

# Neighbors

## Common Irish roots lead to love

Friends say it seemed fated that this man and woman would meet

By CAROL CHILDO

Special to The News Journal

"Hello, I'm Michael O'Callaghan, John's father," declared the man hastening out of nowhere, hand outstretched to Irene Mallon.

Irene, far from her Pike Creek home, had flown to Kildare, Ireland, with her grown son and daughter, Jimmy and Dorene, to attend a cousin's wedding on Oct. 21, 2000. At the Red House Inn where the reception was held, Irene and a girlfriend went looking for late-night snacks.

"That's where he cornered me," says Irene.

"Oh, would you have tea or coffee?" Michael asked. "She was very nice, an extrovert," he recalls. The music played and they talked and danced.

On June 25, 2002, Irene Mallon married Michael O'Callaghan, a widower of three years, in the same Kildare church in which Irene's parents married in 1929.

"I never thought I'd marry again," says Irene. "I never even thought about it. After all, I'd been a widow for 15 years. I don't think Michael thought about it either."

"Learning that she was a cousin of my son John's wife, I wanted to introduce myself," says the soft-spoken Michael of their first meeting. Irene had visited John and his wife, Anne Marie, another of Irene's cousins, at their home near Boston.

"Oh, he's got great eyes, very laughing, and a nice smile," said Irene, recalling her thoughts upon meeting Michael. "He's like a Barry Fitzgerald."

Each had noticed the other across the pews at the cousin's wedding, asking, "Who's that?" Says Jimmy Mallon, Irene's son, "My sister and I had been to Ireland before and met Michael. He's a real nice guy."

Jimmy adds, "At the reception Dorene said to John, 'I think your dad's hitting on our mom.' Someone said they sneaked out for sandwiches. 'Oh, is that what they call it in Ireland?' I said."

"We did not go out," says Michael. "We just went across the corridor from the ballroom



Michael and Irene O'Callaghan met in Ireland at a wedding; she's a cousin of his son John's wife. The widower and widow married a year ago and now live in Pike Creek and Dublin, Ireland.

### PROFILES

#### Irene Mallon O'Callaghan and Michael O'Callaghan

Age: 60s

Family: Michael: Two sons and a daughter — John of Winchester, Mass.; Paul of Galway, Ireland; Mary. Grandchild Ronan, John's son. Irene: Two sons and a daughter — Jimmy Mallon of Pike Creek; Chip Mallon of Hockessin; Dorene of New York City; six grandchildren.

Residence: Michael and Irene divide their time between Dublin, Ireland, and Pike Creek.

Occupation: Both retired, Irene from the State of Delaware, Michael from civil engineering.

Hobbies/Interests: Both love to travel and soon will plan a travel itinerary. Michael is a history buff. Irene is a member of the Mill Creek Fire Company Ladies Auxiliary and the Friends of Brandywine Springs.

to the room where the sandwiches were served."

At evening's end, Michael said, "I'll call you. Would that be all right?" Irene said yes.

The next day he called her and she and her family had dinner with Michael in Dublin at a Chinese restaurant.

When Irene left Ireland, Michael kissed her goodnight and said, "I'll write."

"Instead, he called," says Irene, "that same week, after I got home. He said he wanted to know what an American Thanksgiving is like and would love to come over to the U.S.A.

for the Thanksgiving holiday."

"He's a nice guy," I thought. "I like him," says Irene. "He had a cute little brogue besides." So she invited him over. "When I told my children, they said, 'Duh-uh, Mom, he's coming to see you.'"

"It seemed appropriate," says Michael. "Thanksgiving gave me an excuse. If I'd told my friends I was flying across the Atlantic for a weekend just to see Irene, they'd think I'd gone 'round the bend."

Thereafter, Michael phoned Irene nearly every day, they e-mailed each other, and took turns flying across the Atlantic to be together. On New Year's Eve 2000, in Ireland, he asked her to marry him but she turned him down, concerned she would have to leave her family and six grandchildren.

On Sept. 23, 2001, Michael asked the driver of the horse-drawn cab in Central Park, New

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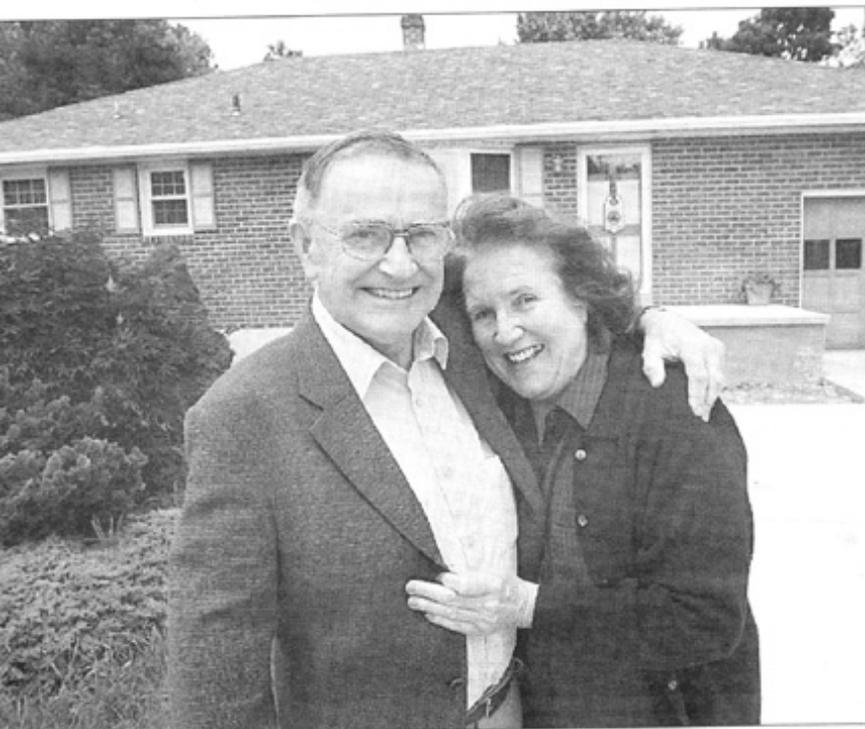
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Courtesy Michael and Irene O'Callaghan  
The O'Callaghans married in Ireland in the same Kildare church where her parents were wed.

York, to pull over. In the cab, Michael got down on one knee, looked up at Irene, and said, "Darling, would you marry me?" "Yes, I will," said Irene. "Oh, it makes me so happy," he said.

"Me, too," said Irene.

"I was wonderin' what you were going to say there," Michael told her.

"We came home, picked out a ring and phoned the family," says Irene.

"We were surprised that Mom was [in her 60s] and getting married. That was amazing," says Jimmy.

Michael sold his Dublin home. "I want to be where she is," he says. Even when he had to return to Ireland to meet his visa requirements, Irene went with him and they filled their time traveling to London and Paris.

Irene and Michael will celebrate their first wedding anniversary on Wednesday.

"As friends tell me, it seems fated we'd meet," says Irene. "He's wonderful! I haven't changed my mind a bit. The second time around is better, they say I agree."

It seems the fairies have woven a bit of their Irish magic.

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