

Irish step dancers perform for school children



Jessica Selby/Daily Times

Students from the Kelly School of Irish Dance in Coventry performed their step dancing for the kids at Western Coventry Elementary, Washington Oak Elementary, Blackrock Elementary and Hope Elementary.

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COVENTRY — Not everyone in the audience was of Irish decent, but everyone was oozing with enthusiasm for the Irish step dancers that performed yesterday for St. Patrick's Day.

Dancers from the Kelly School of Irish Dance visited Western Coventry Elementary School on Thursday morning to deliver two performances of Irish dance for the students. First the dancers performed for the younger students and then they did a second show for the

students in third, fourth and fifth grades.

The all female dance troupe delivered several numbers for the youngsters in the audience, each one garnering more and more excitement from the students. As the dancers hopped, skipped and rhythmically tapped their feet to the floor, the students in the crowd clapped their hands.

The dancers, several of which were former students of Western Coventry Elementary School, described the dance as "extremely challenging."

Jillian Simpson of Coventry, who is now 17, but has been

studying Irish dance since she was in the fifth grade, said that learning the art of the dance is not an easy feat. In fact she said, even now, after all the time she has invested, she still finds the dances challenging.

"It's a lot harder than it looks," she said. "The moves are pretty complicated."

Simpson said that her mother had traveled to Ireland years ago and brought back a CD of Irish music which she just loved.

"When my mom came back from Ireland with that CD she would play it in the house and I

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would dance all around to it so she started me up with an Irish dance group and I have been doing it ever since," Simpson said. "That was in the fifth grade I think."

According to Megan Kelly, who owns the Kelly School of Dance, with her sister Kathleen, the dances are very difficult to learn. She said that it takes a great deal of practice and dedication to learn the art of Irish dance.

Kelly, who has been studying the dance for 21 years, opened the school just four years ago in Coventry. She said over the course of that time interest in the art has grown tremendously and that to date she now has 180 students, a number that seems to be steadily climbing.

She said that her students perform fairly frequently, but at

this time of year, requests for appearances are even more common. Yesterday on St. Patrick's Day, she said that she had more than half a dozen shows lined up for the students.

The dancers first stopped at Western Coventry Elementary, and then were headed to Washington Oak Elementary also in Coventry. Next, they were scheduled to appear at Hope Elementary School in the village of Hope, Scituate and Kelly said that the students had one more performance at a local school, Blackrock Elementary in Coventry. The remainder of their day was dedicated to performing at a number of nursing homes in the community. It is a pretty busy day for the dancers, Kelly said.

"Around this time of year we have shows; plus last weekend and this weekend, we have the parade," she said. "It's basically non-stop for St. Patrick's

Day, but we are really excited that so many people are enjoying what we do."

Jan Sullivan, the principal at Western Coventry Elementary School said that she, just as much as her students, were looking forward to this highly anticipated performance. What she said made her even that much more excited about the show, was that many of her former students, Harris Cook-Hines, among them, were going to be returning to their alma mater to dance as part of the performance. That, she said, made her even more proud.

The dancers in the performance ranged in age from seven to 16 years old and reside in communities around the state from Coventry to Westerly, Kelly said. According to Kelly, The Kelly School of Irish Dance is one of only four Irish Step Dancing Schools in the state.