

Commentary

Time for folks in Mardi Gras city to help themselves

■ I kinda get caught up in things sometimes. Like Mardi Gras. I'm listening to all the reports on the radio from New Orleans, and they're saying how the crowds are smaller this year. They'd have to be smaller, there's less of New Orleans for people to be in this year.



Dave Richards

Some of the radio announcers are being charitable, saying it's nice that you don't have so many people so you can get from place to place easier. But let's face it, friends. Two-thirds of the \$3 billion collected by charity is gone now in six months. Most of it in cash payments. The remaining \$1 billion won't even put a dent in the reconstruction. The city is in shambles, and a lot of people who used to live there don't want to go back and rebuild. And some, not all, of the people who are there now are sitting around waiting for someone else to come along and rebuild it for them. And let's not get started talking about how many tens of millions of dollars our federal government has pumped into the effort. I don't like thinking like this, but I certainly hope there are no new disasters soon. I've lost my enthusiasm for disaster relief efforts after seeing what has (or more to the point hasn't) happened in Louisiana. This is a heck of a way for a positive-thinking person like me to be feeling. But can you blame me? Some people have gotten so used to government bailing them out that they have lost motivation to help themselves. Didn't I hear that New Orleans itself has been destroyed before in history a number of times? The people of that area didn't wait for government or someone else to rebuild their city those times. They did it themselves.

■ I think people have to take responsibility for their own lives. Sure, now and then, circumstances will overwhelm anybody. And it's right to give a helping hand to someone who's down. But you kinda expect that person to do what they can for themselves, not be dead weight. It's like a guy who's going to work and takes the bus each day. Then one day the bus breaks down before he gets on it, and he sits there at the bus stop cursing the bus for being an hour late. Hey, man, how about walking? At least as far as another bus stop where a different bus comes!

■ I have to get off that subject now. Let's talk about happier things, like Mardi Gras Woonsocket-style. Congratulations to our lovely Mardi Gras queen, Lorraine Guilbeault. She's going to have a wonderful time this Saturday riding in a beautiful limousine with the Mardi Gras princesses. And for those of you who will be joining us for the fun, you can expect King Jace, Queen Lorraine, and the royal court to visit you at the Holiday Inn Express at about 7:15 p.m. Then there'll be a brief speech (honk! honk!) by King Jace and maybe a dance or two. Jeff Gamache will read all the clues to the king's identity, the fabulous Denise will collect all the envelopes with the guesses and off we go to do the same at the Coachmen's Restaurant, then to the CYO Center, and finally to the Elks Hall where between 9 o'clock and 9:30, Queen Lorraine will unmask King Jace for the one and only time and we will finally see who has been playing the part of the Mysterious Monarch for these past few weeks. At that point, we'll have the drawings for the queen's raffle prizes and then the drawing from all the envelopes that had the correct guess to King Jace's identity, and that person will win half of all the dollars collected in guesses. Sure sounds like a lot of fun to me. Please remember that you can take a guess in the King Jace contest even if you aren't coming to the ball this Saturday. White envelopes for this purpose are available at both of Woonsocket's radio stations and at Harlequin's costumes. Just put the name of who you think it is on the envelope along with your name and phone number (so we can reach you if you win the money) and slip a dollar inside and seal it. We had a bunch of people guess during the queen's coronation on Sunday. I can tell you that as of this writing, more than one person has guessed correctly so far.

■ Some of you may believe the old superstition that bad things "come in threes." I never heard that until I came to Woonsocket, but it isn't only here. A lot of people seem to believe it. The first time I heard it was when I was very young and working for the radio station. When I first came to the station it was at the time of those terrible fires in the Social District of the city. I remember Alan Archer poking his head into the studio I was working in and saying, "That's Three!" when the Pharos Club went up. Later, when I would fill in for Dave Russell when he'd go on vacation and I'd have to watch the scanner to report on news events, the weather would get bitterly cold, as it did just yesterday, and there would be a fire, usually caused by a space heater. Then, sure as shooting, in the next week or so there'd be two more dwelling fires. So, you can just about figure what folks were saying when they heard the news this past weekend that Don Knotts and Darren McGavin, two great men of TV and screen, died. And you can just guess, I'm sure, what Joe Ferrierre said to me yesterday afternoon when the news that Dennis Weaver had died also came out. Sometimes bad news does come "in threes."

■ I'm looking very much forward to visiting the Kevin K. Coleman school this week to read a Dr. Seuss book with them. This Thursday would be the good Dr.'s birthday I'm told. How appropriate!

■ Comments? Phone 762-1240 or e-mail dave@onworldwide.com. Thanks for reading, and I'll see you at the Woonsocket Mardi Gras!

Dave Richards is president and general manager of Woonsocket radio station WOON. His column runs every Tuesday.