

Galveston Mardi Gras underway

GALVESTON (AP) — Joe and Questa Elizondo's first date seven years ago in Galveston was almost their last. He took her to Mardi Gras.

"I was from Southern California, and I'd never seen such crazy behavior," Questa Elizondo said on a recent return visit as she and her husband, now bead-bedecked veterans, strolled the island streets.

Brass women lifting their T-shirts and plastic trinkets pelting her from all directions made Questa wonder why she'd been brought to such a free-for-all by her future husband. The couple even got mooned.

But that's normal for two weekends each year in this island city of 60,000. The traditional Roman Catholic festival of feasting and merrymaking in the days leading up to the ascetic season of Lent may be more famously linked to New Orleans, but Galveston has a long history of staging its own revelry on a smaller scale.

"It's a controlled crazy," said Jan

Johnson, a tour guide who works in a candy shop on a street lined with Victorian shops, restaurants and hotels.

"To be safe, it's best to get on the balconies above the crowds and throw the beads," Johnson said Saturday. "On the street it can be a bit nutty."

"It's fun, but it's smaller and more confined. And there's a lot less nudity."

— Elaine Underhill
Mardi Gras goer

This year, Mardi Gras — Fat Tuesday in French — falls on Feb. 27, followed by Ash Wednesday, the start of Lent. Galvestonians began celebrating Saturday and Sunday with parades, balls and concerts.

On the streets, revelers devoured crawfish sausage, fried alligator, turkey legs and roasted corn. Work-

ers deftly steered dollies packed high with cases of beer through the crowds. People tossing beads from balconies and windows drew screams as if from Beatles-smitten teen-agers for the plastic strands of purple, green or gold.

"I've come here every year for the past 10 years," said Elaine Underhill of League City, a sedate HMO representative in her non-Mardi Gras life.

Adorned with a red and black feather boa she bought during Mardi Gras in New Orleans last year, Underhill, in her 40s, said she prefers the Galveston party.

"It's fun, but it's smaller and more confined," she said. "And there's a lot less nudity. You'll go to jail for that here — they don't like that in Galveston."

Police said they made more than 30 arrests over the first Mardi Gras weekend, mostly for misdemeanor charges of public intoxication and minors in possession of alcohol. Officers on horseback described crowds as raucous but lawful.

West Texas Jury finds bar partially liable for '97 drunken-driving death

LUBBOCK (AP) — A bar in this West Texas city is partially liable for the 1997 death of a Texas Tech student in a drunken-driving crash, a jury has ruled.

The verdict against SMCA Inc., which operated a bar called Einstein's, found that the company was negligent for serving alcohol to a man who left the bar and caused the crash that killed Ryan Jones.

The bar is no longer open and is not affiliated with the restaurant in Lubbock by the same name.

Jones died Feb. 14, 1997, when his vehicle, stopped at a traffic light, was struck from behind by a pickup driven by 19-year-old Justin Petty of Lubbock.

A witness to the accident said Petty's truck could have been going as fast as 60 mph.

Petty had a blood-alcohol level of 0.16. At the time, the legal limit was 0.10; the limit now is 0.08.

The jury determined Thursday that Jones' mother, Sue Roe of Richmond, deserves \$1 million in damages for the loss of her son and mental anguish.

Jurors found Petty 70 percent negligent and SMCA 30 percent negligent in Jones' death. Roe's attorney, Fred Bowers of Lubbock, said the division makes SMCA responsible for about 30 percent of the damage award.

Petty, originally named as a defendant in the suit, settled with Roe last summer for \$50,000, according to court documents. Petty, now 23, has nearly completed a two-year prison term for killing Jones.

Lubbock attorney Floyd Holder, who represented SMCA and its president, George Mayer of Lubbock, said his client has not decided if he will appeal.

Roe's suit blamed a bartender for serving alcohol to Petty after Petty showed obvious signs of intoxication. Petty was drinking with friends at Einstein's, which is near Texas Tech.

The bartender was charged with criminally negligent homicide for serving alcohol to Petty before the fatal crash. Prosecutors dismissed the felony charge when he pleaded guilty to two misdemeanors.

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