



Heritage pride

Lynnette Fitch ('89) is the Tartan Belle

Calling Lynnette E. Fitch ('89) a huge "Celtics fan" would be an understatement. The British and Irish literature teacher of Scottish, Irish, English and Welsh descent recently won the title of Virginia's first ever 2002 Tartan Belle.

The 2002 Tartan Belle contest sought a woman who honored her Scottish heritage through involvement in the culture and participation in the local Scottish-American community. The mayor of Richmond crowned Fitch at the Tartan Ball on April 6, 2002, National Tartan Day.

Brookie Crawford ('94), director of tourism and public relations for the Ashland and Hanover Convention and Visitors Bureau, was one of the organizers of Virginia's Tartan Belle contest and Tartan Ball. Proceeds from the ball benefited the Second Celtic Heritage Festival in Hanover County in May.

Crawford says, "The Virginia Tartan Ball was a fund-raising event and an effort to increase awareness for both the festival and for Scottish heritage statewide."

Fitch's grandmother, a Ferguson, was an American of Scottish and Irish descent. Fitch is involved with numerous organizations, celebrations, dance competitions and hobbies related to her heritage. She has been involved with or performed at all four of the local Tartan Day celebrations held in her area. Fitch gives students extra credit for attending the celebration, and last year, she threw a ceili with live Irish and Scottish music for seniors at Tallwood.

After graduating cum laude with a B.A. in English and minors in secondary education and psychology, Fitch taught middle school English for eight years. From 1998 to 1999, she studied in Ireland and earned a master's degree in Anglo-Irish Literature and Drama at the University College Dublin. She graduated with honors and earned certification in Teaching English as a Foreign Language.

Fitch is a member of numerous Celtic organizations, including Cuideagh o Corn o Uisghebeathe (a local whiskey tasting society), Tidewater Irish-American Society, Tidewater Scottish Society, Tidewater Friends of Folk Music, American Branch of the Celtic League, International Association for the study of Irish

Literature and the American Conference of Irish Studies. She is the former secretary of the Tidewater Scottish Festival and a member of the Clan Ferguson Society of North America, which awarded her a \$400 scholarship for summer study in Scotland.

Fitch has spoken at Tidewater St. Andrew's Society's meetings and has been asked to organize the ceilidh part of the evening for the group's Burns Night 2003. In 2001, she taught a Scottish culture course for the Slater Institute in Portsmouth and was nominated a Dancer of the Month by the Culkin School. The local Irish Society crowned her Adult Princess in 2000.

Nominated as Teacher of the Year four times, Fitch was named to Who's Who Among American Teachers in 1998. She was one of 15 educators selected nationwide to participate in the National Endowment for the Humanities Hamlet Seminar at Columbia University in 1995.

I am really proud to have studied Anglo-Irish literature and drama in Ireland and serve as the local Irish Society Adult Princess in 2000," says Fitch, who also competes and performs in Irish step dancing and Highland dancing.

In 2002 she won eight medals in Nation's Capital Feis, an Irish dance competition in Washington, D.C. She has been featured on the covers of The Fergus-Elora News and U.S. Scots Magazine, and the Highland Games in Alexandria published a logo that is based on a photograph of her. Fitch is a novice dancer in Irish dance and studies at An Cor Rud. She will be a premiere dancer at the Thistle and Shamrock Dance Academy.

A guy once also used pictures of me competing in the sword dance as a model for a highland dancer for a video game for Scottish whisky," says Fitch.

Fitch organizes educational tours, which have included trips to London, Paris and Scotland. Her first trip to Scotland was in 1991, and at the end of her visit, she didn't want to leave. I was so distraught to have to leave that I was literally in tears, she says. In August 2003, Fitch will guide a self-designed educational tour to the Celtic Isles.

Fitch has published professional articles and short stories in U.S. Scots Magazine and Virginia English Bulletin. She presented a professional paper at the Virginia Beach Reading Council Conference and wrote a one-act play that was performed at the school district's drama competition.

A Renaissance woman, Fitch also holds a part-time job at a local pub. She is a hostess at Jack Quinn's in Norfolk, where she also promotes and schedules Celtic concerts and special evenings for the pub.

In summer 2003, Fitch plans to travel to Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, to study Cape Breton/Scottish step dancing at the Gaelic College of Celtic Arts. She would like to branch out into designing and leading more educational tours.

Learn more about Fitch's traveling experiences, dancing and educational tours at www.pulli.com/lynette

Story by Janelle DiOrio ('03)