

St. David's Day - Chicago Style!

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This Welsh ex-pats society in Chicago, called the Chicago Tafia, was originally founded by **David Parry** from Aberystwyth.



The Chicago Tafia are campaigning to get St. David's day on the American map!

Article written by **Brooke L. K. Parry**.

Throughout the United States during the week of St. David's day Welsh Societies gather to celebrate a holiday which, unlike the Irish St. Patrick's Day, most Americans know little to nothing about. And so, in addition to celebrating, the Chicago Tafia Welsh Society has set out to do something different: campaign to get St. David's day on the American map - this year, more so than ever.

Beginning over a month ago, members of the Chicago Tafia, founded and led by David Parry who emigrated to Chicago eight years ago from Aberystwyth, began their annual push to get St. David's day mentioned by the local media with a great deal of success. Letters and emails poured into Chicago radio and television stations asking presenters, radio hosts and news anchors to wish their listening audience a happy St. David's day, play songs by Welsh artists, and talk about the holiday.

Off to an encouraging start, Parry decided to take things a step further. Inspired by legislation recently passed in Wisconsin to officially recognize St. David's day, he wrote a letter to State Representative Robert W. Pritchard, citing the countless contributions Welshmen have made to the city of Chicago and to the state of Illinois as a whole, asking that a similar bill to Wisconsin's be voted on in Illinois. He made a strong argument indeed, because Representative Pritchard promptly replied in agreement, notifying Parry that he was immediately drafting a resolution to recognize St. David's day officially in the state of Illinois.

That's not the only time that going out on a limb paid off for Parry this year. Months earlier, after interviewing Welsh pop star Cerys Matthews (formerly of Catatonia) for his column in the Welsh-American paper, Ninnau, he asked whether she might be willing to perform for the Tafia during their St. David's day celebration in February. Matthews, who currently resides in Nashville, Tennessee with her American record-producing husband and their two small children and who rarely performs in the states, excitedly agreed to travel to Chicago with two accompanying musicians, Mason Neely and Kevin Teel. With the help and support of Geoff Harding at Wales Trade International's Chicago office, final arrangements were made.

On Saturday, February 24,
Cerys and company were

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- [Your Say](#)

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escorted from the Chicago airport in a limousine driven by Tafia member Brian Geen (formerly of Caerphilly), adorned with Welsh flags on either side "presidential style" (much to the band's delight)

to Fado's Irish pub in the heart of the city, which was already packed to capacity with members of the Tafia watching Wales unfortunately loose to France during the Six Nations Rugby. Lisa Wyn Jones Novak (formerly of Conwy), and her American husband Dave Novak, helped manage the guest list and the eager crowds as everyone settled in for the performance.

As the Tafia enjoyed the house special "Red Dragon" cocktails, Cerys Matthews delighted the group with an amazing private acoustic performance, singing hits from her solo album, "Cockahoop", traditional Welsh folk songs, and even a few variations on songs from her days in Catatonia.

After her engaging performance, during which she joked with the mostly ex-pat audience about adjusting to living in the states, she stayed to graciously sign autographs, take pictures, and enjoy drinks and conversation with the group. Silent auctions and raffles held throughout the evening and managed by Parry's American wife, Brooke, raised over \$400 for the group; 20% of which will be donated to the Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago.

Cerys returned to Nashville the next day, despite a bad Chicago ice storm, and blogged to her fans on her MySpace.com website about her experience. "The Chicago Tafia gave us an amazing welcome," she wrote. "If you're a Welsh ex pat in the Chicago area its well worth looking them up for rugby matches, bonfire night, St. David's day, that kind of thing. Not if you're into clog dancing or candle lit knitting sessions with Glengettie tea. They haven't got to that stage yet. Thank you to Dave, Brooke and Brian for looking after us. We'll definitely be back, and maybe next time with a map to find a fat Chicago pizza."

Cerys plans on joining the Tafia and visiting for future celebrations and events, and hopes that fellow Welsh artists will follow suit by entertaining the group in the future.

The Tafia is also gathering March 1 at a Chicago British restaurant and pub to commemorate the day. The Elephant and Castle, upon Parry's encouragement, agreed to feature special Welsh entrees and appetizers, as well as Welsh whiskey, beer, and themed cocktails for the day. Following the dinner, flag-adorned members will be heading to Chicago's ABC Channel 7 Studio to cheer on the day in front of news cameras.

Finally, bringing the St. David's day festivities to a close, members of the group will be serving dinner and dropping off donations to the Ronald McDonald House, which offers shelter to families whose children are undergoing treatment at Children's Memorial Hospital. Each child will receive a letter about St. David's day, wishing them the courage of the draig coch, and a children's book written in English and Welsh.

Perhaps, with a few more years work, Chicagoans won't raise

their eyebrows in confusion when a Welshman passes them
by with a leek pinned to their lapel on March 1!

Article written by Brooke L. K. Parry.

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