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## **CelticMKE, Milwaukee Irish Fest Founder Ed Ward Passes Away**

*Milwaukee Irish Fest visionary leaves behind a lasting legacy after a long battle with cancer*

**MILWAUKEE** (October 16, 2019) — CelticMKE, the organization behind Milwaukee Irish Fest, mournfully announces the passing of its visionary founder Edward Ward, after a long battle with cancer. Ward passed away at home on Sunday, October 13, surrounded by his family.

What originated as the seed of an idea for a three-day event to celebrate Irish music and heritage in a city known for its German roots has emerged into a thriving year-round organization centered on the mission of preserving and promoting all things Irish in the Milwaukee area and beyond. For nearly four decades, Ward brought people together through music, art and community. Over the years, the festival grew to become the largest Irish festival in the world, with over 100 acts across 17 stages and more than 100,000 attendees.

In addition to Milwaukee Irish Fest, he also founded the John J. Ward Irish Music Archives in 1992 and the Milwaukee Irish Fest Foundation in 1994. He served as the Executive Director for the first 11 years, served as Board President for four years, was a permanent member of the Board, and led the festival entertainment committee as chairman.

Ward's influence and legacy stretches far beyond the festival and its organization. He played a role in connecting with and supporting other Irish festivals across America as well as Irish musicians around the world. He established communications and fostered relationships to elevate Celtic culture with various entities in the U.S., Ireland, Canada and Scotland. He was a trailblazer whose ideas, advice, guidance and mentorship left an imprint on the Irish-American community. Ward has enriched so many lives and has been an infinite source of inspiration.

The staff, board members and volunteers at CelticMKE extend their condolences to the Ward family. "We have lost a true champion of Irish and Celtic music and culture. More importantly, we've lost a dear friend," said Linda Clark-Klibowitz, Board President for CelticMKE. "His impact will be felt in the Celtic community around the world for decades to come. We offer our sincere condolences to Ed's family and to all those who have been touched by his kindness over the years."

CelticMKE will honor his memory and his legacy by continuing to carry out his vision of promoting the Irish culture throughout the Midwest, of which he was so profoundly passionate about. CelticMKE encourages friends and followers to send thoughts, memories and condolences to [rememberinged@celticmke.com](mailto:rememberinged@celticmke.com).

Ward is preceded in death by his son Brendan and his brother Chuck. He is remembered by his wife Cathy, sons Patrick, Sean (Melissa) and Conor, daughters Caitlin (Jimmy) and Kelly, granddaughter Moira, brother Jack (Margaret), sister Colleen Kennedy (Tom), and sister-in-law Cathy.

A visitation will be held at Becker Ritter Funeral Home (14075 W North Ave, Brookfield) on Thursday, October 17 from 4pm until 8pm. A funeral Mass will be held at the Church of the Gesu (1145 W Wisconsin Ave, Milwaukee) on Friday, October 18 at 10am.

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Donations are appreciated to the CelticMKE Tommy Makem Cultural Legacy Fund or the Irish Fest Talent Development Fund.

Due to a family allergy please refrain from using Lily's in any floral arrangements sent.

Full obituary can be found at Ed Ward's CaringBridge profile website, at [caringbridge.com](http://caringbridge.com).

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