

See Mardi Gras - Texas style

By Molly Pepper
Staff Writer

For those with the time and money, Mardi Gras is little more than nine hours and \$115 away on the MSC Travel Committee-sponsored trip to New Orleans this weekend.

But those lacking time and money don't have to miss out entirely. Alternative celebrations in Austin and Galveston may not have the French Quarter, but they're equally festive, more economical and closer by.

The Austin celebration is in its fourth year. Held on Feb. 11, it will consist, officially, of a pa-

rade and a masquerade ball, sponsored by the Austin Chamber of Commerce. The parade will start at 6:30 p.m. with floats sponsored by businesses and individuals from the Austin area. The Royal Court Masquerade Ball will begin at 8 p.m. at the Driskill Hotel on 6th Street.

Unofficially though, the celebration will be helped along by the owners of clubs and bars lining 6th Street, who've been left to plan their own Mardi Gras celebrations. With costume contests, street vendors and musicians, the goal of 6th Street merchants is to make the street more crazy than usual, packed shoulder-to-shoulder with people.

Galveston sponsors another, longer celebration which began

Feb. 1 and continues through Feb. 11. This celebration has been geared more toward families and will have art exhibits and shows of all kinds throughout the city. A children's parade and another large parade to be held on Saturday, Feb. 8 at 6:30 p.m., will be highlights of the celebration.

The Galveston Chamber of Commerce is expecting about 250,000 people to attend the festival.

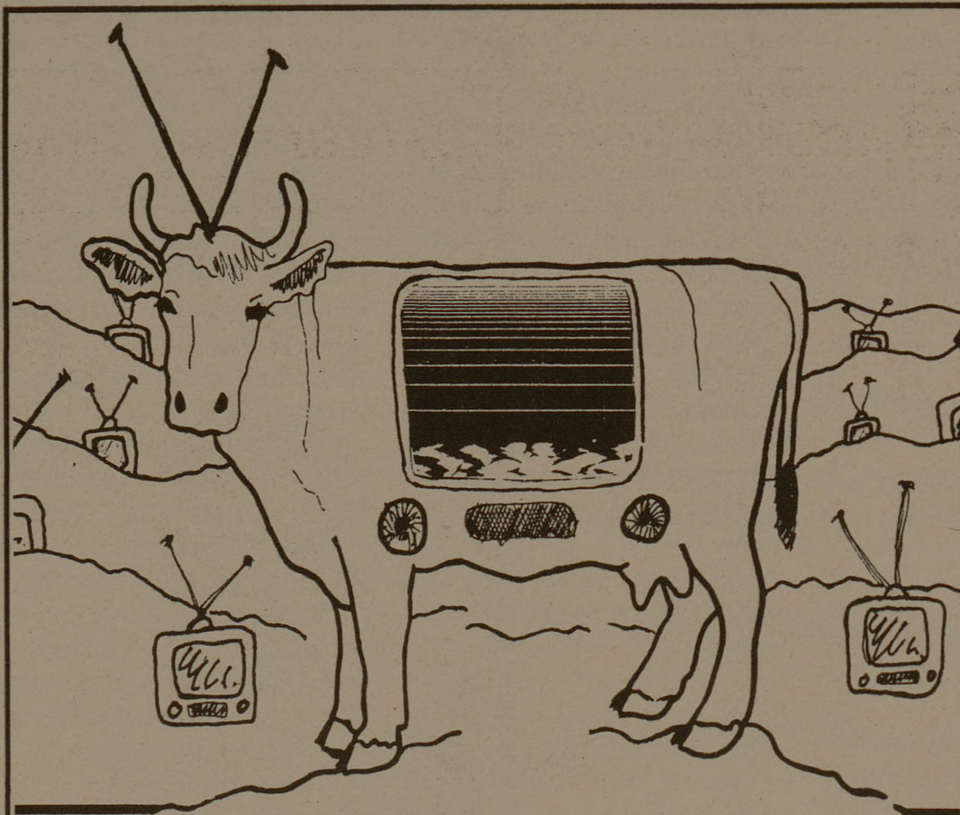
These two celebrations won't come close to the festivities in New Orleans but will have the same basic themes and activities of the original.

Mardi Gras, which means "Fat Tuesday," began as a final celebration before the 40-day Lenten period of abstinence, repentance, and reconciliation.

Historically, the Mardi Gras period begins on Jan. 6, and ends on Ash Wednesday, the seventh Wednesday before Easter. The first Mardi Gras was held in New Orleans in 1857 but the idea of having a celebration before Lent dates back to the pre-Christian period.

It was originally an agricultural rite meant to represent the death of nature in the winter and her re-birth in the spring. The Catholic Church later re-interpreted it to have religious meanings.

In other parts of the world this pre-Lent celebration is called Carnival, and is celebrated in many countries in Europe. Even the USSR, where Ash Wednesday isn't even observed, has a week long carnival that highlights the year.



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