

THE VALLEY BREEZE Weekend

Thursday, January 29, 2004

From near and far, big crowds greet MARDI GRAS

By **GEORGE BEAUBIEN**
Valley Breeze Staff Writer

WOONSOCKET – This city will celebrate its French heritage on Saturday, Feb. 7 when thousands of visitors from throughout New England turn out for the evening Mardi Gras Ball.

Chairperson Susan Tessier MacKenzie says four different locations will play host to the revelers this year - the Elks Lodge on Social Street, The CYO Center on Federal Street, and the Holiday Inn Express on Cumberland Hill Road, all in the city. For the first time this year, a ball will also be held at the Coachmen's Lodge in Bellingham. The night is sponsored by the Northern R.I. Council of the Arts.

Each venue will offer a full buffet, and entertainment provided by well known Zydeco and Cajun bands. A \$28 ticket purchased in advance or \$30 at the door will offer dinner at one location from 6 to 8 p.m. followed



Sue Tessier MacKenzie

by entertainment. After 8 p.m., party-goers are entitled to visit any other location by way of a shuttle bus at no extra charge. To purchase tickets, phone 401-762-9072.

Sites, meals, and entertainment include:

♦ **The CYO Center:** Slippery Sneakers Zydeco Band opens from 6-8 p.m. followed by the Roy Carrier Zydeco Band of Louisiana at 8:30 p.m. The buffet, provided



Local Cajun band Magnolia, above, will be the opening act at the Elk's Lodge on Social Street, at the Saturday, Feb. 7 Mardi Gras in Woonsocket. They'll be followed by the Steve Lefleur Cajun Band. Tickets, \$28 in advance, get revelers a buffet dinner and music at four locations, with free shuttle service. For tickets, call 762-9072.

by Fine Catering by Russell Morin, includes tossed salad, corn muffins, Parisienne bread, seafood jambalaya, baked ham, meat pie, roast chicken, roasted potatoes, and New Orleans bread pudding served with coffee or tea.

♦ **The Holiday Inn Express:** The Ray Gonzalez Orchestra, a Latin band, performs from 8 p.m. to midnight. Catering Collaborative will provide a buffet that

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Entertainment

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includes wild mixed greens, crisp French bread and assorted rolls, roasted chicken thighs, New Orleans roasted pork loin, New England cod fillets with Cajun seasoned bread crumbs, wild rice and roasted potatoes. Dessert will be French Quarter style warm bread pudding with honey cinnamon whipped cream served with coffee and herbal teas.

♦ **The Elks Lodge:** Local Cajun group Magnolia will open from 6-8 p.m. followed by the Steve Lefleur Cajun Band from Louisiana from 8 p.m. to midnight. Uncle Ronnie's will provide a buffet with a barbeque theme including baby back ribs, barbeque chicken, oven roasted potatoes, vegetable and tossed salad with home made dressing. A complete dessert bar will be available as will coffee and tea.

♦ **Coachmen's Lodge:** The Regents of New York will perform from 8 p.m. to midnight. The restaurant will provide tossed salad, assorted French Quarter rolls, rice, cheese tortellini in a light cream sauce, chicken New Orleans and scrod Creole with peppers and onions in a light tomato sauce. Desert will be Bourbon Street bread pudding with a bourbon style sauce.

Tessier MacKenzie is organizing the event for the Northern Rhode Island Council of The Arts.

"Every time Mardi Gras comes around, I find myself talking on three cell phones all at the same time," said Tessier MacKenzie. "I'm keeping Verizon in business these days."

Tessier MacKenzie credits the original Woonsocket Mardi Gras celebration to Woonsocket Jaycees who in 1954, decided the city needed something to break up the winter doldrums. Then, as now, there was a contest for a queen as well as a mysterious King Jayce, which was named for the Jaycees. For five days, various events were held throughout the city, drawing thousands of spectators. By 1961, the celebration ended. Ten years ago, the Northern Rhode Island Council of the Arts rejuvenated the celebration and it has grown each year since, said the chairperson.

The theme for this year's coronation is "Mardi Gras Roundup" and planners will be making an appearance at the event dressed in western style clothing. Guests are encouraged to attend in similar style with an award to be presented for best male and female costumes.

The Elks Lodge site will see the unmasking of King Jayce at 9:30 p.m. For weeks now, a number of clues have been released to see who can correctly name his honor prior to the unmasking. One winner to be drawn from those who have guessed correctly will be presented with a \$500 booklet of Massachusetts lottery tickets.

As it has for the past nine years, the celebration begins with the official naming of a queen and court that is set to take place this Sunday, Feb. 1, from 1-3 p.m. at the Elks Lodge on Social Street. Since last November, six contestants have

been vying to see who can sell the most tickets that will earn her the right to be deemed 2004 Mardi Gras Queen. Two princesses will also be determined in the event that serves as a major fund-raiser for the overall festivities. Tickets for the event are \$10 each and are available at both local radio stations, Harlequin's Costumes, Main Street, and or from any of the contestants.

Queen contestants are Roberta Baillargeon, Tracey Parenteau, Diane Cournoyer, Shelly Laberge, Charlene Goudreau and Christina Leigh Pelland.

The Feb. 7 celebration begins with a Children's Mardi Gras Ball sponsored by Union Saint Jean-Baptiste Council No 2 at the St. Ann's Arts and Cultural Center, 100 Cumberland St., Woonsocket.

Admission at the door is \$2



Valley Breeze photo by George Beaubien

Heading up the Mardi Gras 2004 Queen contest are from left, Teri Robinson, Jeannette Cousineau, Ray Gaboury and Sue Tessier MacKenzie. Committee members dressed in Western-style clothing to reflect the Mardi Gras "Roundup" theme for this year's event.

for adults or children. There will be a free buffet for children as well as free prizes and gifts.

The highlight of the children's ball will be the awarding of costume prizes as well as the selec-

tion of a King and Queen.

For more information, phone 401-769-0520.