



## *A Day at the Leprechaun Shop*

By Abigail Kulick, Main Street Manager

After spending a weekend filled with Irish parades, bed races, crafts shows, sales, food & drinks I just wasn't quite ready to stop celebrating St. Patrick's Day, so to continue on with the theme of the month I thought it would be appropriate to spend Monday, March 14<sup>th</sup> at the Leprechaun Shop! This one of a kind store provides both Clare citizens and visitors alike a way and a reason to commemorate their Irish heritage. The Leprechaun Shop proves that heritage does not have to be something of the past; this store wholeheartedly embraces Celtic customs and traditions.

Kristi Gollish opened the Leprechaun Shop in 1990 as the very first Irish store in the state of Michigan. The store functioned as a very small Irish shop until 1995 when Kristi took on a major project and renovated the entire store, adding 1,800 square feet and vaulted ceilings. The expansion of the building created an expansion of the business as Kristi had more space to display a larger variety of Irish products.

At the time The Leprechaun Shop set the standard for authentic Irish stores and continues raising the bar to this day. Since the opening of the store, Kristi has witnessed Irish customs become mainstream through music, theater, jewelry and travel thus leading to numerous Irish stores popping up around the state. Kristi has noticed the impact of

competition through the fast growing popularity of Irish goods; however, her store continues to pride itself as the oldest, most established Irish importer in the state. The Leprechaun Shop offers the largest selection of jewelry, including Celtic and Claddagh wedding rings, as well as the largest Belleek fine china account in Michigan. Currently there are over ten Irish stores in the state and dozens more around the country, yet the Leprechaun Shop continues to retain its loyal customers and never fails to attract new.

Highway billboards have been The Leprechaun Shop's number one marketing tool. Many years ago Kristi realized that advertising on billboards gave travelers a reason to get off at the exit. She also built a shelf by the front door of her store to accommodate a guest book that has resulted in a customer mailing list of 8,000-10,000 addresses. Six telephone lines later (including a toll free phone number) The Leprechaun Shop has definitely noticed the benefit of concentrating on marketing as customers come from all over the country and the phones ring off the hook daily requesting special orders.

Located in the heart of downtown Clare, named after County Clare in Ireland, The Leprechaun Shop is a 100% genuine Irish store. Kristi chose the theme for the shop based off of Clare's celebrated Irish reputation, and she has stuck to that theme for the past fifteen years. The Leprechaun Shop cannot be confused for an ordinary gift or card shop, Kristi has held true to her theme and has never hesitated to completely identify her store with the Irish tradition. Practicing this theme has created a specialized niche market for The Leprechaun Shop. The majority of the store's clientele comes from tourists. Of course the store has an Irish customer base, however, you do not need to be Irish to appreciate The Leprechaun Shop; many people are intrigued by the little store because it has become part of Clare's Irish legend. When visitors come to town they want to know what makes the area unique, they want to see things that are specific to Clare. The Leprechaun Shop is, hands down, a must-see Clare original!

The Leprechaun Shop imports more than 75% of its merchandise from the British Isles. Kristi believes in selling the finest authentic Irish merchandise that suits her market. She personally does her buying overseas where she can see and feel the products she is ordering, as well as how they are represented in the Irish culture.

Alissa Haynak has been working as store manager for Kristi for seven years. Kristi loves Alissa's expertise and product knowledge, giving every customer individual care. Alissa functions and manages the business and Kristi believes that Alissa's role as manager compliments the business more and more every day.

Jewelry makes up half of the sales for The Leprechaun Shop. Its large selection guarantees customers will find a wide variety of Celtic and Claddagh jewelry suitable for any occasion and price range. Celtic jewelry comes from the Celts who were ancient people with ancient history; they were pre Roman and pre Christian, however the Celtic cross and Eternity Knot have been incorporated into the Christian culture through the shared belief in eternal life and the depicted trinity. The Irish Claddagh symbolizes Love, Loyalty and Friendship. This ancient Irish symbol is recognized all over the world and its custom is still practiced today; if you see a person wearing a Claddagh ring with the hands and heart facing in, put your pick up line in your pocket and turn around because that person's heart is taken. However, if the hands and heart on the ring are facing out then, by all means, proceed; that person is available for love!

Kristi Gollish has enjoyed contributing to Clare's Irish heritage for fifteen years; however, she has recently put her business up for sale and is ready to step back. The sale

of The Leprechaun Shop is an incredible business opportunity for someone new to add a wee bit of Irish into their own life. Although Kristi will not own her business forever she believes that someone new will come along and, like the Celts, there will be eternal life for The Leprechaun Shop.