

Lake Wales Mardi Gras - 26 Years of Letting the Good Times Roll



Fat Tuesday is February 16. So there is still plenty of time to, as the Cajun say, “Laissez les bon temp rouler.” Translation: Let the good times roll. And **Mardi Gras** festivities will come rolling into the Historic District on Saturday, February 13th with the Lake Wales 26th Annual Mardi Gras Parade.

The first Lake Wales Mardi Gras was held in 1984 to honor **Vinton Davis**, the owner and operator of **Vinton’s New Orleans Restaurant** in the Rhodesbilt Arcade. In 1983, Davis was suffering from terminal cancer and he asked his friends and family not to mourn him when he passed. Instead, he wanted a send-off in the vein of a New Orleans jazz funeral.

Unfortunately, they could not do that. So they decided to have a parade in his memory and call it the **Lake Wales Mardi Gras**. His wife, **Nettie**, and daughter, **Nancy**, along with many friends and family members worked to put together the first Lake Wales Mardi Gras to celebrate Vinton’s life.

The first **Lake Wales Mardi Gras** parade consisted of one band (**Al’s Place Band**), four Krewes (**The Krewe of Rex, The Royal Order of the Red Swans, The Krewe of Pegasus, and The Wild Shiners**), and several marching revelers. They marched before a crowd of a couple hundred spectators. Today, the parade consists of over a dozen floats and at least 10 Krewes, with names like **Rex, Aphrodite, Pegasus, Wild Shiners, Zazu, Krewe of Trash, Rebbew, and Edonmada**.

Mardi Gras is a festival that takes place during the fourteen days prior to the Roman Catholic liturgical season of Lent. The festival originated in the early 1800’s in Mobile, Alabama. Eventually, it spread to nearby New Orleans, the city that made it famous. Mardi Gras, which literally means “Fat Tuesday,” concludes at midnight on the day before Ash Wednesday, the official start of Lent.

Active krewes are what keep Mardi Gras alive – and all you need is a group of fun-loving people. New krewes are encouraged to join the Mardi Gras Committee in planning the festivities for next year by selecting a member and an alternate to represent their krewe on the Mardi Gras Committee.

If you are interested in starting a krewe or want more information on this year's event, please visit www.lwmardigras.com or call (863) 638-2686.

This festival of food, arts and crafts will start bright and early at 9 a.m. At 10 a.m., the **Lake Wales Police Association Children's Carnival** opens to the delight of the kiddies. **Chalet Suzanne** will be open to serve a special Mardi Gras Breakfast at 8 a.m.

The musical melee will begin at 11:00 a.m. with **Jon & Debbie Corneal** and continue all day with sets from **Mustang Sally & the Hamjos, Zydeco Zoo, Gris Gris, Jug Band, Bandhaven, Roughshod,** and **Modown** and others.

At 3 p.m., it's all about the beads, when the parade begins to snake its way down 1st Street, Central Avenue, Stuart Avenue, and finally ending on Park Avenue.

Yell "throw me something" as the floats pass by. A tip for the newbie: Making eye contact with a float rider and looking sad may help. And bag your loot as you catch it because many riders won't throw to someone whose neck bulges with fancy, long beads.

On February 12th, the Krewe of Pegasus will have their Gala Coronation Ball from 7:00 pm to 12:00 am at the Lake Wales Country Club. The Krewe of Rex will have their Prince of Wales Grand Coronation Ball at the Festival Steak & Seafood Restaurant from 7:00 pm to 12:00 am on February 16th.

This year's Mardi Gras Gold Sponsors are: **Bernie Little Distributing, Chalet Suzanne Restaurant & Inn, Max 98.3 FM, Lakeland Ledger, Wachovia Bank, Holiday Inn Express, Florida Refuse, Center State Bank,** and the **Winter Haven News Chief.** Purple Sponsors include: **Texas Cattle Company, Party Rental Unlimited, Crazy Fish Grill, George's Tire & Automotive, Lake Wales Country Club, Lake Wales Downtown Times (Moondragon Media Group), Action Signs, Republic National Distributors,** and **Thompson's Speed Printing.**

Proceeds from past Mardi Gras fundraisers have gone to: **Lake Wales Police Athletic League, Lake Wales YMCA, Winter Haven Mission, Barney's Dream, Pirates on the Ridge Parrotheads, Luciano Family Trust Fund, Polk County Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association,** and the **Lake Wales Charter School.**