

James Donahue: Detroiter a devotee of Irish dancing

By **JOE ROSSITER**
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER



James Donahue

James Donahue was a man who stayed in step.

Intensely proud of his Irish heritage, he was active in the Irish Step Dancing community for much of his life and got his children involved at an early age.

That meant spending many weekends crisscrossing the Midwest as he and his wife chauffeured their three kids to countless dance competitions.

“He never considered it work. It truly was a labor of love for him,” said Barbara, his wife of 40 years. “Everything that went into it — the planning, the costumes and the recitals — was something he enjoyed, and

he was so proud of what they accomplished.”

Mr. Donahue, a retired insurance agent and longtime Detroit resident, died Sunday of an abdominal aortic aneurysm at St. Vincent’s Hospital in New York City while vacationing with his wife. He was 63.

Each of the Donahue children went on to compete in step dancing — a dance routine that involves quick and precise foot movements — in the World Championships in Ireland, where only the best vie for honors.

After his daughter, Therese

Schneider, opened an Irish dance school in Grand Rapids in 1992, Mr. Donahue occasionally emceed recitals, resplendent in a green vest and Irish cap, and carrying a shillelagh.

“He was a very eloquent and extemporaneous speaker whose favorite instrument was the microphone,” said his wife. “He loved to entertain.”

Mr. Donahue graduated from what was then University of Detroit High School in 1961 and received a bachelor’s degree in finance from the University of Detroit in 1966.

While attending college, he started working with Allstate Insurance as a sales agent and remained in that job after graduation, spending a quarter-century with the company and re-

tiring in 1987.

Mr. Donahue then worked part-time with Olympia Entertainment for several years supervising concessions at its venues, including Comerica Park and Joe Louis Arena.

In addition to his wife and daughter, survivors include a daughter, Kristin Ries, and a son, Jonathan; his mother, Helen; four brothers; two sisters and eight grandchildren.

A 10 a.m. visitation today is to be followed by a funeral mass at 11 a.m. at Gesu Church, Quincy at Santa Maria, Detroit. Burial is to take place Saturday at 11 a.m. in Holy Sepulchre Cemetery in Southfield.

Contact **JOE ROSSITER** at 313-222-6594 or jrossiter@freepress.com.