

# industry tom o'connell



## The Product is Pageantry

**T**his month we're focusing on industry through green-colored glasses. Our "company" labors mightily to turn out one product a year—and does pretty well!

It's the Holyoke's St. Patrick's Day Parade Committee, a volunteer organization of 150 people. Actually, the parade is only one of several activities connected with the celebration and produced by the committee. The parade is the biggest event, of course.

Building toward the great day (this year the parade is on March 27), is the selection of the colleen and her court, the Bishop's Mass, the National Award Dinner, and then, the marchers step off.

A relatively new dimension to the gala is Irish Fortnight. This is a two-week series of lectures and entertainments dealing with Irish culture. Nightly programs held in school and college auditoriums give area people an opportunity to hear native Irishmen talk about the music, history and heritage of the Emerald Isle.

Serious praying for good weather begins in early February.

This will be the 27th annual St. Patrick's Day Parade. It will operate on a budget of over \$100,000 which is raised, in part, through raffle and ticket sales, donations and program ads.

The parade will draw upwards of 100,000 watchers, though a good Irish estimate is closer to a quarter of a million. Add to that the television audience—Channel 22's Kitty Broman and Ed Kennedy cover it—and you have one of Western Massachusetts's biggest annual events.

Over two and one-half hours, some 20 floats, 40 to 50 marching bands, and literally hundreds of other high-stepping paraders will pass before the crowd and cameras. Election

years seem to draw particularly well. Office holders and "hoppers" from aldermen to those at the national level wear the green and let the voters get a good look. To their credit, the majority are there because they want to be. They are clearly having fun.

This is a day when everyone is Irish regardless of his true nationality. Both parade participants and street-side observers toast the spirit of the Emerald Isle.

High school bands, such as those from South Hadley and Chicopee, and nationally recognized performers do their best stuff for the home crowd. The colorful Mummies, feathered and fancied, strut through their complex maneuvers. And the keening of pipe bands swirls up High Street . . . calling Danny Boy.

There are 39 committees in the Holyoke organization. They range from the bus transportation group and the Colleen Committee to the Audit and Budget, and Music, and Out-of-Town committees. Members of each serve for years, rotating from leadership positions to workers. Many have been participants for over a decade. This year's president, Roger Breen, explained that people in surrounding towns including Springfield, Chicopee, Northampton, South Hadley and Easthampton, have formed committees devoted to colleen selection, float preparation and other activities.

Over the years a host of outstanding Irish Americans have been recognized by the committee. John F. Kennedy was the first recipient of the National Award. This year that award, which bears his name, will be presented to Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill.

He'll be the big Irishman there with the white hair. I'll be the big Irishman with the cold beer. ■

