



# DUBLIN<sup>®</sup>

## IRISH FESTIVAL



### Category 50

**Best Event (Within an Existing Festival)**

**Dublin Irish Festival Best Legs in a Kilt Contest**

**Budget \$750,000 – \$1.5 Million**

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### **Overview Information:**

#### **Introduction & background of main event**

For 28 years, the first weekend in August has been reserved for the largest three-day Irish festival on the planet. The Dublin Irish Festival, hosted annually in Dublin, Ohio, a city just northwest of Columbus, is one of the nation's premier Irish festivals and a Central Ohio tradition. More than 100,000 guests visit the Festival each year to experience the best of Irish dance, music, art, sports and culture. Located on 39 rolling acres in Dublin's Coffman Park, the Dublin Irish Festival brings guests from all over the world together in celebration of all things Irish.

The Dublin Irish Festival strives to offer a wide array of activities in which guests can participate, in an effort to introduce the Festival's diverse demographic to Irish culture and traditions in a meaningful and memorable way. Each year, the Festival aims to provide guests with innovative programs and activities throughout the Festival weekend that are sure to educate, amuse and inspire.

#### **Description and purpose/ objective of event within festival**

The Dublin Irish Festival's Best Legs in a Kilt Contest is an annual festival event that traditionally occurs on Sunday evening. In the three years that the contest has been offered at the Dublin Irish Festival, it has become a favorite event that many guests choose to attend during the last day of the Festival. Participation in the contest is open to all Dublin Irish Festival guests and provides competitors and spectators alike with the unique opportunity to experience an important aspect of Irish culture first hand.

Interested competitors are required to pre-register an hour before the contest begins on the Festival's Trinity Stage. When a contestant registers, he or she is asked to fill out a card with information, which will be announced by the contest's emcees. Contestants are assigned a number to wear while on stage and then directed to line up backstage in numerical order.

Contestants have 45 minutes to register for the competition and 15 minutes to line up behind the stage. At the start of the contest, emcees from local television stations introduce a panel of judges consisting of current and former Honorary Chairs. Each contestant is then introduced by the emcees using the information provided on their registration card, which allows the audience to learn a little about each participant and adds a touch of personality—most often in the form of commendable attempts at humor—to the event.

The contestants are then asked to walk across the stage individually, and this is where the real fun begins. Since contestant swagger and crowd appeal make up two-thirds of the judging criteria, participants are encouraged to make their performance stand out to the judges and audience. Many contestants will strike imaginative poses on stage in an attempt to show off their kilt-wearing physique, while others attempt to incorporate props or talents, such as their own interpretation of an Irish jig, into their few precious moments on stage. Each contestant's stage debut is accompanied by the emcees' narration of the information cards, which allows the crowd to connect a name, age and occupation with the kilt-wearing competitors. Contestants are also asked to share a fun fact about themselves, which can range from shout outs to their wives, husbands, or children to hilarious hyperbolic statements of physical or mental ability. The presentation of individual competitors always generates a few laughs and smiles from audience members, who take immense pleasure in taking photos and videos to share with family and friends later. Full of laughter and energy, this friendly competition manages to



add just the right amount of silliness to an event that is, at its heart, based on an important aspect of Irish cultural tradition. Once all of the individual competitors have had their chance to sway the audience in their favor, participants return as a group and take their final bows before exiting the stage once again.

While the participants wait backstage, the judges collaborate on the contestants and discuss the contest criteria, which includes scores for contestant swagger, how well the contestant's kilt sways and crowd appeal. When the judges reach a decision, they relay the winners' information to the emcees, who announce the third, second, and first place winners. Contest winners are handed prizes as they walk on stage and photos are taken of individual winners and of the group.

Each year, the Dublin Irish Festival strives to preserve the Irish cultural integrity of the Festival, create an optimum event experience for guests and increase attendance through the development and incorporation of creative programming. The Best Legs in a Kilt Contest addresses these ongoing festival goals and melds them into one enjoyable tradition. In its three-year history, the Dublin Irish Festival's Best Legs in a Kilt Contest has become a must-see event. As contestant participation has increased, so too has audience engagement. The contest is conducted in a friendly atmosphere and is designed to appeal to the Festival's diverse guest demographic. As with all other activities offered throughout the Festival weekend, the Best Legs in a Kilt Contest exists to engage, enrich and unify guests in high-quality programming that can only be experienced at the Dublin Irish Festival.

### **Target Audience/ Attendance/ Number of Participants**



The Dublin Irish Festival's Best Legs in a Kilt Contest is designed to be enjoyed by guests of all ages. The contest is open to men, women and children, and the age range of competitors expands year after year. In 2014, the winner of the Best Legs in a Kilt Contest was accompanied on stage by his 6-month-old son, who wore a kilt that matched his father's. Family members and friends of those competing in the event make up a large percentage of the contest audience, as many contestants' families—especially those with young children—enjoy sitting in the front row to cheer on the competitors as they walk across the stage. Even guests with no relationship to the competitors make an effort to attend the contest year after year, as it is an enjoyable, light-hearted

event that is fun to watch. The Dublin Irish Festival strives to provide guests with high-quality, safe and family-friendly events, and the Best Legs in a Kilt Contest does just that.

