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The Irish Echo Presents  
the 2011 Irish Top  
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## Orphans cry

Band members are poster kids for visa shutout

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They are often to be found on posters advertising concerts, but the four members of the band The Screaming Orphans could also be the poster children for the U.S. immigration system's near blanket ban on visas for the Irish.

The Orphans, all members of the Diver family from Donegal, spend most of their working year in the United States, or playing on cruise ships sailing from U.S. ports. And they pay their taxes to Uncle Sam.

But while they are allowed work in the country, the all-girl foursome is required to apply for fresh working visas every year.

And this despite the fact that their mother is a U.S. citizen, and their father is a veteran who served honorably in the U.S. Army.

The Orphans, Joan, Angela, Grainne and Marie Therese, occupy a kind of gray zone resulting from the return of a citizen parent to Ireland, and the fact that their citizen mother, Catherine, gave birth to her four girls an ocean away from her own birthplace in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

"She was brought back by our granny and granddad and just stayed on," said Grainne Diver in an interview.

In theory, Catherine could run for U.S. president. But she can't pass on her citizenship to her daughters from her domicile in Ireland.

Their father, John Diver, has also found himself in a most unusual situation with regard to his status in the eyes of the U.S. government.

John Diver served in the U.S. Army in Germany back in the late 1950s. He was in the same army unit as Elvis Presley.

During his years of service, Diver earned himself a good conduct Medal, his Driver's Badge and his



The Screaming Orphans have strong family ties to America, but no green cards.

Marksmanship Badge.

But on a day when he turned up at Dublin airport with a ticket for a flight to America, the U.S. immigration authorities took legal aim at his green card.

As Grainne explained it, her dad's green card had expired and it was put to him that he could renounce it, secure a separate visa for that particular visit, or skip the flight entirely and go before a judge to appeal for a renewal of the green card.

With the Divers expected for an important event in New York, John felt compelled to renounce the green card and make the journey with the non-residency visa.

By doing so, he found myself in a category not unlike that of his daughters.

As it currently works, the Orphans must apply every year for a

renewable P1 working visa. Already having a P1 is no guarantee of a renewal so the band lives and works from year to year in more ways than one.

They have outlined their hopes for a more secure visa situation in letters to Senators Chuck Schumer and John McCain but, so far at least, they have to keep applying to their annual visas.

"Every year they have to go to Dublin to get P1 visas. This is time consuming and costly for them and causes problems in setting up their schedule, which depended on when their P1 visas are issued," said friend and supporter Eugene Hart, who lives in Omaha, Nebraska.

"I believe if anyone should get green cards it should be the daughters of a U.S. citizen and a veteran of the U.S. Army," Hart said.



Playing the green card. Fianna Fail leader Micheál Martin checks out the pepper plants during a campaign stop at Keelings Fruits in Dublin. PHOTOCALL

## Ireland votes

By Ray O'Hanlon  
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Irish voters go to the polls on Friday in a general election that promises little in the way of quick relief from an overwhelmingly gloomy economic situation.

Nevertheless, political leaders and party members have been injecting energy and verve into a campaign that could end with Fine Gael securing a rare single party majority in the next Dáil.

Spurred on by encouraging poll numbers which show the party pulling ahead of Labour, its most likely coalition partner, Fine Gael had pledged a 100-day campaign once in office that would focus on jobs.

According to an Irish Times report, Fine Gael's finance spokesman, Michael Noonan, said his party intended to introduce a jobs creation bill by July if elected. The bill would result in a lowering of the 13.5 percent Value added Tax (VAT) rate to 12 percent, and the current 8.5 percent rate of Pay Related Social Insurance cut in half.

The pledge came as 43 jobs at the Sunday Tribune newspaper in Dublin were lost after failed attempts to secure new investment. Irish newspapers labor under high VAT rates that do not apply to British newspapers on sale in the Irish market.

Meanwhile, Fianna Fáil leader Micheál Martin said that his party would target the "very significant" number of undecided voters in the final few days of the election campaign.

An Irish Times/Ipsos poll showed that the undecided still make up 19 percent of voters.

Friday's election is confined to voters living in the Republic, in addition to diplomatic and military personnel serving overseas. Irish emigrants can't vote, but Fine Gael, Labour and Sinn Féin have all promised varying degrees of voting rights that would be applied to the diaspora should they gain power.