

# Mardi Gras means more than having fun

By Ashley A. Bailey

Static excitement fills the air as the magnificent parades approach, and every face gleams with anticipation as the Jazz bands begin to play on the car-jammed streets. It is time once again for one of the greatest shows in America.

The Mardi Gras season has arrived and the partying has begun.

Joey Quinlan, a freshman in the Corps of Cadets and a native of Baton Rouge, La., says that he has attended Mardi Gras with his family since he was about 2 years old, and it is more fun each time he goes.

"Carnival is for everyone, and it's good for you," he says. "It's for forgetting about your troubles."

The best thing about Mardi Gras, he says, is the temporary release people get from mental, social and religious constraints. Being able to party for two weeks is nice, too, he says.

The Carnival is not just one day or one parade. It's an entire season of no-holds-barred merrymaking. It is a combination of nonstop parades, pageantry, folk drama and feasting.

Mardi Gras marks the arrival of the fasting days of Lent. As a celebration usually held in Roman Catholic countries, the holiday is a way for people to indulge in excessive eating and drinking before the strict Lenten season begins.

Lent is a religious season in some denominations that is marked by fasting and abstention. Ash Wednesday starts the 40-day Lenten period preceding Easter, which represents the biblical 40 days that Jesus wandered in the desert and fasted while being tempted by Satan.

But before this religious period comes a period of festivities, ending with the Tuesday preceding Ash Wednesday. In modern times, the celebrations accompanying this period is known as Mardi Gras, which translates from French to mean "Fat Tuesday."

In the Episcopal Church, this day is called Shrove Tuesday. Shrove means to have heard confession and give absolution. In Germany, the festival is called Fasching. The holiday has its roots in pagan rituals and fertility rites concerning the coming of spring and renewal of vegetation.

These traditions, celebrated throughout the centuries, eventually became so ingrained in the culture that it could not be eliminated by the Catholic church. Thus the Church began to control and restrict the sometimes bawdy celebrations. Popes sometimes even served as patrons in order to maintain control over the festival.

Notable Mardi Gras celebrations take place in Belgium, Italy, France, Canada, Mexico, Brazil and the

United States. Celebrations are held in cities such as Rio de Janeiro, Nice, Cologne, Galveston and, of course, in New Orleans.

Catherine Boyer, assistant director of public relations for the New Orleans Chamber of Commerce, says that the floats are paid for and made by their "krewes." The term "krewe" means a band or group, and it was coined by the originators of the New Orleans Mardi Gras parade, the Mistick Krewe of Comus, in 1857.

One of the largest and most splendid floats belongs to King Rex, the Mardi Gras king, and his krewe, which was formed in 1872, she says.

Boyer says that the King Rex Krewe

introduced one of the biggest innovations in the history of Mardi Gras.

"In 1960 Rex introduced new souvenir throws in the form of doubloons, and now they are collector's items," she says. "Some of the first Rex doubloons are worth about \$2,000 now."

Doubloons, or coins, are made mostly of aluminum and are produced in all colors, Boyer says. Some other common throws are colored plastic beads, trinkets and cups.

Quinlan says that getting the souvenirs is easy.

"All you have to do is yell 'Throw

me sumthin', mistuh!' and the trinkets start flying," he says. "Then if you scramble fast enough you might be lucky and get some."

Boyer says that the krewe on each float funds the throws they toss to the crowds.

"Each krewe member spends about \$200 to pay for their throws," she says, adding that that the money for the floats and throws is well-spent because Mardi Gras is a big asset to New Orleans' economy.

"Mardi Gras will bring over 1 million people — tourists and residents — out into the streets of New Orleans," she says. "It's a wonderfully exciting time for everyone."

## Student helps A&M celebrate Mardi Gras

By Barbette Foley

Determination has a great deal to do with success. Some people base their success on how their actions will benefit the less fortunate.

Brett Powell, director of Mardi Gras '88 which was sponsored by Off-Campus Aggies, says Mardi Gras was fun last year, but its goal was very abstract.

This year Powell wanted to make a difference by having the profits from Mardi Gras donated to the Brazos Animal Shelter.

"Too much money was spent last year on Mardi Gras, and it had no purpose," he says. "This year we decreased costs, turned a profit and we supported a good cause."

Powell, a senior economics major from Alice, Texas, says he was heavily involved in high school. He was in the National Honor Society, the newspaper graphics editor, on the golf team and in the drama club.

Powell believes fate brought him to Texas A&M.

"I had made plans to go to Baylor," he says. "I had been accepted and everything, but I ended up here. However, I'm very glad I'm here. Isn't everyone?"

With such a diverse list of activities in his background, Powell had enough "spunk" to tackle the task of planning the Mardi Gras parade this year.

Powell has been living off campus for three years and has been working diligently with OCA for two years, he says. He was an Apartment Council President last year.

"Most complexes have ACPs," he says. "We're like the contact between on-campus activities and off-campus Aggies. We keep the

apartments informed by posting fliers and planning parties."

Even though he has never been to Mardi Gras, he took on the task of organizing the local celebration.

"This is all new to me," he says. "I'm basing this year's accomplishment on last year's experience."

There weren't many major problems in the planning of Mardi Gras, Powell says, except the possibility of rain.

"This year we didn't have the help of the Corps because they went to Mardi Gras in New Orleans," he says. "But the hardest thing we had to swallow was not having the Aggie Band to march in the parade."

Powell says he started making plans for Mardi Gras in the summer. He had ideas about the fliers, dates and time.

"In the spring of '87, OCA was looking for a full-time director of Mardi Gras for the next year," he says. "I decided to give it a try, to see how bad I could mess things up."

Under the Mardi Gras committee, there were four sub-committees, including the parade, dance, fund-raising and public relations committees. Powell was a co-chairman of the parade committee last year.

"I came to OCA meetings and I saw the need for help," Powell says. "I thought that helping a local charity was a good idea. I came up with the idea of Mardi Gras benefitting the animal shelter because one of the workers came to one of our meetings."

"Also, I thought having the party at Graham's was a good idea, because they play a mixture of country-western and rock music. We

wanted to make it a more well-rounded affair."

Powell says he had more control over the committees once he became director.

"I worked with the fund-raising committee and the Aggie Beach Club for the Mardi Gras t-shirts," he says. "I worked with each committee individually."

Powell says Nancy Thompson, OCA adviser, helped him tremendously.

"I think she helped me the most," he says. "She was my right arm and she gave me that extra boost. She let me run the event pretty much the way I wanted to."

Before Mardi Gras, Powell says the committee members had a meeting at least once a week. During the week before the big event, he says it took even more meetings and time.

"Everyday I was doing something for Mardi Gras," Powell says. "If I wasn't doing something for Mardi Gras, people would call me while I was studying, asking lots of questions about it."

Although he put so much time in Mardi Gras, Powell says he still did well on his first round of exams.

"Honestly, this month I spent more time with Mardi Gras than studying," Powell says. "However, the busier my schedule, the better I do, and I haven't missed a class yet. The only thing I procrastinate about is studying."

After Mardi Gras is over, Powell, who plans on graduating in August, says he has one main goal.

"My main goal is to rest now that it's over," he says. "I need a nice, peaceful break."

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