Attendance at the Festival's Best Legs in a Kilt Contest has noticeably increased in the past three years. The contest is held at the Trinity Stage, one of the Festival's seven entertainment stages. In 2014, approximately 400 guests attended the Best Legs in a Kilt Contest as spectators—an increase from previous years—and 25 guests participated in the contest—a sizeable increase from 2013.

### **Overall revenue/expense budget of event**

The overall expense budget for the Dublin Irish Festival Best Legs in a Kilt Contest was minimal, with a total of \$50 allotted for the purchase of the winners' prizes, which typically consist of festival merchandise and a trophy. The emcees are media personalities from local television stations who announce the contest as part of their in-kind festival sponsorship agreement.

As a favorite Dublin Irish Festival event, the Best Legs in a Kilt Contest drives revenue through increased attendance. The contest is not a separate ticketed event; however, increased attendance at the event throughout the past three years indicates that it has developed a devoted following of guests, including some who return to watch the competition year after year. Increasing attendance on Sunday—especially during the evening hours—continues to be a festival goal. Hosting the Best Legs in a Kilt Contest on Sunday evening gives guests a reason to stay longer on the Festival's last day, and also might encourage family members and friends of those competing to attend the Festival when they otherwise would not.

In addition to the money earned by attracting a different market to the Festival, the Best Legs in a Kilt Contest saves money by placing an entertainment event on the Trinity Stage for approximately 30 minutes. The contest costs significantly less than scheduling a band to perform for the same amount of time. Bands that are typically scheduled to perform on the Trinity Stage cost up to \$5,000, with an average festival entertainer contract ranging from \$750 to \$2,000. Hosting the Festival's Best Legs in a Kilt Contest for a 30-minute period of time on the Trinity Stage increases guest attendance and prevents the stage from sitting empty between performers' sets.

The contest also generates media coverage, which provides the Festival's media partners with content for television broadcasts or news articles and maximizes the Dublin Irish Festival's presence in local and national news media throughout the weekend. The Best Legs in a Kilt Contest has been mentioned in several local newspapers such as the *Columbus Dispatch* and Dublin's *ThisWeek News*, and also in a variety of travel and Irish culture blogs.

### **Tie-in of program to main festival**

The Dublin Irish Festival strives to incorporate events and activities that engage guests in high-quality programming that pays homage to Irish traditions in reimagined ways, and the Best Legs in a Kilt Contest is no exception.

Kilts are an important part of Irish history, stretching back to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century during the "Gaelic Revival" movements that attempted to establish a distinct Irish culture separate from that of the English. During this nationalistic movement, the kilt was adopted as a symbol of the restoration of "traditional" Irish culture. Along with the popularization of the kilt as a distinctly Irish style of dress, the revival movement also sought to restore the Irish language and revive song, literature and sports traditions. As the movement went on, organizations such as pipe bands, military groups, and even boys' schools began to wear kilts as a sort of "traditional" Irish garment.

But the Dublin Irish Festival Best Legs in a Kilt Contest does not only pay respect to the extensive history of the traditional Irish kilt; it also acknowledges and incorporates stylistic trends that have gained increased popularity in recent years.

Traditionally, kilts in Ireland were made in solid colors, usually saffron or green, and did not display the colorful tartans like those seen on Scottish kilts. Although archeologists have found evidence that tartan cloth was worn in Ireland centuries ago, it does not seem like a fashion culture linking the tartan pattern to a specific family lineage or location existed in Ireland, at least not to the extent of what is seen in Scottish kilts. More recently—historians estimate this change occurred sometime between 1960 and present day—some Irish kilts have started to incorporate the tradition of "named tartans," but these have mostly gained popularity outside of Ireland.

Since both tartan and solid colors kilts are worn by participants in the Dublin Irish Festival's Best Legs in a Kilt Contest, this event succeeds in taking important pieces of Ireland's history and reinventing them for a modern audience. Like many unique experiences offered at the Dublin Irish Festival, the Best Legs in a Kilt Contest serves as a memorable and meaningful educational opportunity that encourages guests to gain a better understanding of Irish culture in a welcoming and creative environment.

### **Duration of program (start to finish) and years program has been part of event**

The Dublin Irish Festival Best Legs in a Kilt Contest has been a part of the Festival for three years, and has experienced increased audience attendance and contestant participation each year. Registration for the event begins Sunday afternoon. Guests interested in participating have 45 minutes to enter the competition and receive their contest numbers. The event itself, which includes the individual introduction of contestants, scoring by judges, announcement of winners and presentation of awards, lasts approximately 30 minutes.

### **Description of sponsor/charity/volunteer/school/other group involvement with event and benefits to each (if applicable)**

In 2014, the Dublin Irish Festival Best Legs in a Kilt Contest was presented with the help of two festival sponsors, 10TV and Hollywood Casino. As part of its in-kind media partnership with the Festival, 10TV's media personalities had the opportunity to emcee the contest, which resulted in increased community exposure for their television station. Trinity Stage sponsor Hollywood Casino also benefitted from the event being hosted on its stage, as the contest always draws a diverse audience that increases in numbers each year. Sponsorship signage was hung in highly visible places behind and around the stage, which gave Hollywood Casino the opportunity to market its brand to festival guests.

