.

By **Matt Rocheleau**, Town Correspondent

The Irish Social Club of Boston has been saved.

Seven months ago this week, a grass-roots group launched a bid to revive the cash-strapped, 65-year-old institution after its West Roxbury home abruptly closed and leaders moved to dissolve the organization.

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- [Supporters push to save fading Irish social club](#)
- [Irish Social Club moves toward reopening](#)
- [Frustration grows as Irish Social Club members, supporters locked out of meeting](#)

This weekend, the group will formally realize the achievement of its goal.

“It’s saved and now we’re working on returning it to what it once was, returning it to its past glory,” said club member Brendan Adams, whose wife Kathleen Adams helped lead the “Save the Irish Social Club” campaign.

Sandwiched between a Mass and a dance scheduled for tomorrow night, the club will install its new elected officers and board

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install its newly elected officers and board members, which includes some newcomers and longtime members Mary Maloney as club president and Kathleen Adams as first vice president.

The club that was founded in 1945 had seen its membership grow to around 15,000 by the mid-1970s, according to Globe archives.

However, the membership declined over the years and the then-leaders ominously watched so few members attend this year's annual St. Patrick's Day dance, once a highlight of the club's calendar, that door collections did not cover the cost to hire the band.

Several weeks later, club officials [closed the club's building](#) on Park Street after a final, bittersweet dance in mid-April. They cited a combination of factors -- discouraging attendance at the club's Sunday night dances, a dwindling and aging membership, rapidly shrinking savings and a looming to-do list of repairs -- for their decision.

The closure appeared to signal the beginning of the end for not only the club's dance hall in West Roxbury, but also for the entire nonprofit that had originally met in rented space in Hibernian Hall in Roxbury.

But, a [team](#) of club members, concerned residents and elected officials, helped lead [an at-times frustrating effort](#) to stop and reverse plans to eventually sell the spacious, former bowling alley venue the Irish club moved into 33 years ago.

[That campaign](#), which felt not enough effort was put into trying to save the club, saw its first significant victory about two months after the club's closure, when [the club's now-former leaders agreed in late June](#) to begin planning for a major fund-raising event and membership drive.

After three months of planning, the late-September event was an overwhelming success raising tens of thousands of dollars and signing hundreds of new members. More than 2,500 people, a host of multi-generational families, visited the club over a 10-hour span.

"I don't think anyone saw that many people coming out. It was amazing. You couldn't move in there all day long," Brendan Adams said by phone today. "The hall was filled to capacity from one in the afternoon to eleven o'clock at night."

Over the past seven months, the club's size has tripled to 900 members, he said. The majority of the \$92,000 the grassroots campaign has raised was collected during that event. Nearly all of the money will be reinvested into projects needed to reopen the club including, replacing a leaky roof, bringing the building up to fire code, repainting, refurbishing the dance floor and making upgrades to heating, cooling, electrical and plumbing components.

All of the projects along with efforts to obtain new liquor and entertainment licenses from the city are ongoing and aided through volunteer support and non-monetary donations, such as labor or discounted supplies.

On Dec. 4, the club's West Roxbury headquarters is scheduled to hold a Sunday night traditional Irish dance -- its staple event -- for the first time since April 17.

Sunday nights will continue to be reserved for the traditional Irish dances. The club has formed committees that are brainstorming ideas for more events, likely on Fridays and Saturdays, that appeal to its longtime and older membership as well as functions designed to garner interest from younger and family-oriented crowds.

Leaders also expect the club's facility will be rented out to for other community and cultural events on weekdays. The club hopes to continue to expand and diversify its membership and will continue to fundraise to bolster its programming and further secure its financial footing.

"We're at the point where the club is on firm ground. The club is sound. Now

it's up to code," Brendan Adams said. "The next step is now to keep the club viable. Basically, to grow the club. I really have a great feeling about this going forward. It will return to what it once was, a premier club for Boston's Irish."

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