

Celebrating 76 Years of Diamonds

The Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association honors seven decades of family, friendship and tradition.

by Samantha Arcieri
Editor

For Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association President Eric Finley, Carnival Season represents a time where friends and family come together to honor tradition and celebrate the community. Finley, who has been involved with the organization his entire life and has served as president for two years, has seen the Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association evolve into a vibrant community.

Though the parades and celebrations have gotten bigger, he said the spirit of the holiday is timeless and will always remain the same.

“I’ve seen (the organization) go from two floats to 30 floats. I’ve seen it go from (a single) event to where now it’s the two coronations and the two luncheons,” he said. “It’s an organization that’s not only active during Mardi Gras but active in the community, doing charity work.”

The 2014 theme for the Mobile Area Mardi Gras Associa-

tion Mammoth Parade is “76 years of Diamonds.” The parade takes place at 2 p.m. Tuesday, March 4 along Mobile Parade Route B.

Parade preparation

The Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association works throughout the year to organize the Mammoth Parade, hold two coronations for both Kings and Queens and host two luncheons for members as well. The organization is comprised of roughly 130 members — and additional auxiliary groups who are not members of the organization. Members also participate in a variety of community activities in addition to the regular Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association events as well.

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President

“We have chairman of committees that we delegate the responsibility for different units to oversee that operation. Different committees oversee the processes,” Finley said.

An in-house construction crew, comprised of organization members and workers who have been contracted out, builds the floats each year. An artistic designer then creates icons, draws

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The Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association Mammoth Parade takes place at 2 p.m. Tuesday, March 4.

Photo courtesy of the Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association



The Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association hosts several events including the annual ball and luncheon throughout the year.

Photo courtesy of the Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association



Edra Elise Finley served as Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association Queen in 2013. The King and Queen, as well as the Junior King and Junior Queen, are selected by mystic organizations.

Photo courtesy of the Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association



From left: 2013 King Elexis I Baron Ramon Young, 2013 Queen Edra Elise Finley and 2013 Junior King Dylan Ross Merriweather.
Photo courtesy of the Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association

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designs on the floats and paints them to coincide with one central parade theme. At the end of each year, a committee — and the organization — as a whole, decides on the theme for the next year's parade.

Finley said it takes months of planning and work to finalize plans for the parade each year. He added that spectators should expect to see about 29 floats — decorated to represent the “76 Years of Diamonds” theme — and other forms of entertainment in the Mammoth Parade.

A Tradition Begins

1938

The year the Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association was established.

“You have the bands, you have the horse riding groups and you have the dancing groups. So it is a lot of preparation and coordination,” he said.

76 Years of history

According to the Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association website, the organization was incorporated in 1938 under the trusteeship of W. L. Russell, D.D.S, J.T. McKinnis, a local Mortician, Sam Besteda, Jr., a local Tailor and J.A. Franklin, M.D. The trustees created the organization in order to “promote knowledge, arts, sciences: to create and cultivate interest in the celebration of carnival activities at Mardi Gras and to encourage its members to participate in all events that will enhance our civic and national betterment,” the website said.

The Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association held its first parade in 1939 and elected its first royal court in 1940.

“Throughout the years, many prominent Mobilians have participated in the annual Mardi Gras celebration events including the former U.S. Secretary of Labor Alexis Herman as Queen and the all time greatest hitter in baseball Henry Aaron as Grand Marshal,” the website said.

Community Benefits

Finley said he is looking forward to the 2014 season because the organization elected a royal court whose members have deep ties to the Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association and a long family history within the organization as well.



The Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association is comprised of about 130 members.

Photo courtesy of the Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association

Finley said Mardi Gras not only helps honor the traditions of the Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association and other organizations in the area, it also helps stimulate the Mobile economy.

“All the hotels are full which means people are buying gas, buying food and new dresses. A lot of revenue is generated more or less for events that the city does not fund,” Finley said. “They do provide police, fire and ER type assistance which they do an excellent job. As soon as the parade is over, the public works follows the parade with an army of guys with blowers and then the trucks sweep it up.”

Finley said he sees tremendous success for the Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association in the future. He said tradition is one of the major factors what will allow the organization continue its mission of spreading joy within the community several decades down the line.

“You want to continue that positive energy and drive,” Finley said. “I have so much respect for the individuals that started this organization.”

For additional information about the Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association, visit the organization’s website at mamga.com.

Parade Schedules

Organizations show off their floats in Mobile and the surrounding area through the month of February.

- **Conde Cavaliers**, 6:30 p.m. Friday, Feb. 14, Mobile Route A
 - **Bayport Parading Society**, 2:30 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 15, Mobile Route A
 - **Pharaohs, Order of Hebe**, Conde Explorers, 6:30 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 15, Mobile Route A
 - **Order of the Polka Dots**, 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 20, Mobile Route A
 - **Order of Inca**, 6:30 p.m. Friday, Feb. 21, Mobile Route A
 - **Apollo’s Mystic Ladies** 6:45 p.m. Friday, Feb. 21, Daphne
 - **Mobile Mystics, Mobile** Mystical Revelers 2 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 22, Mobile Route A
 - **Maids of Mirth**, Butterfly Maidens, Krewe of Marry Mates Mystical Revelers 6:30 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 22, Mobile Route A
 - **Knights of Ecor Rouge**, 6:45 p.m. Monday, Feb. 22, Fairhope
 - **Neptune’s Daughters, Order of Isis**, 6:30 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 23, Mobile Route A
 - **Order of Venus**, 6:30 p.m. Monday, Feb. 24, Mobile Route A
 - **Order of LaShe’s**, 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 25, Mobile Route A
- Information provided by Mobile Mask, themobilemask.com**



The Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association will feature about 29 floats in the Mammoth Parade on Tuesday, March 4.

Photo courtesy of the Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association

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