

Mardi Gras: World's largest party is cold and wild

United Press International
NEW ORLEANS — Cloaked and shivering celebrants formed a river of bodies stretching from stately St. Charles Avenue to the raucous French Quarter Tuesday for the last big blowout before Lent.
 Tens of thousands of people from across the United States swarmed to New Orleans each year for Mardi Gras, the world's largest free party.
 "This is the craziest thing I've

ever been to," said Mary Parker, 37, of Miami. "I mean, the whole city shuts down so people can dress up and beg for junk. The Catholics in this town sure take their Lent seriously."
 Drizzle and bone-chilling temperatures in the 40s prompted many celebrants to forfeit Mardi Gras costumes for the warmth of coats and winter clothes. But others were not hampered by the cold, turning out to dance in skimpy g-strings and flowing garments.

Others jumped around to keep warm, screaming "Throw me something, mister" to maskers who pelted bystanders with aluminum doubloons and plastic trinkets from a stream of colorful and elaborate floats.

The crowds seemed relatively calm, but a policeman standing along the parade route warned, "It's still early yet." He said the crowd was considerably smaller than the estimated 1.1 million people who packed the down-

town area on Fat Tuesday last year.

"I came here to be crazy without anyone knowing," said 21-year-old Gretta Soniat, a student living in Dallas. She said she spent two weeks putting together her costume, which mimicked a pregnant Princess Diana.

"My parents think I'm studying for a psych test," Soniat said. "I'm looking at it as a field trip in psychology. I've never seen such a self-indulgent city."

A California man and his wife used a box on a stick with a sign that read "Throw something for California" to entice maskers to toss them treasures.

"We came all the way from California ... to freeze," said W.W. Wanamater of Van Nuys, "but we're having a good time."

He said the plea painted on his box had netted him one of the treasured Zulu coconuts. The coconuts, hand painted by members of the Krewe of Zulu,

are among the most sought-after Mardi Gras prizes.

Revelers crowd around the Zulu floats begging for the coconuts and sometimes scuffle with each other when a masker drops one on the crowd.

Most of the crowd stayed along the parade routes but other celebrants drifted into the French Quarter, where small marching groups with jazz

bands tossed doubloons and beads to bystanders.

Visitors hung over railed balconies in the French Quarter answering cries from below by tossing beads and plastic trinkets. Other revelers gathered around artists' booths in Jackson Square to have their faces painted in gay colors and bizarre designs.

Texas crime rate decreases for first time in 22 years; increased awareness cited

United Press International
AUSTIN — A decline in Texas' crime rate — the first in 22 years — is being attributed to an increased awareness of the consequences of crime and the growing number of citizens' crime-fighting groups.
 Col. Jim Adams, director of the Texas Department of Public Safety, said Tuesday the overall crime rate for major and minor crimes in 1983 dropped by 6.2

percent with 5,907 crimes per 100,000 people.

In addition, 766 Texas law enforcement agencies reported 928,827 major crimes during 1983, a drop of 3.5 percent compared to the previous year. The DPS chief said the public's perception of crime may have been a contributing factor in the decrease.

"We had almost come to accept a yearly increase in volume

as being inevitable," Adams said. "A simple answer for these decreases is hard to come by, but I believe there's been greater awareness of the consequences of criminal acts, less tolerance of the criminal on the part of the law abiding citizen and increased participation in neighborhood watch groups, crime-stoppers programs and other anti-crime efforts."
 In the violent crime category,

robbery posted the greatest decrease — 11.4 percent. Murders were down by 9.1 percent, rapes were down 7 percent, and aggravated assaults were down 6.7 percent.

In the property crimes category, burglaries fell 8.2 percent and car thefts were down 5.2 percent. Theft, the only ma-

ior crime category showing an increase in 1983, rose only 0.4 percent.

Other statistics reported by DPS included:
 — Drunken driving arrests in 1983 totaled 149,621, an increase of 33 percent.

Dispatcher's argument aired; incident stirs 300 complaints

United Press International
DALLAS — An ambulance dispatcher who argued for several minutes with a man whose stepmother was dying has been reassigned to other duties.

A Dallas television station that broadcast tapes Monday of the January incident reported some 300 calls from people complaining of similar treatment.

Fire department section chief Mike Jones said Tuesday the dispatcher, 17-year veteran nurse Billie Myrick, was placed on paid administrative leave one month after the incident, but was returned to duty after two days' leave.

Jones said Myrick was reassigned to other duties Tuesday because of stress and media pressure.

Dallas television station KDFW aired fire department tapes of the incident during its news program.

It was not determined if Myrick was involved in any of the other instances, but KDFW said it has filed a request under the state open records law to obtain tapes of other such conversations.

Larry Boff, whose 60-year-old stepmother died Jan. 5, filed a \$300,000 damage claim against the city in the incident. Officials said a full investigation should be completed this week.

Boff said he called the fire department shortly before 11 p.m. on Jan. 5, after his stepmother, Lillian Boff, began having trouble breathing.

On the tape, Myrick was told Mrs. Boff was ill. Myrick asked to speak to the woman.

The tape continued:
 Boff: "No, you can't. She seems like she's incoherent."
 Myrick: "Why is she incoherent?"

Boff: "How the hell do I know?"
 Myrick: "Sir, don't curse me."
 Boff: "Well, I don't care. These stupid questions you're asking me ... Give me someone who knows what they are doing. Why don't you just send an ambulance out here?"

Myrick: "Sir, we only come out on life-threatening emergencies."

Boff: "Well, this is a life-threatening emergency."
 Myrick: "Hold on, sir. I'll let you speak with an officer."

On the tape, supervisor Don Greene came on the line and again asked to speak to the woman. Boff's response contained the word "hell," and Greene threatened to hang up on Boff.

Myrick came back on the line and insisted on talking to Mrs. Boff. When Boff told Myrick that Mrs. Boff was unable to talk, Myrick told Boff to give the woman the telephone.
 Boff hung up, saying he would call a hospital. A few minutes later, Boff's roommate Dennis Fleming called back, and again Myrick insisted on talking to Mrs. Boff.

"She cannot talk," Fleming said. "She is just out of it. In fact he (Boff) is going in there now. He thinks she's dead."

At 11:01 p.m., about eight minutes after the first call, the fire department sent an ambulance to the Boff home.

Mrs. Boff was pronounced dead at 11:30 p.m. of heart disease.

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