



Mardi Gras at Carville

Carville's celebration of Mardi Gras began in the 1930's, probably by patients from New Orleans who wanted to continue their tradition of carnival.

Mardi Gras for the Krewe of Carville follows the general structure of urban Mardi Gras celebrations in Louisiana, with costumes and masks, a parade with music, food and drink, favors, or tokens being thrown or begged for, general revelry, role reversal and symbolic inversion. It is unique, however, in that the participants are residents or staff members of the Gillis W. Long Hansen's Disease Center (formerly called the National Leprosarium) in Carville.

Patients' organizations, like the Lions Club, American Legion Auxiliary, Patients' Federation, American Legion Post, and the Mexican Social Club, started working months ahead planning and preparing for the carnival celebration.

Patients and staff built floats out of anything with wheels—decorating bicycles, tricycles, wheelchairs and various carts to compete for prizes. A parade rolled through the 2 ½+ miles of covered walkways (connecting the patients' dormitories, infirmary, cafeteria) and ended in the recreation center where the King and Queen of Mardi Gras were toasted and a ball was held by the masking patients.

Doubloons minted in the 1990's commemorate important dates to Carville History: 1921 marks the federal take over of the facility, 1994 for the 100-year commemoration of the arrival of the first HD patients, 1996 for the arrival of the Daughters of Charity who came to care for the patients. The armadillo, an important animal in HD research (pictured on the doubloons) became mascot of the celebration.

In the 1980's and 1990's the parade moved to the ballroom of the recreation center to accommodate older Carville residents. Since the hospital's relocation to Baton Rouge in 1999, the celebration of Mardi Gras continues at the Summit Hospital.

Mardi Gras

February 21, 1950

For the first time since before the World War, the patients planned a big Mardi Gras celebration, with all the trappings and regal splendor, King, Queen, Court, floats customs and parade and a grand ball. The patients are to be commended

for their efforts in making up artistic floats for which all kinds of hospital equipment has been put into use, from old wheels to cart on wheels and bicycles.

After a parade on the walks the floats entered the ballroom in the recreation building for the awarding of prizes. The first prize for floats motif "Justice" was awarded then Mexican Club second prize an Irish theme by the B natural Music Club second prize the American Legion representing a hugh horn of plenty won third prize. There were customs of gypsies Spanish señoritas clowns mandarins, pirates etc all joining his New Yorkers from Baton Rouge. It was a very nice affair and a very fine miniature representation of the world famous Mardi Gras in New Orleans.

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