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Reconnection via exchange

Ireland, US sponsor new one-year visa program

By Maria Sacchetti

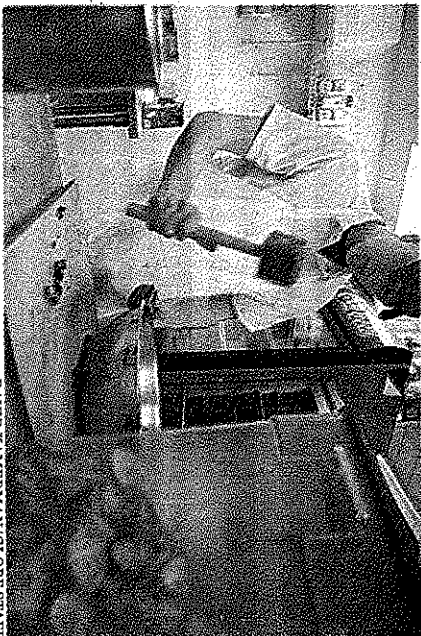
GLOBE STAFF

More than 100 years ago, young Jeremiah Donovan left Ireland on a steamship pointed toward Boston Harbor, desperate to find work in the United States. He quickly landed a job on the railroad and gave his family the opportunities he never had.

Now his great-grandson, Patrick, hopes that Ireland will return the favor.

Patrick Donovan of Portland, Maine, and others across the United States are pinning their hopes on a new visa exchange program between Ireland and America. The five-year pilot program allows college students or recent graduates to live and work in the other's country for up to a year as a way to strengthen ties between the two nations, which were transformed by huge waves of Irish immigration to the United States in the 1800s.

"I'm not sure what to do with my life," said Donovan, 23, who graduated from Franklin & Marshall College last spring with a history & IRELAND, Page B4



DAVID KAMBERMAN/GLOBE STAFF

Patrick Donovan of Portland, Maine, has applied to the new Ireland-US visa exchange program.

'There are a lot less Irish folk here than there used to be. This is an injection of new, bright, Irish folk keeping that tradition alive in a new way.'

THOMAS KEOWN, Irish Immigration Center



DAVID KAMERMANN/GLOBE STAFF

Patrick Donovan, a Mainer, is heading to Ireland in the new exchange program mainly to learn more about his roots. More than 100 years ago, his great-grandfather left Ireland by steamship to find work in the United States and arrived in Boston.

US, Ireland reconnect via exchange

► IRELAND

Continued from Page B1

gree only to confront soaring unemployment and settle for a job chopping tomatoes at a tavern in Portland. "My parents are giving me some space. They're really psyched about this Ireland thing."

Officials from both countries concede that the program is kicking off at a grim economic time, but say its greater goal is to promote the relationship between the two countries. In 1870 — the year Jeremiah Donovan landed in Boston — the Irish were the biggest group of legal immigrants to the United States. Now, Australia is the top choice for young Irish workers heading abroad.

"There are a lot less Irish folk here than there used to be," said Thomas Keown, spokesman for the Irish Immigration Center in Boston, a nonprofit that is processing applications from Ireland for the program. "This is an injection of new, bright, Irish folk keeping that tradition alive in a new way."

Under the Intern Work and Travel pilot program, participants must be college students or

must have graduated within a year. Americans can apply to the program through the Irish Embassy in Washington or consulates in Boston, New York, San Francisco, or Chicago.

But some question introducing new competition in the workforce, even for a year, at a time when unemployment has soared to 9 percent in Ireland and 7.6 percent in the United States. Typically, Irish immigrants come over in three-month stints to take seasonal summer jobs, but the young applicants for the exchange program are looking for both low- and middle-income jobs in both countries.

"Right program. Wrong time," said Steve Kropper, cochairman of Massachusetts Citizens for Immigration Reform, who lived in Ireland for four years as a child because his father set up factories abroad for manufacturing companies. In addition, he said, Ireland and the United States should have the same number of work visas for fairness.

Donovan, who is unsure what sort of job he will want, said he is heading to Ireland mainly to learn more about his roots. He wasn't always this way.

He prefers Pat to Patrick. He always disliked it when his father Tom, a New Hampshire lawyer, insisted that he wear green on St. Patrick's Day, even affixing an "I'm Irish" pin to his jersey.

"I always hated it," he said with a laugh. "It was embarrassing. I was the only guy with pins on my green sweater."

As he grew older, though, he grew more curious about his family. He does not have any first cousins in the United States but he is eager to meet his extended family in County Cork.

"We don't have a big family," said Donovan. "It's good to keep contact with family from the home country. You don't want to lose contact with that."

Irish government officials echoed his concern. With 4 million people, Ireland has a smaller population than Massachusetts and is very conscious of its ties to the United States.

"We really have a very longstanding relationship with this country," said David Barry, Ireland's consul in Boston. "At home, people value the links with America. It's a very important connection for us. The last thing you'd want to see is a weakening

of that link in any way."

In Dublin, Roman Caffrey, 24, said he hoped to come to America under the visa program to tell Americans how much Ireland has changed. His country has become far more cosmopolitan, but many Americans still recall only the country their great-grandparents fled. Once in a New York City bar, a man asked him if Ireland had pizza.

"I had to look at the guy, like, you know — we have satellite TV," he said. "Ireland is as advanced as any place in the world. I had to give him a bit of a lecture."

Caffrey, who studied international business, also hopes to learn something here. He said he will try to find work in the financial sector in New York and get a front-row view to the start of what he hopes will be an economic recovery that will spread around the world.

"Despite the economic problems that America's having, Ireland's are much worse," he said. "I still feel that America's the land of opportunity, no matter what."

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