

The idea of the Off-Campus Aggies' Mardi Gras parade started almost as a joke on Parents' Weekend in 1986, Off-Campus Aggies President Scott Mendell said.

Mendell, a senior biomedical science major, was talking with another student's mother when he mentioned he was from New Orleans. The inevitable question, "Oh, is that where they have Mardi Gras?" followed, he said.

While they were on the subject, the parent suggested that Texas A&M should celebrate Mardi Gras.

At first, Mendell laughed the suggestion off as a joke. But later that summer it didn't sound so funny, he

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said. He decided OCA just might be able to pull it off.

And they did. 1988 Mardi Gras director Brett Powell, a senior economics major, said OCA's Mardi Gras parade last year had 25 entries and drew a crowd that lined the streets from Cain Athletic Hall to past the Commons. He considered it a success, especially considering it was the first year for the event.

Last year's Mardi Gras costume ball at the Ramada Inn was not as popular, Powell said. He said not as many people came as OCA had expected, probably because OCA stressed costume wearing.

Prior to this year's A&M Mardi Gras, held on Friday, both Mendell and Powell were optimistic about both

the parade's and the dance's success.

Mendell said he expected a larger crowd for this year's parade than for last year's because more people knew about it this year. OCA sold T-shirts in the MSC publicizing the A&M Mardi Gras a few weeks before the parade.

Powell says OCA planned this year's dance at Graham Central Station to attract a larger crowd. Wearing costumes was not stressed, he said, although the Mardi Gras theme this year was "A Brilliant Disguise."

"We're not pushing a costume, but if they want to wear one, that's OK," he said. "We hope this will turn out better."

Organizations entering floats into the parade paid a \$10 entry fee to OCA, Powell said, but marching groups entered free. He said OCA also sold medallions and bead necklaces, at cost, to parade entrants.

OCA donated all of the Mardi Gras proceeds to the Brazos Valley Animal Shelter, Powell said.

Mercifully, Friday wasn't as cold as Thursday. But the chilly air was enough to justify the coats and jackets most parade entrants wore as they made last-minute adjustments to their floats or their costumes in Parking Annex 62, on the west side of Kyle Field.

Mendell and three other Mardi Gras judges, head yell leader Doug Beall, Fish Camp adviser Jo Hudson and Corps Cmdr. Pat Thomasson, walked from float to float, deciding which organization's entry was closest to the theme, which was the most colorful and which was the best overall.

Roads along the parade route, from Joe Routt Boulevard to Coke Street, from Coke Street to Lubbock Street, from Lubbock Street to Bizzell Street and from Bizzell Street to Jersey Street, were temporarily blocked off during the parade, with the cooperation of the University Police.

A University Police car escorted the saints as they came marching in at 6:05 p.m. in front of the MSC. In the back of a pick-up truck, the Aggie Jazz Band played a few numbers for a swiftly growing mass of about 100 onlookers before moving on.

Just behind them followed Powell, as the grand marshal, tossing beads and medallions to greedy hands from a Porsche convertible. 1988 Cotton Bowl queen and Mardi Gras marshal Cathy Park leaned from a convertible BMW and rained more handfuls of trinkets on the crowd.

OCA chose Judson Loupot, owner of Loupot's Book Stores, to be the Mardi Gras king. Dressed in a leather sports jacket and crowned with an



Photo by Mark Gee

David Oakland, a sophomore general studies major, rides with Reveille V, queen of the A&M Mardi Gras, in the parade Friday.

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