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The Sun shines on event that has 'really grown'

By Rachel Rausch

Post-Crescent West editor

NEW LONDON -- Young and old alike displayed their love of emerald green as they lined the streets to watch the largest St. Patrick's Day parade in the state. And, once again, it didn't disappoint. New London resident Shane Sutherland says he watches the parade every year. "It's a fun time. I know everybody pretty much and it's a great parade," he said. **The nearly two-hour long parade featured more than 125 floats including bagpipe and marching bands, the Leinenkugel horses, the Wacky Wheeler -- a leprechaun performing stunts inside a moving wheel -- and Circus World horse-drawn wagons. Dan and Marie Perttula said the Irish music and the Wacky Wheeler were their favorite parts of the procession.** "There's a lot more this year than there was last year," Dan said. "The bagpipes are really beautiful." Decorated farm tractors also made a strong showing. In fact, parade director Jill Hart noted that in the first parades -- which began more than two decades ago -- farm equipment was a popular entry. "It used to be that if you wanted to see every tractor in the county, you'd come to the parade," Hart said. "But, it's really grown a lot since then." That's no blarney. Organized by the Shamrock Club of New Dublin, the city's 22nd annual Irishfest went off without a hitch. Parade-goers flocked to the city in the thousands donning green wigs, wearing green beads and painting shamrocks on their faces. It was the first time Robyn Hidde and her 3-year-old daughter Lily of Brillion attended the event. "I heard about it from my co-worker," Hidde said. "We're Irish and we knew it was going to be nice and Lily loves parades." Everyone claims to be Irish on this day, where T-shirts sporting phrases like "Kiss Me, I'm Irish" can be viewed for as far as the eye can see. With a much nicer forecast this year than last year, people didn't have to brave the weather to attend. "Last year we had to clear snow off the streets before the parade," said Sgt. Chris Gregory of the New London Police Department. Gregory said controlling the parade route and the crowds is handled by coordinating efforts from the department, the city's Police Explorers and fire department and officers from Outagamie and Waupaca counties, as well as the State Patrol. He also said open intoxicants used to be allowed on the street during the parade but about 10 years ago that became prohibited. "The parade is now more geared toward a family event," Gregory said. Virginia Julius of Greenville, who has been attending the event for many years, agrees. "It's a nice family parade," she said. "We found a couple places against the wall and people brought blankets. Everybody made themselves comfortable." Post-Crescent West Editor Rachel Rausch can be reached at 920-982-3650 or by e-mail at rrausch@postcrescent.com.