Additionally, vendors in the Festival's Marketplace and Emerald Isle shopping areas, which feature nearly 100 vendors selling authentic Celtic-inspired merchandise, benefitted from increased kilt sales in the days leading up to the Dublin Irish Festival Best Legs in a Kilt Contest. The contest created an expanded market for the kilts sold at the Festival and encouraged guests to support the Festival's talented artisans and unique vendors.

### What makes the event unique/creative?



The Dublin Irish Festival Best Legs in a Kilt Contest provides guests with the unique opportunity to become better acquainted with important aspects of Irish culture through an unforgettable, hands-on experience. For many contestants, being able to perform in front of an audience of almost 500 people is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and will be something that can be shared with family and friends long after the Festival ends. The Best Legs in a Kilt Contest encourages guests to actively participate in the Festival's diverse cultural and entertainment programming, rather than simply observe from a folding chair in the audience.

Year after year, the energy and creativity exuded through contestants' enthusiastic participation in the Festival's Best Legs in a Kilt Contest is what makes this event special. The

contestants have the unique opportunity to make this event their own through their choice of kilt, performance style and with the information they include on their registration cards. The contest's atmosphere has always been a welcoming, free-spirited environment that encourages contestants to express themselves as they see fit, and the each year's competition is different than the last. The contest has definitely seen growth in the number of participants, leading many competitors to return with family and friends each year. The contest has seen an increase in audience throughout the past three years as well, and the event continues to attract a wide array of diverse guests.

Like many other activities offered at the Dublin Irish Festival, the Best Legs in a Kilt contest first and foremost exists to educate and involve its audience. The contest succeeds in introducing its audience to quintessential aspects of Irish culture in a creative environment that encourages and celebrates increased guest engagement and expression.

### Overall effectiveness/ success of program

The Dublin Irish Festival Best Legs in a Kilt Contest has enjoyed resounding success in the three years it has been a part of the Festival. In 2014, attendance and participation increased from previous years to incorporate 400 spectators and 25 competitors. The contest has gained popularity due to its marketability to a wide range of festival guests, as well as its reputation for being a fun and enjoyable way to round out the last day of the Festival.

One of the most important indicators of this event's effectiveness is observed in the contest's ability to increase revenue for minimal expense. A total of \$50 is allotted for the purchase of the winners' prizes, which consist of festival merchandise and a trophy, and the emcees from local television stations announce the contest as part of their in-kind festival sponsorship agreement. Although the budget is small, the quality of presentation does not suffer. A favorite Dublin Irish Festival event, the Best Legs in a Kilt Contest drives revenue through increased attendance and the development of a devoted following of guests, including many who return to watch the competition year after year. Increasing attendance on Sunday—especially during the evening hours—continues to be a festival goal. Hosting the Best Legs in a Kilt Contest on Sunday evening gives guests a reason to stay longer on the Festival's last day, and also might encourage family members and friends of those competing to attend the Festival when they otherwise would not.



The contest also generates media coverage, which provides the Festival's media partners with content for television broadcasts or news articles, and maximizes the Dublin Irish Festival's presence in local and national news media throughout the weekend.

The Best Legs in a Kilt Contest is a festival favorite that continues to grow and improve each year. Through the promotion of hands-on audience participation, this event succeeds in enhancing the Festival experience for many guests, and encourages increased active involvement in all that the Dublin Irish Festival has to offer.

**Supporting Question:**

**What did you do to update/ change this program from the year before?**

**Were your updates/ changes successful? Please provide measurable results/ examples.**

Having only been held at the Dublin Irish Festival for three years so far, the Best Legs in a Kilt Contest is constantly changing to better serve both its audience and its participants. With each passing year, new ideas and changes are implemented that work toward the betterment of the event. In 2014, the Dublin Irish Festival Best Legs in a Kilt Contest incorporated a specific set of judging criteria for the first time. The judging panel, consisting of current and former Honorary Chairs, was asked to score contestants based on their swagger, how well their kilt swayed and overall crowd appeal. Not only did the introduction of specific criteria give the contest a more organized and professional feel, it effectively streamlined the judging process, which allowed for more time to be allotted for each competitor's performance and aided the judges in coming to a consensus on the winners.



The Dublin Irish Festival Best Legs in a Kilt Contest continues to enjoy success, much of which is due to the positive changes made each year to the event's organization and implementation. In the three years it has been a part of the Festival, the Best Legs in a Kilt Contest has become a guest favorite, and an integral part of the complete Dublin Irish Festival experience. In 2014, attendance and participation increased from previous years to incorporate 400 spectators and 25 competitors, and positive feedback indicates further growth in years to come. The contest has gained popularity due to its marketability to a wide range of festival guests, as well as its reputation for being a fun and enjoyable way to round out the last day of the Dublin Irish Festival.