

Thistle Epistle

March 2022

[Annual General Meeting \(AGM\)](#)

The AGM of the St. Andrews Society of the Inland Northwest will be held at O'Doherty's Irish Grille, 525 W Spokane Falls Blvd, at 4:00 pm on April 24, 2022.

To maintain continuity in the running of the Society, the elections of President and Secretary are held in alternate years to those of Vice-President and Treasurer. At this meeting, elections will be held for the offices of President and Secretary for two-year terms.

Both of our current President and Secretary have served the maximum term limits. We have two people who have been nominated and are willing to serve in these positions:

Nominated for President - **Kenyon Fields**

Kenyon has been playing in local pipe bands since 1970. Following Bill Thomas' tradition, he started off at Shadle Park High School and then joined the Angus Scott Pipe Band. Being involved in the Scottish community is a family affair; his daughters were highland dancers and his wife was a piper as well. Kenyon is now retired and looking forward to contributing to the Society in a different role.

Nominated for Secretary - **Rafaela Ortiz**

Rafaela Ortiz is a recently retired chief operating officer at a governmental insurance company. She comes to the St. Andrews Society by way of marriage to a Highlander who loves his roots and instilled the same love in her for anything Scottish. She brings many organizational skills to the table and is eager to help the St. Andrews Society grow and flourish.

Please note that having the above nominations does not stop other nominations from being made. In fact, the Society welcomes nominations of people who have not held office before; new officers are required to carry the Society forward. Accordingly, nominations are invited for both posts. Any member of the Society is eligible to serve; note though, that persons nominated must agree to the nomination.

Nominations may be sent by email to spokanescots@gmail.com or by ordinary mail to PO Box 11312, Spokane, WA 99211 by **April 1, 2022**. In addition, nominations may be made from the floor at the AGM.

President's Message

Dear Members,

It has been my pleasure and honor to serve as your President and Vice President for the past nine years. This April marks the end of my term limit as President and I am grateful for the memories that I have made with many of you. I know that I am leaving the Society in capable hands with our Board Members and look forward to hearing what the Society will do in the future. My family will be relocating to Missouri (time still to be determined) and I will miss the Inland NW and all of you. I have been asked to give a brief background on my involvement in our Society over the years.

My journey begins in 1986 when I met Elizabeth Coyle and started taking highland dance lessons with her. She forever changed my life and opened my world to this amazing community. Throughout the next eight years, I competed throughout the U.S., Canada and in Scotland as well. In 1995, I started helping with the dance competition at the Spokane Scottish Highland Games and our Spokane Indoor Competitions. That was the start of hosting competitions and championships throughout the last 27 years including the U.S. Championship that Elizabeth and I, along with a fabulous group of dance moms, hosted in Spokane in 2011.

Teaching was a passion of mine from the start and I began with the Shadle Park Highland Dancers in 1997. In 2002, I opened my first studio in my garage. It was a tiny little space, but I was living my dream. Throughout the following years, I expanded and grew the studio. I continued to serve in other areas for highland dance including representing the NW as the Delegate in ScotDance USA and becoming a judge as well.

Some of my favorite memories are from our Burns Nights. From my very first Burns Night and smelling haggis - Oh my, the scent was so strong you could smell it when you walked into the hotel (it's not like that anymore). I remember about ten years later almost running into the pillars at the Masonic Lodge from a great strip the willow. Fast forward more and I have loved taking my passion for ceilidh dancing to our Burns Night and helping others to learn the dances.

I will be forever grateful to this whole community and especially Elizabeth who introduced me to this special culture. Thank you all for including me, supporting me and allowing me to share my gifts.

Most Sincerely,
Marie Grimes-Darling

[Spokane Scottish Highland Games 2022](#)

I want to start by thanking everyone who marched with us at the St. Paddy's Day Parade. It was so awesome to see all the parade goers lining the streets and sidewalks. I have to say for me personally, hearing the pipes and drums rocked! The combined sounds of the Angus Scott Pipe Band and the Spokane County Firefighters Pipe and Drum Band was amazing and good for the soul. Spirits were up and it was a great day for all.

The Spokane Scottish Highland Games is pleased to announce that we will have a Tartan Day presentation at the Games, organized by Barbara Bley of the St. Andrews Society. See the separate article below. We are working on the details now.

We have sent out an art contest invitation to some area graphic designers and we are hoping to get some great designs for our T-shirts, programs, and posters. If you know of anyone interested in joining this contest, please refer them to Cheryl McLean, cherylmcl66@yahoo.com, and I will send them the information.

The SHGA will be sending out sponsor letters to our current sponsors and we will be sending them to the St. Andrews Society members as well. Our Games may only be one day, but it takes lots of sponsorships to get us there. Please know that we all appreciate everything you do to help with the Games – whether it be sponsoring or volunteering.

Our Piping and Drumming Chair, John Blunt, is sending out emails inviting pipe and drum bands to join us for the massed bands and asking pipers and drummers to join the competition.

Sondra Willmann, our Athletic Director says that there is a strong interest in the Games. She feels we will have a great turnout this year.

I am sad to say that we will not have an actual dance competition this year, due to Covid 19 slowing highland dance lessons almost to a stop; however, we will still have highland dance exhibitions. We hope to have the Highland Dance competition back up running in 2023.

We are hoping to bring you new vendors, lots of clan tents, and more heritage activities to enjoy and to help you learn about your Scottish heritage. We are just now contacting heritage groups, vendors, and clans, and will keep you informed of our progress.

Remember to save the date, August 6th, 2022, and join us at the Spokane County Fair and Expo Center for the 65th annual Spokane Scottish Highland Games.

Sincerely Yours,

Cheryl A. McLean, Chairperson, Spokane Highland Games Association.

[National Tartan Day](#)

A reminder that April 6th is National Tartan Day! And, while the new standards on wearing masks indoors and meeting maskless outdoors has been lifted, it came too late to plan an indoor observance on the actual day itself. But take heart! The National Tartan Day observance has, for this year, been moved to an outdoor venue; The Spokane Scottish Highland Games has graciously invited us to join them in honoring our tartans!

We will have a Tartan booth in the Heritage section between the St. Andrews Society tent (selling T-shirts) and the Weavers tent. We will have a display of historic weaponry along with assistance in finding your clans and tartans. In addition, there will be commemoration speeches honoring the day on the Main Stage.

So, don't forget to wear your tartans on April 6th and we'll see you at the Games on August 6th!

Barbara Bley

[Scottish American Military Society \(SAMS\)](#)

Ed Wattawa has been leading the move to reinstate SAMS in Spokane. Things are progressing, but there has been a glitch; believe it or not, the Petition to Form a SAMS Camp which Ed sent in got lost in the shuffle. He has submitted another petition, but still hasn't heard back on whether it has been approved. We have eight SAMS members, enough for a camp, but just shy of the ten we need to form a post. Hopefully, we will hear back from the Regional Commander soon that our camp is good to go.

[St. Patrick's Day](#)

As Cheryl remarked above, the St. Patrick's Day parade on March 12 was a great success. The combined pipe band and the Scottish contingent took their accustomed place towards the front of the parade. There were a large number of participants in the parade and an excellent turnout of spectators all along the route. It was wonderful after so long of an absence to finally see people out and about and having fun.

[Upcoming Event with the Dishman Hills Conservancy \(DHC\)](#)

For all our active members:

Breezy Knees Hike with the St. Andrews Society - Saturday, April 30th, 1:00 - 3:00 pm. Camp Caro Trailhead, 625 S Sargent Rd, Spokane Valley, WA 99212.

Please share the link among your group so they can register! The event is posted on DHC website at <https://dishmanhills.org/events-list/>.

[Covid in Scotland](#)

As I write this, on March 21st, the situation in Scotland relating to Covid appears on the surface to be dire. Nearly 400,000 people currently have it - 1 in 14 of the entire population. There are 2,030 cases in hospital, almost a record for the entire period of the pandemic. The surge is attributed to the BA.2 subvariant of the Omicron strain of the virus, which is more infectious, but not any more virulent than the original strain.

However, some things are positive. The numbers of positive Covid cases are not translating into as many hospitalizations as earlier in the pandemic, and those who are in hospital are not ending up in intensive care - and possibly death - as happened earlier.

Around 30% of people in Scotland report that they have now had Covid. Expert medical opinion believes that the surge may be short-lived, as the virus runs out of people to infect.

Most restrictions relating to Covid have now been lifted in Scotland, although the mask mandate remains in place for public transport and most indoor public settings.

After March 18th, travel restrictions have been lifted for international travelers to Scotland.

If you believe you might need to show proof of vaccination for any reason, there is an NHS Scotland Covid Status App you can use.

As always, if you are planning to go to Scotland, you will need to research the situation current at the time you go. As you know, things can change quickly.

[Scottish Independence from England](#)

The situation since last I reported remains virtually unchanged. Last fall, the chief minister, Nicola Sturgeon, said that she was looking to hold another referendum on independence in 2023. The U.K. Government said they would not allow this to happen. Those positions remain the same now as then. However, the majority of Scots are of the opinion that discussions on independence should remain on hold while the Ukraine crisis exists, and there has been a slight strengthening in "Remain" sentiment.

Ukraine

It is interesting to note the parallels between the situation in Ukraine and the Scottish wars of independence in the middle ages. Back then, a very powerful and more populous country launched an unprovoked attack on its smaller neighbor, as an act of aggrandizement. The smaller country rallied round charismatic leaders, Wallace and Robert the Bruce, and managed to assert its independence. Will the Ukrainians have their Bannockburn?

Marie Darling

As you will have already read above, Marie Darling is leaving us for new pastures. For as long as I have been around, she has been a constant presence in the Scottish community in the Inland Northwest, as well as being prominent in the national highland dance scene. As well as her dance activities, she has greatly contributed to the St. Andrews Society, as Council Member, Vice-President, and President. For many years she organized the Society's Burns Night celebrations and acted as MC. Who can forget the Grand March she led every year, which had almost all the Burns Night guests out on the floor!

Marie, thank you for your service and we will definitely miss you!

Peter Guthrie
Thistle Editor